PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1992-93

COMPRISING PERIOD
5 July—16 July 1993

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 228**

TWENTY-SECOND VOLUME OF SESSION 1992-93

House of Commons

Monday 5 July 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Invalidity Benefit

1. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his plans for invalidity benefit.

2. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the future of invalidity benefit; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): Invalidity benefit is being reviewed in the context of the fundamental review of social security expenditure. Many representations have been received. No decisions have been made, but when they are I will make a full statement to the House.

Mrs. Jackson: Is the Secretary of State aware that, in Sheffield, the number of medical assessments for people on invalidity benefit has increased in every month since February, so that it is now 70 per cent. higher than it was in February? Is he also aware that, to use the words of a constituent who went for a medical assessment, it was undertaken in a way that made her feel "a criminal and a scrounger"? Will the Secretary of State, therefore, assure all the many people who are already sick and depressed from being out of work that they will not suffer continual harassment and worry that their income will be removed?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for writing to me about that case. I assure her that I have asked a senior medical officer in the area to look into her constituent's interview and report the details to me. Obviously, I would not like anyone to feel harassed in the way that she describes.

The number of people applying for invalidity benefit has remained pretty constant in recent months throughout the country, whatever may have happened in particular regions, but, over the longer term—since 1979—the number of people receiving invalidity benefit has increased from 600,000 to 1·5 million, at a time when the nation's health has improved. It is only natural, therefore, that we should examine the benefit and see whether the arrangements for it can be improved.

Mr. Bruce: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the sooner he can make a decision on that the better, and that many people who receive invalidity benefit are deeply concerned and angry that the Government may be targeting them—the poorest and most vulnerable members of the community—when wealthy donors to the Conservative party appear to be trying to persuade the Government to ensure that their incomes are protected? Can that be just and fair?

Mr. Lilley: The second half of the hon. Member's question makes it clear that he is not seriously concerned about those on invalidity benefit. He is just trying to make cheap jibes at their expense. Nothing that has been said by the Government, or in any of the documents allegedly coming from us, would give rise to the fears that he mentions. Only the scaremongering of Opposition Members suggests that there is any targeting of people on invalidity benefit. Our objective is to ensure that those who are genuinely sick and disabled receive help and that it is not diverted to those who would be better off either working or on benefits that would help them back to work.

That seems to me a logical and positive approach, which those who have a genuine incapacity to work fully and whole-heartedly support.

Mrs. Roe: Does my right hon. Friend share my view that his proposals to consult fully on a test of ability to work will be welcomed widely by the medical profession? Is he able to tell the House whether his Department has received any representations from doctors on the tightening up of procedures and current rules?

Mr. Lilley: I agree with my hon. Friend that most people think that it is sensible to consider an objective medical test. We are considering it and we shall see whether it is possible to develop one. If so, we will consult fully about it. Since we began the tightening up of procedures under the existing legal powers in February this year, we have received about 300 letters from doctors, all but three or four supporting the changes that we are making and saying that it is sensible to tighten up, and that the previous arrangements were unsatisfactory for them as well as for their patients.

Mr. Ward: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while we all want applicants for state help to be sympathetically and courteously dealt with, he should not be deterred from carrying out a full review of all aspects of social security spending by all the smears and innuendo put about by the Labour party? Does he further agree that such a review is the only way to make sure that the money goes to those in need and not to those who would just like a little bit extra?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have to carry out a deep and far-reaching review. The objective of that review is to end up with a better system, in the sense that it guarantees the position of the most vulnerable and needy in society and does not outstrip the nation's ability to pay. If we allowed the system to outstrip that ability, it woud collapse under its own weight and put at risk the very people who depend on it. Opposition Members who believe that nothing need be done are putting at risk those who depend on the system.

Mr. Bradley: Is not it quite incredible that the Secretary of State accuses the Opposition of scaremongering and fails to deny that he will cut benefits to the sick and disabled who will have to pay the price for your economic impompetence? [HON. MEMBERS: "Order."] Does not he realise that the average invalidity benefit payment is £79 a week, which is well below the national average? Those people will suffer hardship if you tax it, thus reducing the amount of benefit to which they are entitled. If you add to that the heartless decision to stop payments to the independent living fund for the terminally ill because the Government refuse to resource the fund sufficiently—this is not scaremongering—that is a tax on the sick and disabled because the Government are trying to cut public expenditure. Will the right hon. Gentleman today stop the attacks on the sick and disabled and make sure that they have the amounts to which they are entitled, so that they may live and die in dignity and independence?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for sharing some of the unwarranted blame that we have to face on this issue. Whenever we have reformed and changed benefits, we have always protected the position of existing claimants. Everybody knows that and people have our track record to go on. Equally, we have made it clear for many years, since the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that it was our long-term intention to tax all income replacement benefits, that that has been our intention in the case of invalidity benefit, as elsewhere. Because of practical difficulties, we found it impossible to do that. However, most people would agree that it is sensible that a benefit that replaces income should, where possible, be treated like income and taxed for people who have other income to accumulate with it. The hon. Gentleman seems to think that money grows on trees and that it is just a matter of the Government pouring endless, additional sums into the benefit system. We have increased expenditure by two thirds in total, but growth must be contained within the nation's ability to pay.

Social Security Payments

3. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of central Government spending will go in social security payments this year; and what the figure was in 1979.

Mr. Lilley: Expenditure on social security accounts for more than 30 per cent. of total Government expenditure. In 1978-79, the proportion was just 24 per cent.

Mr. Fishburn: Do not these figures show that, unless something is done about it, the growth in social security will overwhelm us all? Is not the main intellectual and political question for the Conservative party to seek to constrain that giant in the years ahead? Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is no better place to start than to set a date for the equalisation of the age at which men and women may retire?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right; we have to start thinking now about these problems if we are to ensure that they are tackled sensibly and that we or a future Government are not forced into arbitrary cuts later. Every Government in the world face such a problem. Some, who perhaps have shown less foresight than us, have been forced into difficult and arbitrary decisions. Last week, the German Government had to announce nearly £10 billion of cuts, including real cuts of 3 per cent. in many benefits.

We are committed to introducing an equal pension age for men and women and we shall make an announcement on that in due course. It would not be sensible to make an announcement before we have heard the Coloroll decision from the European Court of Justice, which should clarify the position on the equalisation of private pensions. We are proceeding in an orderly and speedy fashion to that end.

Mr. Frank Field: Does the Secretary of State accept that he is panicking over his review of social security expenditure? Has he taken note of the Prime Minister's statement that 70 per cent. of the public sector borrowing requirement is due to cyclical—that is, unemployment—effects on the Government's budget? If that is so and the Secretary of State takes the Prime Minister's words to heart, should not he relax over the whole process?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman forgets that we have set a new control total for public expenditure that deliberately excludes the cyclical rise in spending on the unemployed because we believed that it was right, morally and economically, to finance that rise as the economy went into recession. As we come out of recession, it is equally

right and proper to keep to the same total and ignore, therefore, the cyclical beneficial effects on unemployment. Otherwise, there would be a permanent ratchet effect—every time there was a down turn, the level of expenditure would be raised and it would never be allowed to recover. Even if one excludes unemployment, the underlying rate of growth of spending on social security spending has been 3 per cent. a year in real terms during the 1980s and is set to be 3·3 per cent. up to the end of the century. That is something which must be taken into account in any long-term review.

Mr. Forman: Is not the most disturbing consequence of the seemingly inexorable increase in social security over this long period the way in which it produces disincentives for people to take low-paid jobs? Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of my constituents, who saw me at my surgery on Friday, said that he has the possibility of taking a new job, largely on commission, selling insurance for £30 a week, plus any commission, whereas his existing income on income support is £300 a week? He complained that, when there is a disparity of that kind, where is the advantage of getting back into regular work?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend points to a difficult problem that arises especially acutely in the case of those on income support who get help with their mortgage payments. I do not think that it is possible to resolve that problem simply by extending that help to people in work, except at the potential expense of several billion pounds, which clearly is not affordable in any foreseeable circumstances. Therefore, we have to look at other ways in which we can try to improve incentives in the system and, of course, we are doing so.

Mr. Dewar: Does the Secretary of State accept that many people are worried about the treatment of lone parents in future social security budgets following the speeches made by Ministers this weekend, some of which seemed to give the impression that lone parents were a feckless group of social outcasts? Is not it the case that 70 per cent. of lone parents are divorced, separated or widowed and that teenage unmarried mothers, so often represented as typical, are only a small minority of the total? Ministers preach family values, but does the Minister accept that their policies constantly undermine family stability?

Did the right hon. Gentleman notice—*[Interruption.]* Did the Secretary of State notice that statistics produced by his own Department in the past week showed that, in 1979, 19 per cent. of lone parents had a family income of less than half the national average? By 1991-92, that figure had grown to 60 per cent. Rather than simply criticising lone parents publicly, would not it be right for Ministers to concentrate on helping the vast majority who want to earn their keep, by improving affordable child care facilities, training opportunities and job opportunities?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on most points. The largest, fastest-growing group of lone parents—they cover a variety of different categories—is the "never married" category. The important thing is that we are not against any category of people and we are certainly not against lone parents. We are in favour of parents—both parents—accepting responsibility for their children and offering them love, affection and support. The state can and must sometimes step in with monetary help if marriages break down and the parents are unable to support their children. However, we can never substitute for that love and commitment.

Everyone notices that Opposition spokesmen, with one or two notable exceptions, never say anything good about the family and they always seem to support alternatives to it. That is, I imagine, why one anonymous leading Labour figure is quoted in *The Independent* today as saying that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) should stop trying to defend the indefensible. I agree with his colleague the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) who, in a "carefully worded statement" according to *The Independent*, made it clear that Ministers were right to tackle the issue of single parents. He said

> "We need . . . real action to reinforce personal responsibilities. That means acceptance by fathers of their obligation towards their children and . . . housing policies which do not encourage the belief that the only way to a home is having a baby."

I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Family Support

4. **Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual spending on family credit; and what was the spending on family income supplement in 1979.

5. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many awards of family credit have been made since the introduction of the scheme.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): Family credit expenditure for 1992-93 was £864 million. This is 13 times more in real terms than the £24 million spent on family income supplement in 1978-79. Since its introduction in April 1988, more than 3,750,000 family credit awards have been made.

Sir Anthony Durant: In spite of earlier criticisms of the scheme, does my hon. Friend agree that the average payment is now £42 a week and that more than 80 per cent. receive at least £20 a week, which is an incentive to getting back to work? Is it not a better scheme than the earlier one?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend is quite right. The average award now compares favourably with the average award of family income supplement, which, at current prices, would be about £17·40 a week, compared with the present average of £44 a week. The average for the self-employed is £55 a week. The numbers currently in receipt of family credit are at a record of 457,000. The scheme is fulfilling its aim of directing resources to where there is most need.

Mr. Amess: Will my hon. Friend confirm that a family credit helpline was introduced in March this year, thus fulfilling another election manifesto commitment? Will he also confirm that our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is conducting an advertising campaign to help unemployed families better to understand the benefits to which they would be entitled when in work?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend speaks for some 1,300 family credit recipients in Basildon. I am pleased to tell him and them that our helpline, which now caters for potential as well as existing claimants, has received 250,000 calls so far. My hon. Friend is also right to say that the latest take-up

advertising campaign is aimed at the unemployed and informs them of their potential to receive family credit, which can act as a real incentive to getting back to work.

Mr. Pike: Is not one of the reasons for the large increase in amounts paid out in family credit the large increase in the number of people on low pay as a result of Government policy? Will the Minister tell us how many people on low pay and living in poverty are entitled to family credit, but, unfortunately, not getting it?

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman fails to distinguish the fact that the most important determinant in family credit is not the size of the wage, but the number and the age of the children. Part of his anger comes from the fact that family credit is a better system than any supported by the previous Labour Government.

Mr. Rooney: In view of the Minister's comments about the spectacular increase in the numbers receiving family credit and about the amount of the awards, when can we expect the Government to undertake a responsible review of how the money is distributed? How much impact has there been from the change in working hours from 24 to 16? Why does the Minister not look again at the clawback of 94 per cent. for anyone receiving an increase in wages?

Mr. Burt: About 60,000 extra families have received family credit as a result of the change of hours from 24 to 16 as the entry to family credit. We keep the scheme constantly under review. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman shares my pleasure in the fact that take-up is increasing both for expenditure and for case load. Take-up by case load is 14 per cent. higher than it was five years ago and expenditure is 6 per cent. higher. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman welcomes those figures.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that family stability comes best from children being born of a loving relationship between a man and a woman? The strong movement towards girls and very young women to have babies to get flats and houses is damaging to them and to the children, because those children do not have the proper background that they should have. Will my hon. Friend consider that point and do all that he can to encourage proper family stability, because it is the bedrock of the nation?

Mr. Burt: Behind some of the newspaper rhetoric over the weekend have been sensible comments from hon. Members of all parties and from a variety of commentators on the issues raised by single parenthood. Family structure is important. It is the responsibility of social security to protect the most vulnerable and it is too often forgotten that the most vulnerable element in a single-parent family is the child. We ought to hear more about the child's situation than about the rights and responsibilities of everyone else.

Mrs. Golding: Given the big increase in the need for families to have family credit, does not the Minister think that, instead of proposing the withdrawal of all benefits from mothers with children who have been recently abandoned by their fathers, the Government would do better to concentrate their efforts on eliminating poverty wages and the threat of unemployment, as that would do more to stabilise family life? Or does the Minister agree with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales who believes that penalising children is the right answer?

Mr. Burt: There is no question of withdrawing benefit in the manner suggested by the hon. Lady. It is important that the social security system acts to protect the most vulnerable. The hon. Lady will also understand that the most important thing that any Government can do for the poorest is to improve the jobs situation. The Government are determined to improve that situation by keeping inflation and interests rates low. It should be noted that the prospects for growth in this country are significantly better than in the majority of countries abroad. I would have hoped that the hon. Lady would welcome that development.

Pensioners (Income)

6. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the change in pensioners' total incomes since 1979.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. William Hague): In the decade following 1979, pensioners' average incomes increased by 30 per cent.

Mrs. Lait: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the income of pensioner couples, excluding housing costs, has risen by almost a half since 1979, allowing for inflation? Will he further confirm that the proportion of pensioner couples in the lowest income groups has fallen from 19 per cent. in 1979 to 11 per cent. now? Does he agree that those figures show that pensioners are better off under a Conservative Government?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. She rightly draws attention to the figures published last week showing that the total incomes of pensioner couples have risen by 48 per cent., excluding housing costs, since 1979. That is largely because of the growth in occupational pensions and in income from savings. But the Government have always recognised that not all pensioners have shared in that increased prosperity. That is why extra resources have been concentrated on helping the oldest and poorest pensioners.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Minister aware that, last week, a strong deputation of pensioners from all over the country came to the House and that they were deeply anxious that their standard of living will be further eroded as a result of the introduction of VAT on domestic fuel? Does the Minister recognise that, in this country, there remain literally millions of pensioners who are living on the very smallest of incomes? That have not benefited in any way from occupational pensions and now find themselves living day by day, virtually on the breadline. Are not the Government largely responsible because they have refused to increase the pension in line with earnings? Should not they be thoroughly ashamed of themselves?

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other members of the Government have always made it clear that extra help will be given before the increase in VAT takes effect next year. That help will be additional to the automatic increase in pensions and other beneftis that will reflect the impact of any increase in fuel bills. But the hon. Gentleman should remember that, in the past 14 years, total expenditure on benefits for the elderly has

increased by 40 per cent. in real terms, to a level never dreamt of by any previous Labour Government. The Opposition should remember that on all occasions.

State Pension Age

7. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his current estimate of the additional cost of equalising the state pension age at 60 years.

Mr. Hague: The cost would be around £4 billion a year more than the current scheme at 1992-93 prices.

Mr. Arnold: Would not the reverse be true if equalisation were to take place at a higher level? Would not there be considerable savings—amounting to billions of pounds—in the social security budget, which could be redirected to those most in need? Is not that why Germany and the United States are well on the way to equalising at a higher level and why Denmark has already done so?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is right to point to the action taken by other countries in equalising, and in some cases increasing, their state pension age. Obviously, large savings stand to be made in those countries' expenditure. The Government are still considering all the options. No decision has yet been taken, but one will be announced in due course.

Mr. Bennett: Is the Minister aware that the Government's continual dithering over this matter is causing a lot of hardship to people who have to make logical decisions about their retirement? Does he accept that what would help most people would be to offer a flexible retirement age between 60 and 65 to suit individuals and their savings?

Mr. Hague: Accusations of indecision or dithering come strangely from a party whose policy on this matter is shrouded in the deepest mystery and is likely to remain so for some time. The Government have received 4,000 responses to their consultation document about the state pension age. It is fair and proper to give full consideration to all those responses and to await the European Court judgment, which was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, before reaching a decision on any of the options, including a flexible retirement age.

Social Fund

8. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many payments have been made since the introduction of the discretionary social fund.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Since the discretionary social fund was introduced in 1988, more than 7·2 million grants and loans, worth more than £1·2 billion, have been awarded.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my right hon. Friend for that most encouraging news. Will he confirm that, since the introduction of the social fund, more than £300 million has been given to community care projects and more than £800 million in interest-free loans? Is not that another good example of the Government targeting those most in need?

Mr. Scott: I have no doubt at all that, in the five years of its life, the social fund has demonstrated its ability to respond flexibly to need at the margins of the overall social security system and to control expenditure—something which its predecessor manifestly failed to do.

Mr. Skinner: Why do not the Government admit the facts—that during their period in office, they have allocated £26·2 billion in tax cuts to the richest 1 per cent. of people in Britain, yet they have the cheek to tell people who are living below the poverty line that they cannot get money from the social fund? This Government stink to high heaven.

Mr. Scott: I am tempted to respond to the gross discourtesy shown by the hon. Gentleman earlier in our proceedings by ignoring his question. Instead of doing that, I shall say that the social fund has responded to need and that Governments of all political colours have always found that, at the margins of any social security system, there is a need for a flexible response to special need. The social fund has provided such a response. The single payments scheme was doubling in cost every two years and had simply become unaffordable. I believe that we were right to bring that expenditure under control while meeting special needs.

Benefits Uprating

9. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was spent on uprating benefits in April.

Mr. Lilley: The uprating of all the main benefits by 3·6 per cent. in April this year cost an additional £2·5 billion.

Mr. Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is essential that the Government, like other Governments, should live within their means when it comes to the social security budget? Is not it significant that the French Government have just announced that there will be no pension uprating in July this year and that they propose to claw back £3·8 million in health charges? Has my right hon. Friend also noted that the German Government propose a 3 per cent. cut in benefit across the board? Is there an example to be followed in all that, and will he follow it?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend puts his point extremely clearly. He will recall that, before the announcement of last year's public expenditure round, we heard scaremongering throughout the summer to the effect that we would have to make such a draconian cut. None of the scares that were run by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) turned out to be true. We fulfilled the uprating that was then necessary. We believe that it is sensible to carry out sensible structural reforms. We have begun that process with the long-term review. We have commitments and we have kept to them, unlike the Labour party, which singularly failed to do so when it was in power.

Dr. Godman: In the light of the decision of the Secretary of State to accept the judgment of the European Court of Justice—case number C328/CF91—will he ensure that all the women concerned, who will benefit directly from that judgment and his belated acceptance of it, will not only receive the benefits to which they are entitled under European Community law but will be paid all arrears dating back to this April? Will he give an assurance that he

will not now proceed with his appeal at the Court of Appeal against Commissioner Skinner's decision, CS27/91?

Mr. Lilley: He is no relation, I trust, of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

As I do not keep in mind a catalogue of all European Court cases by number, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman when I have traced that case number. We have no option but to accept the rulings of the European Court of Justice since it overrides the authority of the House.

Single Mothers

10. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was provided by his Department in benefits to single mothers in 1975, 1980 and the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Burt: Although changes in the benefits system mean that figures for 1975 and 1980 are not available, expenditure on benefits for all lone parents has increased from £2·4 billion in 1981-82 to £6 billion in 1991-92 at constant prices.

Mr. Riddick: Those are pretty incredible figures. Does my hon. Friend agree that, when the welfare system encourages young women to have babies out of wedlock so that they can qualify for council houses and benefits, perhaps the system has gone too far? Will he confirm that the Government will take action to extend and encourage parental responsibility, particularly paternal responsibility?

Mr. Burt: There are many reasons why there has been a greater number of single parents in the past 20 years or so, including a greater tendency to divorce and separate, as well as a rising number of single, never-married young mothers. The responsibility of social security is that, whatever the relationship between parents may have become, a child has a right to be financially protected: in the first instance, by its natural parents, and the Child Support Agency will reinforce that; secondly, by providing what incentives we can for mothers to go back to work, where appropriate, because all the evidence that we have shows that the majority of single mothers want to get back to work; and, thirdly, where children are left vulnerable, they must be protected by the rest of society.

Ms Glenda Jackson: Will the Minister take this opportunity to condemn unreservedly not only the question put by the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) but the speech made by the Secretary of State for Wales over the weekend, which quite outrageously alleged that young women deliberately make themselves pregnant to benefit from housing and social security benefits, when the Minister knows, as do Conservative Members, that there is absolutely no evidence whatever to support those scurrilous allegations? Will he further assure the House and the country that no woman and her children will be denied benefit because she will not name, or the Government cannot find, the father?

Mr. Burt: It was clear this weekend that the issue of single parenthood has now been raised, and a variety of sensible comments have been made by hon. Members on both sides of the House. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned the quote from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett).

In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said that Britain had moved on, quite rightly, from the unacceptable situation where single mothers were ostracised but

"as a society we have to think seriously about how we try to help single mothers and I am not at all sure that putting them on their own with their children is the best way."

The hon. Member for Croydon North-West (Mr. Wicks) wrote an interesting article on single-parent policy, which appeared in *The Guardian* today. The issues have now been raised and, provided they are discussed sensibly and in a straightforward way, some of the problems that affect single parents, and therefore society, can now be sensibly considered.

Child Benefit

11. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many increases in child benefit have been announced in the past two years.

Mr. Burt: Since April 1991, there have been four increases in child benefit rates—in April and October 1991 and April 1992 and April 1993. These have increased the pre-1991 rate of £7·25 a week for each child to the current rate of £10 a week for the eldest eligible child and £8·10 a week for all other children.

Mr. Congdon: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government have pledged to retain child benefit as the cornerstone of their policy for helping all families with children? Will he further confirm that the annual uprating of child benefit, in line with the increase in prices, fulfils that pledge? Does he agree that the greatest threat to universal benefits is the threat to means-test them, which emanated from members of the Labour party?

Mr. Burt: Yes, what we know from the Commission of Social Justice, which is not very much, shows that my hon. Friend is right to have such suspicions. Child benefit remains the cornerstone of our policy; but since 1988 the Government have been able to find additional resources worth £1 billion, which have been made available to the least well-off families with children. That is a record of which to be proud.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Church Congregations

31. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what account is taken of the size of congregations in setting the contribution required from each parish to diocesan funds.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): It is not for the commissioners to set parish share or quota levels. Each individual diocese has its own method of calculating that and most take account, among other things, of the usual Sunday attendance figures, which are based on congregation size at times other than festivals or peak holidays.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is not it a matter of regret that church finances, which are already reeling from a fall in property values, will now have to cope with compensation running into millions of pounds to clergy who are leaving the Church in opposition to the ordination of women priests—an avoidable and infinitely divisive issue which, unlike the Bishop of Durham, who is taking retirement, and despite what he says, will not go away? Would not it reduce the number leaving and ease the financial burden on congregations if the safeguards proposed in the Act of Synod were incorporated in a supplementary Measure and given the force of law, rather than expecting traditionalist clergy to run the risk of another fit of political correctness and militant feminism at some point in the future?

Mr. Alison: I take note of what my hon. Friend has said. We very much hope that the alarmist figures of likely resignations will prove, in practice, to be gross overestimates and that the pastoral provisions announced already by the bishops of the Church of England will go a long way towards reassuring those who are in danger of resigning. I should point out to my hon. Friend that the net cost arising from resignations will depend on the extent to which resigning clergy are immediately replaced.

Mr. Frank Field: The hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) asked whether the right hon. Gentleman would be in favour of the safeguard being enshrined in a supplementary Measure. If that Measure came before the House after women's ordination had taken effect, would he be in favour of that?

Mr. Alison: I would certainly be in favour of that, particularly if the hon. Gentleman felt happy with it. But we would have to look at it on its merits, and it would be difficult to provide the safeguards for which he and I are looking. Much would depend on appointment factors, which are often subject to secret voting, and one could never be certain that the aims that we seek were achievable in a statutory form.

Property Assets

34. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what is the latest estimate of the property assets of the Church Commissioners.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners' property investments were valued at £901·2 million net at 31 December 1992.

Mr. Marshall: My right hon. Friend is possibly as surprised as I am that we have reached this question this afternoon. Has he considered the question of clergy housing? Is it desirable for clergy to live in a tied cottage for 40 years and then have to buy a home when they retire? Would not more women priests be attracted to the Church —many of us look forward to that—if they did not have to live in tied houses?

Mr. Alison: It would be very difficult to enable a clergyman to stay in the house from which he had been ministering to his parish, after he had resigned the incumbency of the parish. His successor would have to find somewhere to live, and there would be an increasing roll-on effect with the need to buy more and more property over the years. My hon. Friend will be aware that the Church has a very active and helpful rehousing provision to enable clergy, on leaving a tied cottage, to find property for their retirement which is well subsidised by the Church Commissioners.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Commonhold

35. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has for introducing commonhold.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): The Government intend to introduce legislation when parliamentary time allows.

Mr. Fishburn: Is not it absurd that condominiums and co-operatives, which are the standard way in which flat owners own their property throughout the English-speaking world and the Common Market, are not available in England? Would not commonhold put that right? Would not it be beneficial for this measure—which is supported by everyone who is interested in the proper forms of tenure for our great cities, from the Duke of Westminster to the Labour Front Bench—to be introduced as soon as possible?

Mr. Taylor: No one has done more than my hon. Friend to advance that proposal and see it thus far, with the enfranchisement legislation shortly to receive Royal Assent. I share his sense of urgency about getting the condominium rules, or commonhold, on to the statute book, although he may feel that those of his constituents who have lived, in their view, under difficult reversion regimes have achieved a vital breakthrough in being able to acquire the freehold reversion. I agree, however, that the picture will not be complete until we get the commonhold legislation on to the statute book as well. There is great pressure on parliamentary time, and the commonhold legislation will have to compete with other legislation that the Government are minded to introduce.

Mr. Raynsford: Does not the Minister accept that, following the Government's shameful climbdown in the face of the interests of the landed estates and the Duke of Westminster, the leasehold enfranchisement measures in part I of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Bill will prove to be a sham to the large number of leaseholders who will not be able to take advantage of them? When will the Government show a sense of urgency about the need to reform leasehold and introduce the commonhold measures that have been promised for far too long?

Mr. Taylor: I have just answered the second part of the question. As for a climbdown, as the hon. Gentleman calls it, I am not aware of one. The measures introduced by the Department of the Environment, which are shortly to receive Royal Assent, have received a broad and proper welcome.

Legal Aid

36. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his latest estimate of the amount that will be spent on legal aid in the current year; and what the figures were for *(a)* 1978-79, *(b)* 1990-91, *(c)* 1991-92 and *(d)* 1992-93.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is estimated that net expenditure on legal aid will amount to £1·284 billion in the current financial year. Net expenditure on legal aid in 1978-79 and in the previous three years was as follows: for 1978-79, £86 million; for 1990-91, £682 million; for 1991-92, £906 million; and for 1992-93, £1·093 billion.

Mr. Bruce: The figures are clearly frightening because they reveal the speed at which the cost of legal aid is increasing. Has my hon. Friend thought to tackle the problem from the other direction, by reforming court procedures to cut the delays and waste caused by having many lawyers sitting around in court waiting for cases to be called and by frequent adjournments, thus also creating various costs?

Mr. Taylor: As I have been one of those lawyers who used to sit around, I have every sympathy with my hon. Friend's question. He may like to know that improvements to and the simplification of court procedures are a constant and urgent preoccupation of the Lord Chancellor's Department. Meanwhile, the royal commission will report tomorrow, and my hon. Friend will no doubt want to see the extent to which its proposals meet his anxieties.

Ms Eagle: What is the Minister's opinion of the fact that when Mr. Asil Nadir fled bail, he left behind a legal aid bill of £1 million which has to be footed by the British taxpayer, although Mr. Nadir is clearly not short of money? Will the Government consider examining the loopholes in the legal aid system to prevent such outrages happening again?

Mr. Taylor: It is extremely unusual to hear the Labour party worrying about the taxpayer—refreshing perhaps, but just a touch unusual. The Labour party's usual cry is for more and more legal aid.

Mr. David Shaw: What are the Department's views on the projections for growth in legal aid costs over the next few years? Is the Department worried about the fact that it is projected that the legal aid bill will exceed the Government support given to manufacturing industry?

Mr. Taylor: I do not have a brief to speak on industrial matters, but I can answer my hon. Friend's question about the amount by which legal aid is set to increase over the next three years. Very approximately, the figures are 10 per cent., 10 per cent. and 10 per cent. in each of the next three years, and the anticipated usage of legal aid is expected to rise from the participation of 3 million persons per annum to 4 million persons per annum during the review period.

37. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment his Department has made of the effect of the recent restriction in eligibility to legal aid; how many representations he has received on this issue; and what proportion of them have indicated that this restriction is causing hardship.

Mr. John M. Taylor: We estimate that about 48 per cent. of households are now eligible for civil legal aid and about 21 per cent. for advice and assistance under the green form scheme. The Lord Chancellor and I have received a number of representations about various aspects of the changes to legal aid eligibility, a small proportion of which give examples of the effect of the changes.

Mrs. Roche: What would the Minister say to the seriously ill leukaemia patient who is not able to sue for medical negligence because of cuts in legal aid and who said that he could not gamble with the money that is meant for his children's food? What consideration has the Minister given to the Home Affairs Select Committee's recommendation that the cuts in eligibility should be restored?

Mr. Taylor: I remember that the hon. Lady raised the issue of the Home Affairs Select Committee's report with me during the debate on legal aid eligibility. I am at pains to tell her that the Lord Chancellor will shortly report, on the Government's behalf, on the Committee's report. I think that that will happen soon, and I do not want to anticipate it.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Is my hon. Friend aware that two hours' consultation under the green form scheme for someone with an income of up to £60 a week will be free and that two hours' consultation for someone with an income of £62 a week will cost £100? In view of the all-party Home Affairs Select Committee's recommendation that the suspension of the green form scheme should be dispensed with, especially as it is to continue in Scotland —the Lord Chancellor told the Select Committee that people north of the border would be better off than people in the south—will my hon. Friend undertake to look again at the decision to do away with the green form scheme other than for those on income support?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. and learned Friend will be aware that the proposals were approved not long ago by a majority of 49 in this honourable House. They were subsequently referred to the High Court on judicial review, whereupon the Lord Chancellor's position was sustained in its entirety. However, it is not for me to anticipate future positions with regard to public resources and the many claims on them. We will continually and very closely monitor the effects in practice of the changes that we have made.

Judges

38. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what study has been made of the parental background, gender and race of judges; and what proposals he has for change.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's policy is to appoint to judicial office, entirely on merit, those best qualified, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, political affiliation, religion or parental background. The Lord Chancellor has repeatedly made it clear that he particularly encourages applications for judicial appointment from women and ethnic minority practitioners.

Mr. Cohen: Are not working-class, black, Asian and women judges scarcer than praise for Arthur Scargill from

a Tory Government? Does not the hidebound and classbound composition of the judiciary contribute to its many mistakes? Are not many students—intelligent young men and women—saying that they now find it harder to obtain grants for courses in law studies? Is not it about time that the Government fast-streamed working and middle-class young men and women into the upper reaches of the legal profession?

Mr. Taylor: The only figures available on the socio-economic background of lawyers are contained in the results of a survey of student solicitors at the College of Law. In that survey, just over half the students responding described themselves as being from socio-economic groups A and B, 28 per cent. described themselves as C1, C2 or C3 and 20 per cent. failed to respond. That is encouraging evidence of a growing social spread among new entrants to the profession, but it is by no means a cause for complacency.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that the significant increase in judicial appointments in recent years from ladies and members of ethnic minority communities is greatly to be welcomed? However, does he agree also that it is ludicrous for the Labour party to call for some kind of positive discrimination when what the British people need are the best judges? Is not it absolutely right for the Lord Chancellor to continue to insist that judges will be appointed only on merit and does not the positive discrimination suggested by the Labour party lead Labour into the ridicule and contempt of the British people?

Mr. Taylor: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend may wish to know that the number of women in the judiciary is showing a steady increase. The trends at the lower levels are most important and they are the most particularly encouraging. There are now 50 female assistant recorders, compared with 35 some 15 months ago.

Mr. Boateng: Does the Minister recognise that, the merits of the current judiciary apart, there is a need for special training for judges hearing, trying and sentencing in cases involving sex offences? Does he recognise the extent to which the judiciary is brought into disrepute by the silly and inane remarks of some judges? What attempts will he make to ensure that the training for the judiciary in that important area is enhanced?

Mr. Taylor: There is no more urgent area of anxiety and progress in the Judicial Studies Board programme and curriculum than that identified by the hon. Gentleman. It has the highest priority of all.

Mr. Lidington: Would it not add to the diversity of the background of members of the bench if the Government were to ensure that rights of audience in the higher courts and eligibility to sit on the bench were opened up to all solicitors—not just solicitors in partnership but employed solicitors? Will my hon. Friend therefore override the objections of the barristers's trade union and introduce that necessary reform?

Mr. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's advisory committee on legal education and conduct published its advice on this important matter on Friday. The committee's advice gives the green light to solicitors in private practice appearing as advocates in the higher courts. I think that the lights are at amber for employed solicitors. The Lord Chancellor will be considering those matters with the appointed judges.

Lawyers

39. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what information he has on the number of persons qualifying as *(a)* solicitors and *(b)* barristers in each of the last three years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information that the hon. Gentleman requires is collected by the independent professional bodies themselves. I understand from the Law Society that, in 1990, 3,389 solicitors were admitted to the roll, 4,614 were admitted in 1991 and 4,775 in 1992. I understand that, in 1989-90, 1,200 barristers were called, in 1990-91, 1,157; and in 1991-92, 1,340.

Mr. Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the detail of his reply. Does he agree far more women barristers and solicitors are needed so that, before too long, we have a sufficient number of judges who are of the female sex? Does he accept that far too many of our judges are way off beam and far too insensitive when dealing with cases that relate to sex crimes? Will he admit that his Department —indeed, the Government—must do more so that we might have a better show? There is a need for him and his Department to do better.

Mr. Taylor: If the hon. Gentleman would re-read his question, he would see that there was no other way that I could answer it. He might take comfort from the fact that the most recent figures show that, in 1992, 49 per cent. of all those admitted to the roll as solicitors were women and that 13 per cent. were from ethnic minorities. Out of a total of 1,340 barristers called in 1991-92, 41 per cent. were women. The hon. Gentleman must regard that as encouraging.

Defence Estimates, 1993

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The House will be aware that every year the Government publish a Defence White Paper, which sets out their policy and plans for the future and describes the activities of the armed forces in the Minister of Defence. This year's White Paper, called "Defending our Future", is published today. We are also publishing the United Kingdom defence statistics for 1993, and a separate defence statistics bulletin showing expenditure on research and development.

I have taken the unusual step of announcing publication through a statement in the House because, although the White Paper includes the traditional information, I believe that the approach that we have taken in "Defending our Future" is a new departure, and that much of the material in it is particularly significant.

That applies in two respects. First, "Defending our Future" reports on the adjustments to the "Options for Change" force structure, taking into account recent changes in the international situation, and presents that force structure as an integrated whole.

Secondly, it then shows, in a way which has never been attempted before, how each of the elements of our armed forces can be matched to the various tasks which we require the armed forces to carry out. That matching of forces to tasks is crucial. The two must be in balance if we are to avoid wastefulness on the one hand and overstretch on the other. I believe that the analysis which we set out, which is an entirely new and ground-breaking approach, shows that that balance is being achieved.

The force levels of the armed forces are kept under constant review. We are regularly analysing the international situation, evaluating the threats which we face, and making sure that we have the right mix of forces to meet that threat. It is a continuous process. It is not something that we do every year, stopping our planning while we do it. Since last year's defence White Paper, we have continued that process of adjustment. Our conclusions are set out in detail in "Defending our Future". This afternoon I will describe the most important elements of what we are proposing.

The international situation continues to change, and in a number of very important respects the security of the United Kingdom has been enhanced in the past two years. In certain other areas there have been new demands on our armed forces. "Defending our Future" addresses both considerations.

I refer first to the improvements in our security and the implications for our force structure. Russia remains the largest European military power and it retains significant forces for its own defence; but it is also well disposed to the United Kingdom, its offensive capability has dramatically reduced, its equipment serviceability has deteriorated, and its defence industry is in decline. Since 1991, the Soviet Union has ceased to exist and Russian forces have now largely withdrawn from Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states as well as from eastern Europe. At the same time, we have made great progress in establishing mutual trust with our former enemies.

That means that a major external threat is even more unlikely to re-emerge in the foreseeable future than seemed likely in 1991, and this makes it sensible for us to make some reductions in the levels of relevant forces that were particularly aimed at countering the Soviet threat. Equally, the changed strategic situation has demanded that we confirm a series of enhancements to our capability in other areas. Let me begin with the reductions.

For the Royal Navy, the rapid decline in the size and operational activity of the former Soviet submarine fleet means that there is no longer the same need to sustain the current level of anti-submarine operations in the north Atlantic; nor is there the same need to patrol the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap.

We therefore plan to reduce the submarine fleet to 12 SSNs and to withdraw the Upholder class of four conventional submarines from service by 1995. We are examining the relative merits of their sale, lease, or storage. The reduced risk in the north Atlantic also means that the surface fleet can meet its tasks in peace and war, including our contribution to NATO, with a force of about 35 destroyers and frigates.

For the Army, we have decided that our requirement for indirect fire anti-armoured weapon can best be met through procurement of an air-launched weapon. Already, the United States and Germany have withdrawn from the MLRS 3 collaborative programme, and we will follow them at the end of the current phase.

For the Royal Air Force, the reduced threat of air attack to the United Kingdom means that a force of 100 Tornado F3 fighters will be fully capable of defending the United Kingdom and meeting our commitments to NATO's reaction forces. This is a reduction of 13 aircraft, and the force will be reorganised into six squadrons rather than seven. There will be no change in the number of Tornado GR1 aircraft.

We have also decided that, for similar reasons, there is no short-term requirement for a medium surface-to-air missile, but there is likely to be a longer term need and we are continuing our studies into those options. There is a clear operational justification for each of those reductions, which otherwise would not have been agreed.

I turn now to the other side of the picture—the enhancements to our current force structure that are appropriate to respond to new challenges and potential threats. The past 12 months have shown an increase in the number of operations, both in Europe and the wider world, in which our armed forces might be involved in conflict.

There is a need to ensure maximum flexibility and mobility for our armed forces in the modern world. In the White Paper we present measures that will improve our overall capability to respond to the changing situation, some of which have recently been announced to the House.

For the Royal Navy, we recently announced procurement of a helicopter carrier which will enter service later in the decade and which will significantly enhance our amphibious capability. No such dedicated carrier has been available to the Royal Navy since 1985. We are also proceeding with project definition of the class of ships to replace HMS Fearless and Intrepid.

For the Army, I recently announced an increase in the planned size of the infantry to take account of our new commitments, and our intention to retain two additional battalions and increase front-line strength by 5,000. We are also considering how best to equip the Army's six

Challenger 1 regiments, over and above the purchase of 127 Challenger 2 tanks which we have already announced. I will make a further announcement in due course.

I am able to announce today that we are placing an order worth some £75 million for over 400 new medium load carrier vehicles. That will enable us to deliver ammunition quickly to forward locations in support of our new AS90 self-propelled howitzers, and provides a good example of the practical steps we are taking to enhance the mobility and flexibility of our forces. We have also invited tenders for a future attack helicopter, which will substantially enhance the Army's anti-armour capability.

For the Royal Air Force, "Defending our Future" confirms plans to replace or refurbish part of the Hercules transport aircraft fleet. We also intend to procure a substantial number of additional support helicopters to increase the flexibility and mobility of our armed forces. The Eurofighter 2000 is now secure, and will be the cornerstone of the RAF capability in the future, and we have plans to upgrade the Tornado GR1's operational capability.

Those adjustments, taken together, represent a shift in the overall capability of our forces. We are reducing capability where the threat to the United Kingdom has itself been significantly reduced. We are gaining capability in those areas where we believe we will be required to act. Changes to particular capability areas need therefore to be seen in the context of the whole programme, and our security policy objective.

For example, our plans to reduce anti-submarine and air defence capabilities must be viewed alongside improvements in areas such as Army manpower, the new helicopter carrier, armour and anti-armour, and air transport helicopters—all key elements of the mobile, flexible and well equipped forces which we shall need for our future security needs. Choices always have to be made. It is my view, and that of the chiefs of staff, that we have made the right choices to enable us to face up to the challenges which confront us.

I turn now to the major innovation set out in "Defending our Future". I mentioned at the beginning of my statement the new analysis that we have undertaken of the way in which our armed forces carry out their commitments. "Defending our Future" includes unprecedented detail about the rationale for our current and planned force structures and activities.

During the cold war, defence planners dealt with a relatively simple equation, one side of which was the monolithic threat from the east. In the post-cold-war world, that certainty has vanished to be replaced by a broad spectrum of risk and uncertainty. The defence planner needs more sophisticated tools to ensure that the programme really is providing what such a fluid strategic setting demands.

We have therefore identified broad policy areas within each of the defence roles set out in last year's statement, and within each of those the specific military tasks, 50 in number, which the armed forces are required to undertake. We have then identified with some precision the force elements—for example, the number of infantry battalions or frigates or aircraft—required to meet each task.

All that is set out, in full, in the White Paper. It gives Parliament and the public an insight we have not had before into the purposes for which we use all the elements of our armed forces. It highlights the balance which currently exists between commitments and resources. It also shows clearly how changes—for example, a decision to take on a new United Nations commitment or the approaching obsolescence of an item of equipment—may affect the detail of the programme. There are many valuable conclusions to be drawn from the analysis. Let me give a few general examples.

First, our analysis has also shown us how our defence needs are influenced by national commitments unique to the United Kingdom. Most of our European partners do not have commitments analogous to our responsibilities in Northern Ireland and to our dependent territories; nor, except for France, do our European allies maintain a national nuclear deterrent. The cost of those activities amounts to more than £3 billion a year. That has to be borne in mind when comparisons are made between levels of defence spending.

Secondly, the analysis also shows the value of NATO, and the benefits of sharing the financial burden of our collective security of the defence of Europe. If NATO disappeared and we had to insure on a purely national basis against major external threat, we would almost certainly have to spend a great deal more money than we currently do.

Thirdly, another valuable insight is the overlap between the types of forces needed for the defence of Europe and the types of forces needed to contribute to our wider security interests—through United Nations operations, for example. The kind of mobile, flexible, well equipped and trained forces, with true war-fighting capabilities, that we provide for our NATO commitments have proved equally suited to operations in the Gulf and in Bosnia—the Tornado and Sentry aircraft and the Warrior armoured personnel carrier, for example.

But the most significant overall conclusion is that the planned force structure is capable of meeting all the tasks we require of it. At the same time, we must, of course, ensure that its high quality of manpower, equipment and support is mantained; and I have touched on a number of the major items in our foward programme that will help us to do so. We must also watch carefully to ensure that we maintain the balance we have achieved between our commitments, our force levels, and the resources devoted to defence. Again the analysis will help us to do so.

I do not expect the House to comment in detail on this material today—but I hope, by publishing this analysis, that our defence debates will be even better informed than in the past.

"Defending Our Future" is a comprehensive account of the Government's defence policy. It rightly describes the tasks of the armed forces and the civil servants in the Ministry of Defence. I pay tribute to the outstanding way in which they carry out their duties. It also breaks major new ground in terms of open government. Never before have commentators on defence issues has such access to the defence planner's perspective. I hope that the House will understand and appreciate the seriousness of this endeavour, and I commend it to the House.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I thank the Secretary of State for his "Statement on the Defence Estimates" and for accepting the argument, which the Labour party has advanced over the years, that more information on planning in the armed forces should be available to us. We do indeed appreciate this—especially the Secretary of State's acknowledgement of the role that our forces will

[Dr. David Clark]

have to play under the aegis of the United Nations. Opposition Members take this matter very seriously. Indeed, it is included in the Labour party's constitution.

However, what the Secretary of State has announced is merely a small step, and is in no way a substitute for a full defence review, which would enable an assessment of the threats and the challenges to Britain's security to be made, so that our armed forces could be reshaped accordingly.

The Government's statement is long on presentation, but short on commitment; long on planning, but short on strategy. We have had fine words, but where's the beef? In reality, there will be increased demands on our armed forces, but they will have fewer tanks, fewer ships and fewer men and women. Nothing has changed: the overstretch will go on.

When will the Secretary of State shake off his indecision and take some decisions? When, for example, will he confirm that he has not yet made up his mind on a new nuclear bomb for the RAF? Does he not realise that he will have to cancel this eventually? Why cannot he do so now and save £3 billion?

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm also that he cannot make up his mind about the decision concerning Challenger 2 tanks? We need to know whether he intends to upgrade Challenger 1 or replace it with Challenger 2.

Why cannot the Secretary of State make up his mind about support helicopters? Is he not aware that our armed forces are desperately short of helicopters? Does he not recall that one of his predecessors, as long ago as 1987, announced the Government's intention to place an order for 25 EH101 support helicopters? After six years, is the Secretary of State incapable of making a decision?

What about our conventional submarines? How and why are the four Upholder class submarines to be disposed of, even though they cost us almost £1 billion to complete and are not yet in service?

These are questions to which we need answers. We need decisions. Today was decision day for the Secretary of State, but we have not had decisions.

The Secretary of State referred to the need for a non-proliferation treaty and for a comprehensive test ban. Will he now join Labour in welcoming President Clinton's wise decision, over the weekend, to extend the ban on nuclear testing? Why is the right hon. and learned Gentleman being so churlish? Does he not accept that this is a major step towards renewal of the non-proliferation treaty in 1995? Will not the Government welcome it?

Why does the Secretary of State treat the defence workers of Britain in such a cavalier and callous manner? Does he not appreciate that more than 100,000 of them have lost their jobs? The right hon. and learned Gentleman doe not seem to care about them. Why does he persist in refusing to establish a defence diversification agency, which could help in the transition from military to civilian jobs? These skills are too valuable for the nation to lose.

The Opposition accept that there is a case for reducing the amount that we spend on defence. With the end of the cold war, virtually every country in the world is doing so. But it must be done with management and planning, and the criteria must be those of security and defence, and not simply demands from the Treasury, which are what the Government have adopted as their criteria. Strategy and savings can go hand in hand, but they must be balanced.

Today, we have had "Options for Change" mark 2. "Options for Change" mark 1 cut service manpower and today we have had cuts in equipment. When are we to expect mark 3, which will cut commitments?

The Secretary of State talks of "adjustments", but the adjustments that he has discussed today are no substitute for a full-scale defence review. The Conservatives have got Britain's defence into such a mess because they persist in that folly. It will remain in a mess until we have a full defence review.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) asked me about Challenger tanks, support helicopters and submarines. He will appreciate the fact that, if Labour's policy of a £6 billion reduction in defence spending were implemented, there would be none of any of those for the armed forces, now or at any time in the future. The hon. Gentleman should reflect on that fact.

On Challenger tanks, the various rumours and reports about possible reductions in the number of armoured regiments or armoured reconnaissance regiments are incorrect. We have no proposals to make any reductions in the number of armoured regiments or armoured reconnaissance regiments. We are considering the best way to meet the modern requirements, in terms of their tanks, of those regiments.

We have reviewed the question of support helicopters and can confirm that there is an enhanced requirement for them to ensure mobility and flexibility for the Army's needs. I hope to make a fairly early announcement on precisely how we intend to implement that matter. We have said in the White Paper that we are considering options such as the sale, lease or storage of the Upholder submarines, and that will be taken forward.

The hon. Gentleman asked about nuclear tests in the light of President Clinton's announcement. Historically, this country tests less than any other nuclear power. We have carried out an average of one test a year, which is far fewer than France, the United States, Russia or China. Only with testing can one ensure the safety and reliability of nuclear weapons. If testing is not to continue, it will be necessary to develop computer modelling and simulation techniques but we cannot yet be certain that those methods will provide the information available from underground testing. Clearly, that needs further detailed consideration.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman came up with his usual call for a defence review, which masks the bareness, the nudity, of Labour party policy. Whenever the House asks the Labour party how much it thinks should be spent on defence, we are told that that will be considered by a defence review. When we ask the Labour party how many battalions, frigates or aircraft are required by the armed forces, we are told that that will be the subject of a defence review. When we ask what the commitments of the armed forces should be, we are told that that should be the responsibility of a defence review.

The hon. Gentleman's view and that of the Liberal party remind me of a remark that Voltaire once made—that the Opposition are like a eunuch, knowing what they want to do but not know how to do it.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I welcome the new format of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates",

which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has produced today. I particularly welcome the new way in which the size and structure of the forces are linked to the Government's commitments, internationally and to defend our own country.

My right hon. and learned Friend will know that the Defence Select Committee feels that, in some aspects, our forces are overstretched at the present level of commitment, and we are looking for improvements to be made in specific areas. However, he is absolutely right to make that specific statement linking the two, and I look forward in future to ensuring that commitments do not outstretch resources.

In that context, I see no prospect of our being able to cut the commitments that the Government face in the short or long term to secure our country's future. That being so, it must follow that the Treasury can make no further cuts in resources to the funds made available to the Ministry of Defence. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will convey the feeling of myself, the Defence Select Committee and many of my colleagues to that effect.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend for the welcome that he gave to the White Paper's general presentation. There has been some incorrect speculation in the press, and I can confirm that the resources available to the Ministry of Defence are, and continue to be, those announced in the public expenditure survey last year. Contrary to some suggestions in the press, no further reduction has been imposed on the Ministry of Defence.

It is right firmly to link resources, commitments and the other ways in which the armed forces carry out their requirements. Our commitments in some sectors have been reducing. Over the past year, there has been a reduction in our military presence in Cyprus, and we are in the process of reducing our military presence in Hong Kong. We have also indicated our intention to withdraw from Belize. There have been a number of such reductions. However, the overall link between resources and commitments must remain the test against which we judge any proposed changes in capabilities or assets for the armed forces.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I wish that the Chancellor had made this statement, as his fingerprints are all over the document which we have yet to see. The Secretary of State says that the White Paper breaks new ground, but that ground was broken in the 1920s and 1930s, when British forces were run down to a level that ultimately proved to be dangerous.

I hope that the Secretary of State's White Paper reflects the dangerous environment in which we live, and that he has provided adequate forces to meet all contingencies. If the Royal Navy found it difficult to meet its commitments with "about 50", how will it meet its commitments with about 30 frigates and destroyers? The right hon. and learned Gentleman will go down in history as the Secretary of State responsible for reducing the Royal Navy to the lowest number of capital ships—ships of the line—since 1689.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman's final comment is historically inaccurate. If he studies the records, he will discover that, in the 1820s, after the Napoleonic wars, ships of the line were reduced from 98 to, I think, 23—a figure far lower than the Royal Navy's current or expected strength.

The real test that must be applied involves the tasks expected of the Royal Navy. The hon. Gentleman will know from my earlier remarks that we believe it right to reduce the number of submarines and frigates because of the dramatic reduction in the threat previously posed by the Soviet naval forces. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman, with his knowledge of defence matters, would seriously question that there has been dramatic reduction of potential naval threat from Russia or the former Soviet Union. That is the operational basis on which the changes have been made.

If the hon. Gentleman wishes to know how the Royal Navy is to carry out its current commitments with the frigate/destroyer fleet of about 35, he has merely to read the White Paper, which says exactly how that will be done.

Mr. Archie Hamilton (Epsom and Ewell): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the fact that the White Paper shows that our forces are aligned with our commitments is welcome? However, does he also accept that the scales are pretty finely balanced, which should make him reluctant to take on new commitments? My right hon. and learned Friend should constantly review where we might lose commitments, including Northern Ireland.

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. Friend is right to say that there is not a lot of unused capacity in the armed forces. The White Paper shows that, as has always been the case, our armed forces carry out many tasks on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, and we do not have forces dedicated to unexpected contingencies or crises. All our forces which might be used in a crisis are used for other roles in peacetime. That is right and proper, and is the policy carried out by every other country. It is important that that point should be understood.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): The right hon. and learned Gentleman's literary reference is well taken, as there is more than a hint of Dr. Pangloss about himself.

The White Paper tells us two things. The first is that there is still no clear overall political judgment by the Government of what the United Kingdom's military role should be as a middle-ranking power. Secondly, if we are to have access to capability and to maintain our security, is not that most likely to be done through far greater military and political integration in NATO and the European Community as part of the integrated defence policy that the Maastricht treaty clearly contemplated?

Mr. Rifkind: On the hon. and learned Gentleman's opening comment, it is better to be candid with the House than to seek to avoid the consequences of our policy. That is what the hon. and learned Gentleman does, because he knows that the Liberal party called for a 50 per cent. reduction in our defence forces.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Rubbish.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, the hon. and learned Gentleman is right—it was a rubbish policy. That is why he is so embarrassed by it.

He also has the nerve to call for political and military integration within NATO. Where has the hon. and learned Gentleman been for the past 40 years? The United Kingdom defence forces could hardly be more integrated within NATO than they are at present.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on producing a much improved defence White Paper. We all recognise that it is difficult to accept change and to match resources to changing commitments. However, many of us on this side of the House, while understanding the difficulty of accepting change, recognise that we are fully stretched. We do not want my right hon. and learned Friend to return to the House next year to say that, after making agreed changes to meet new commitments, or changes in commitments, he has to announce further cuts.

Mr. Rifkind: I acknowledge my hon. Friend's comments, and he is right to emphasise that commitments and resources must remain closely interlinked. We will continue to seek more value for money through improvements in efficiency and other such changes. However, there is inevitably a limit to that which can be achieved by that means. Where that can be achieved, it is well worth pursuing.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): The Secretary of State deserves our thanks at least for more information, but he receives some minus points for the way that it has been presented.

For example, the right hon. and learned Gentleman managed to include in the active fleet eight, not six, type 23 frigates, which could not be used on the Armilla patrol anyway. He has managed to include also Fearless as an assault ship, which could not put to sea tomorrow if we had a major war on our hands. From my brief reading of the White Paper, the Secretary of State seems to have included some questionable assets—but I assure him that I shall be studying it in much more detail.

Mr. Rifkind: It would be fairly absurd not to make any reference to ships currently in refit as assets available to the Royal Navy. Of course they are not available when they are in refit, but when one is determining total numbers, one takes into account the fact that refits are required for every ship at some time in its life.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that his statement will come as a bitter disappointment to journalists who wrote about defence cuts before they knew the facts? In fact, there are no cuts in resources in the statement.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that we need no lectures on defence from the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, both of which are dedicated to dangerously damaging cuts? When allocating resources, will my right hon. and learned Friend remember always that 95 per cent. of our trade goes by sea, and that, however capable the Royal Navy's shipping units may be, we need sufficient units to be credible in defending our trading interests?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree. The Royal Navy will remain, after the United States navy, probably the most effective naval force in the world. It is a powerful force in terms not only of its ships and assets but of the naval skills and experience of those who man those ships. The Royal Navy performs a number of roles in the national interest, and I believe that it will continue to be able to do so with all the professional excellence that the nation has come to expect.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Given United Nations bungling, I compliment the Secretary of State on the choice of title for his White Paper, "Defending our Future"—rather than the future of foreigners. May we assume that priority will be given to defending British interests and British citizens? It is to be welcomed that the Secretary of State has resisted any cuts in infantry strengths, particularly in the light of unwise statements made over the weekend by at least two ex-Ministers.

Mr. Rifkind: The defence of the United Kingdom and of its citizens must always be the first call upon Her Majesty's armed forces. Of course we look forward to the day when it will be possible to reduce the number of battalions in Northern Ireland in a responsible way. In judging when that is appropriate, we shall be guided by the important work that the armed forces are doing in Northern Ireland, and the importance of ensuring that the battle against terrorism is won.

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that there is probably greater uncertainty in the world today than at any time since 1945, and that, however good the planning of the link between resources and commitment might be, it might not always work out in practice? Is he aware of the increasing unease, especially in the Royal Navy, that that unfortunate set of circumstances might occur?

Mr. Rifkind: I accept the force of what my hon. Friend says. Considerations of the kind he mentions—the unpredictable nature of the post-cold-war world—require us to consider the need for armed forces that are more flexible and mobile and that can be deployed in circumstances that we cannot predict. Those enhancements have to be funded and, at a time of declining defence resources, it is sensible to identify the capabilities that are less necessary. Clearly, a potential Soviet naval threat in the north Atlantic has receded dramatically during the past few years, which entitles us to change the balance of our capabilities in the way that I have outlined.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The right hon. and learned Gentleman dodged the question put to him by my hon. Friend, the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) about nuclear testing, which the Government said 15 months ago was indispensable to the nation's security.

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that, now that President Clinton has banned British nuclear testing in Nevada, the pretence that Britain's nuclear capability is independent is exposed as a total sham? Will he also accept that, now that we have no Soviet enemy to aim nuclear weapons at, now that we have no American friend who will permit us to test those weapons and now that the French President and Prime Minister have called for a comprehensive international nuclear test ban treaty, it is about time that the Government took the initiative in the negotiation of such a treaty?

Mr. Rifkind: The United Kingdom's view on nuclear testing has not changed. We believed a year ago, and we believe today, that there are useful advantages in ensuring the safety and reliability of our nuclear weapons. If that is no longer possible, clearly the emphasis has to be on trying to identify whether simulation, computer modelling and other methods can provide comparable information. Time will tell whether that information can be provided in the same way, and we look forward to co-operating with other countries with that objective in mind.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): I respect and welcome the skill with which my right hon. and learned Friend has undertaken this revision of our military capabilities, not least because it involves contesting with many long-standing interests. When "Defending our Future" and the expenditure that it postulates are fully effective, how will our military spending, as a percentage of our gross domestic product, compare with that of our political allies and economic rivals in the European Community?

Mr. Rifkind: When "Options for Change" is fully implemented, we expect British defence expenditure to be broadly the same as that of France and Germany, as it is today. As a percentage, it will be slighly higher than that of a number of other NATO countries, but much of that is to be explained by our commitment in Northern Ireland, our residual responsibilities for dependent territories and —along with France—our nuclear status. In terms of hard cash spent on defence, British, French and German defence expenditure are almost identical and are likdly to remain broadly the same.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Footnote 5 on page 28 of "UK Defence Statistics", 1993 edition, states that there are 7,100 people in intelligence and investigation. Do we get value for money from them? How on earth could they have allowed a British Foreign Secretary to tell the House that the operation in relation to Kuwait was justified and proportionate, when we now learn that it would have done discredit to Abbott and Costello? These guys ran out of petrol and did not know where the university was where they were supposed to assassinate the former President of the United States. What has happened to British intelligence, and how could a senior member of the Government be so sure that the Americans were right?

Mr. Rifkind: If there was evidence available to the United States—and there was—that Iraqi intelligence was seeking to assassinate a former President of the United States, the American response, which was deliberately targeted on the headquarters of Iraqi intelligence, was appropriate.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the Royal Navy and Royal Marines manpower figures already announced are unchanged by today's statement? Will he continue to treat with contempt Liberal statements on defence matters of this kind, bearing in mind that party's conference policy, which has never been reversed, for a 50 per cent. cut in defence expenditure, with the horrible consequences that that would have for manpower and equipment levels?

Mr. Rifkind: It is correct that the likely redundancies affecting the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force that were announced some time ago are unchanged by today's announcement, which we took into account when making those figures known. I understand that the Liberal party has never been asked to reverse the commitment to a 50 per cent. cut and the massive reduction in the size of the armed forces that would result from that policy.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): May I help the Secretary of State on matters nuclear? This year, his experts gave evidence to the Select Committee on Defence that testing was unnecessary and that all the safety assessments could be done mathematically by computer modelling.

The Secretary of State makes a plea about the unique nature of our defence requirement, while at the same time saying that our defence provision is structually sound. That might be true coming from the brass hats, but it is not true coming from the people on the ground.

The Secretary of State cannot have it both ways. He cannot say that this nation is an international leader in strategic requirements and allow it to be the leader of the Rapid Reaction Corps and maintain a seat on the Security Council, while still allowing the Treasury to beat him about the head and drive him into the ground in this way. The Government cannot have it both way. When will they stand up for one or the other? They should either relinquish the leadership of the Rapid Reaction Corps and their seat on the Security Council or put the Treasury in its place.

Mr. Rifkind: The time to contemplate such an unpleasant conclusion would be when we were unable to meet our commitments. As "Defending our Future" clearly shows, the Rapid Reaction Corps and the United Kingdom's other commitments can be met. When the present draw-down process is complete in 1995, there will be a significant extra availability of military personnel to deal with any unexpected occurrences. It is at this precise moment, when a number of battalions or regiments are amalgamating, that we have restricted availability of forces for any overseas commitments. That situation will ease over the next 18 months.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that a statement by the former Minister of State for the Armed Forces that the cuts could lead to a cut in the commitment to troops in Northern Ireland received wide coverage in the Province?

Will the Minister note that, when the former Minister of State, his right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton), mentioned Northern Ireland, he sidestepped any comment on that matter? Will the Minister rectify that by assuring the people of Northern Ireland that, although, under the policy of his right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell, the Ulster Defence Regiment and part-time soldiers met their demise, there will be no cuts in the troop commitment to Northern Ireland?

Mr. Rifkind: The men of the former Ulster Defence Regiment are now carrying out an extremely valuable and welcome role as proud members of the new Royal Irish Regiment. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the new way in which they have been further integrated with the armed forces of the United Kingdom.

The precise level of our military presence in Northern Ireland cannot be static because, of course, it will change —sometimes it will go up, and sometimes it will go down. I look forward to the day when security will enable it to be substantially reduced, because that would be a clear mark of success in the battle against terrorism. I assure the hon. Gentleman that it would be reduced only if the security circumstances in our view were to justify such a course of action.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): While welcoming the greater transparency and openness in the

[Mr. John Hutton]

White Paper, which will benefit the discussion of such issues in the future, I must express reservations about the statement on the Royal Navy and the future of Britain's few remaining warship yards.

Can the Secretary of State confirm that a new class of ships is designed to replace Fearless and Intrepid, and that it is not the Government's intention to replace those ships with one assault ship? Can he confirm that there will be no slippage in orders for the new class of submarines, the batch 2 Trafalgars?

When does he expect the next round of type 23 frigate orders to be placed? Will his right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer come to the House in November with yet a further round of defence cuts that he will have to explain?

Mr. Rifkind: Coming as he does from Barrow-in-Furness, I thought that the hon. Gentleman might have at least preceded his comments by welcoming the helicopter carrier, and the benefit to employment that will result in his part of the country. We have concluded that it is right to take forward the project definition for the replacement of Fearless and Intrepid and, at this stage, we envisage two ships to replace them. Announcements about other procurement matters will be made in due course when we have something new to say. There are no changes other than those that I have announced.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): My right hon. and learned Friend's contribution to the proper discussion of defence priorities in this document is to be warmly welcomed, certainly on the Conservative Benches, where the only constructive discussion will take place.

Will he look closely at the shifting foreign policy objectives? There are many current concerns about the former Soviet Union, such as the potential destabilisation that may be caused by the movement of Russians outside Russia. There is also the problem of nuclear proliferation, especially in the middle east. We in Britain need to know that we have the resources available to meet those foreign policy commitments as and when they arise.

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with my hon. Friend. The situation in Russia is, at best, uncertain and there could be either beneficial or worrying developments. No one can predict how events may turn out. Russia remains a nuclear super-power and, even after it has fulfilled all its obligations under the START treaty, in 10 years it will still have more than 3,000 strategic nuclear warheads.

For reasons such as those, we have to maintain a strong defence, and NATO must continue to be the fundamental bedrock of our defence policy. That has been the guiding factor that has determined the sort of defence capability that we must continue to have long into the 1990s.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): In the context of the reduction of RAF Tornado squadrons from seven to six, will the Secretary of State confirm that there will be no implications for the development of RAF Lossiemouth as a key base in the deployment of and training in the use of those aircraft? When will he be able to announce exactly the further plans for the operational capability of the GR1s?

Mr. Rifkind: The particular squadron that will be disbanded as a result of today's announcement will be the No. 23 Squadron at RAF Leeming. Other matters will be reported to the House when we can give specific information.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I am obliged to hon. Members on both sides of the House.

May I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his terse and trenchant statement, and suggest that, for the country's benefit—as the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) said—that is as far as we can go? May I suggest that he abandons the "about" theory next year? We are to have "about" 40 destroyers or frigates, which I am told means between 35 and 45—and presumably means 35. Thereafter, the figure will be 35, which I am told means between 30 and 45. If everything can be numbered correctly, why are destroyers and frigates, which will apparently be repaired and refitted at Rosyth, given such a vague assessment?

Mr. Rifkind: I echo the House's welcome to my hon. and learned Friend on his return to the House after his recent illness. We are delighted to see him in the Chamber.

I appreciate my hon. and learned Friend's concern about the number of frigates and destroyers. He will be pleased to know that, contrary to some press speculation, the 18 major warships which I said recently would be refitted at Rosyth are in no way affected by today's statement. We were, of course, aware of the contents of the White Paper when I reported to the House on the allocated programme that would go to Rosyth. In the consultation document, which we hope to publish later this week, the figure of 18 major warships will be confirmed.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): In view of the commitment of the Secretary of State and of the Government to a new non-proliferation treaty, how can we continue to try to develop a new free-fall nuclear bomb and the tactical air-to-surface missile system? Would it not be logical to abandon that attempt and to save money, which could then be used necessarily to increase our conventional weapons and conventional defence systems?

Mr. Rifkind: The whole question of the future of our sub-strategic nuclear capability is currently under consideration. I hope to be able to report to the House fairly soon on that matter. I do not want to add anything at present.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): However skilfully my right hon. and learned Friend may have dressed up his announcement today, is he aware that he cannot conceal the fact that it constitutes part of the relentless rundown in the capability of our armed forces from an already tiny base? Is he aware that it is especially a matter for regret that he has not been able to reprieve any more of the overstretched infantry battalions which still face cuts?

My right hon. and learned Friend has announced today that there will be further reductions in the front-line strength of the Royal Air Force. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) has just mentioned, the reduction from 50 destroyers and frigates a decade ago to about 35 is a matter for deep concern. Looking to the overall capability of our armed forces, is my right hon. and learned Friend aware

that we shall no longer be able to fulfil our capabilities, as we have in the past, if we ever have to fight a significant conventional war?

Mr. Rifkind: I cannot agree with my hon. Friend's conclusion. We believe that we would be able to defend these shores against the threat to which my hon. Friend refers. He must reflect on what changes he believes are justified in the light of the end of the cold war, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the removal of the Soviet naval threat from the Atlantic and the removal of any likelihood in the foreseeable future of a direct attack on the United Kingdom.

One cannot, of course, exclude the possibility that those threats, which have largely disappeared, might re-emerge at some date. However, they could not re-emerge overnight, but only over a considerable period. If there was any evidence that such a new threat was beginning to re-emerge, there would be a bounden duty on this Government, as there would be on all NATO Governments, to revise our defence capabilities.

In all honesty, we cannot argue that it necessary to maintain in the vastly different circumstances of the 1990s a balance of capabilities that was designed for the cold war. There is a need for greater flexibility and mobility, and that is why part of our planned enhancements which have been envisaged in recent years are to continue and are to be made available to our armed forces in the way that I have described.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): How many people will be made redundant by the armed forces as a result of the previous announcements by the Secretary of State and of his announcement today? As the figure will run into thousands, and as those people will be made redundant when millions of people are already looking for jobs, will the Secretary of State confirm that he has consulted the Secretary of State for Employment about the results of such redundancies? Have his officials talked and listened to Department of Employment officials about the employment results of his policy?

Mr. Rifkind: Redundancies in the Navy and the Air Force were announced in recent months. Today's statement has done nothing to change the figures as, obviously, we took those matters into account. I announced a proposed size for the Army of 119,000 some months ago and a large part of the draw-down has been completed. There will be a need for a third phase of redundancies on the basis of the orginal proposals that were announced some time ago, but that will not be changed by the White Paper.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): No one could accuse my right hon. and learned Friend of lacking presentational skills. He made—as any good lawyer would—the best of a brief which, at first sight, seems to be inadequate and driven more by the Treasury than by defence considerations.

Will he address the question of the mobility of our armed forces which has been raised by some hon. Members? He has not answered the question about support helicopters, or those about heavy lift air transport of a tactical and strategic nature. Does he agree that it is important that, if we are to fulfil our obligations to the United Nations peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts, we must be able to get men and equipment to the places where they are needed as quickly as possible?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree unreservedly with my hon. Friend. We have carried out a new assessment in recent months as to the likely need for support helicopters. That assessment has suggested that enhanced financial provision—greater than had been anticipated previously—is needed to ensure that support helicopter facilities will be available. That provision is built into our assumptions.

We are working on the precise identification of the type of helicopter that would be required, and we hope to come to an early conclusion. My hon. Friend knows that various options have been discussed recently. The need for a proper enhancement of support helicopters is accepted unreservedly.

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): The Secretary of State has poured scorn on the suggestion of a defence review. May I ask him for a commitment that he will not allow British forces to go into any future situation where those troops would be overstretched, under-resourced and underfunded until there has been a defence review?

In view of the redundancies that are implicit in the statement, what discussions are the Secretary of State and his Department having with the DTI and the Department of Employment to ensure that areas that are dependent on defence contracts have other industries brought in, and ensure that the skill of men and women in the defence industries is not lost when they are thrown on the scrap heap?

Mr. Rifkind: The signs are rather encouraging. Over 70 per cent. of those who were made redundant from the Army during the past year have now found employment. The fact that that has been possible during a severe economic recession is a useful indicator of how valuable their experience has been. The hon. Gentleman should welcome that.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. We must now move on.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

MERCHANT SHIPPING

That the Merchant Shipping (Local Passenger Vessels) (Masters' Licences and Hours, Manning and Training) Regulations 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 1213) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Michael Brown.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

OPPOSITION DAY

[16TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Pit Closures

[Relevant document: The First Report of the Trade and Industry Committee of Session 1992-93 on British Energy Policy and the Market for Coal (HC 237), together with Memoranda of Evidence (HC 703).]

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. I shall limit speeches to 10 minutes between the hours of 7 pm and 9 pm.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The motion that we are to debate ends with a reference to measures that would ensure

"a fair opportunity for coal to compete for a wider market."

No. 36 in the Remaining Orders of the Day and Notices of Motions—last, but not least—is the Energy (Fair Competition) Bill, which would introduce measures such as those referred to in the motion. In those circumstances, is it not right that we should be given an opportunity to consider that measure following today's debate? The Bill could do what the Secretary of State has not done to save the coal industry in this country.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that that is not a point of order for me. He is a good publicist, though: I note that it was his own Private Member's Bill to which he referred.

4.29 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move,

That this House recalls that Her Majesty's Government encouraged the belief that the proposals in the White Paper, 'The Prospects for Coal' would reprieve 12 pits and widen the market for their coal by providing a subsidy for their output; notes that within three months of its publication two of those pits have already closed and no extra contracts have been secured for the coal of the other ten pits, which therefore remain at risk; records its concern at the damage from the continuing closure of Britain's coal mines to the coalfield communities, the mining equipment industry, and the long-term security of energy reserves; and demands that Her Majesty's Government now acts to secure the future of the remaining pits and adopts the recommendations of the Trade and Industry Select Committee in its Report, 'British Energy Policy', which would ensure a fair opportunity for coal to compete for a wider market.

Three months ago, the House debated the White Paper on coal. The press reports on that White Paper were all quite clear about its bottom line—that 12 pits had been saved. Most of them put that bottom line in their headlines. *The Daily Telegraph* announced:

"12 pits reprieved by Heseltine".

The *Financial Times* carried the headline:

"Government to save 12 pits".

The Independent—marginally more optimistic than the rest—said:

"13 pits have hope of survival".

In *Today*, we read:

"£500 million bill for taxpayers to reprieve a dozen pits".

The *Daily Express*—the official organ of the state, which saves us from speculating what Conservative central office is saying by faithfully reprinting every word—announced:

"12 pits and 7,000 jobs are saved".

Those half-dozen newspapers did not all reach the same conclusion by accident. They were all heavily briefed, lobbied and guided to the same conclusion—that 12 pits would be saved. But the educational effort that was mounted to get the message across to the press was as nothing compared with the one-to-one tutorials set up to convince Conservative Back Benchers—and many of them believed what they were told.

I see that the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) has temporarily absented himself from the Chamber. He was quoted by the Press Association a fortnight ago as saying that

"Had he known then what he knew now he would have voted against the White Paper rather than merely abstaining."

I hope that the Patronage Secretary's representative will convey to the missing Member our hope that we are tonight giving him a second chance to redeem himself. We can assure the hon. Gentleman that there will be more rejoicing tonight in our Division Lobby over the one prodigal who returns to it than over the 295 who got it right last March.

At least the hon. Member for Davyhulme abstained. The hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), who I am pleased to see is with us, voted with the Government. During the March debate, the hon. Gentleman said:

"While we hoped that we might have been able to save more pits than the 12 . . . which we will save, at least we have 12".—[*Official Report*, 29 March 1993; Vol. 222, c. 58.]

I am sorry to say to the hon. Gentleman that we are now 10. Only three months later, we have lost two of those pits. At Rufford, the decision has been taken to close the pit, which will cease production when the current face is exhausted—probably in a couple of months' time.

The hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who was then Minister responsible for coal, visited Rufford in February last year. This is what he said to the local paper:

"Rufford is a fine example of how a loss-making pit can turn round to become a remarkable success."

Barely a month before a general election, in a marginal Tory constituency, Rufford was a remarkable success. Now, barely a year into this discredited Tory Government's term of office, Rufford is an expendable failure.

At Markham, production has already ceased. As it happens, I have been down to Markham. Only six months ago, when I visited Markham, there was machinery still in service. It was new machinery—machinery that they were still stripping down to install underground. It was modern machinery—machinery that had helped to make that pit highly efficient and to double its productivity in eight years. It was expensive machinery—machinery that is now among the millions of pounds' worth of machinery that is being left underground in Britain to buckle under pressure and be buried under roof faults.

I hope that, in his reply, the Minister will spare the miners at that pit and at Rufford the humbug that it is they who choose to close the pit by accepting redundancy. In those cases, they had no choice. Those at both pits were told that they could stay open until next year, when the coal contract drops by 10 million tonnes, or they could vote to close this year. The difference was that, if they voted to close this year, they would each get an extra £10,000 on top of their redundancy. We have all contested

elections; that is how we got here. I doubt whether any of us would care to contest an election in which the voters for our opponent qualified for a £10,000 bonus.

I fully understand why those miners voted for extra redundancy money. The only thing about which they were being consulted was whether their pit would close this year or next. It is a grotesque travesty of the language to say that any of them have taken voluntary redundancy. Let us at least give them the dignity of recognising what the Government forced on them—compulsory redundancy in all but name.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman make it clear how he intends to pay to keep pits open? Does he intend to keep all 31 pits open? Does he recollect that previous Labour Governments closed 277 pits without any of the generous redundancy payments that this Government have offered?

Mr. Cook: That Labour Government did not make one miner compulsorily redundant. That Labour Government saw an increase in the amount of coal going into electricity generation. I do not take any particular kudos for that Labour Government, as it was like every Government since the war except this one. This is the first Government to see a reduction in the amount of coal for electricity generation. That is why we have a crisis in our coal industry. The hon. Gentleman helpfully brings me on to the reason for the closure of those pits, and the reason why the other 10 are still at risk. It has nothing to do with miners wanting to go.

Neither the White Paper nor the three months since it was published have produced a contract for one extra bag of coal from those pits. That is why they are closing. It will not do for Ministers to say that it is nothing to do with them, that it is not their fault, it is the fault of British Coal for not selling the coal, or the fault of the generators for not buying the coal, or, as the Minister appeared to suggest this morning, the fault of Michael Fish because it has been too warm for the past three months to sell the coal.

It will not do, because it was their idea. It was they who came up with the lifeline of a subsidy to find a bigger market. It was they who let the press believe that that would save 12 pits. Now that it is not working, it is they who, for just once in their ministerial careers, must accept responsibility for it not working. We warned them that it would not work. It would not work because the problem for coal is not its price. One cannot sell coal at any price in a market that has been specially rigged to keep it out.

The Minister for Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cook: The Minister may shake his head, but I address my point to him. If there is one thing for which I am grateful to him and his colleagues in the Cabinet, it is that in the past three months they have proved our case about the rigged market. They set out to test the market. The result of that test is already in: two pits have failed it. The result of that test confirms that we are dealing with a rigged market. Let us review the evidence.

Since March, British Coal has relied on the subsidy to offer extra coal for sale to generators at a sharply reduced price. The price is supposed to be a commercial secret, but since no one is buying it, let us give it some more advertising space. The price at which it is offering coal is 93p per gigajoule. That is 40 per cent. below the base price in the contract. At that price, generators could produce electricity at a penny-ha'penny per kilowatt hour. That is cheaper than they can produce electricity from the new gas-fired stations, at tuppence per kilowatt hour.

It is cheaper than they can buy electricity from France at threepence ha'penny per kilowatt hour. It is cheaper than they can buy electricity from nuclear power stations, at almost 4p per kWh hour. If ever more proof were needed that we are dealing with a market rigged against coal, what better proof could there be than that the generators will not buy it even when it would give them cheaper electricity?

The largest consumer of electricity in Britain is ICI. It is not a dangerous, leftist front, even if it makes donations to the Tory party. Its power services manager has prepared a comparison which shows how ICI has been disadvantaged by the generators' refusal to buy that cheap, subsidised coal. I shall read it in full, as it is worth sharing with the House:

"Utilising internationally priced coal . . . Fiddler's Ferry power-station, 5 miles from ICI in Runcorn,"

is capable of generating electricity

"in the range of £10-15/vcMWh.

For a high proportion of the time, this power station"—a coal-fired power station—

"and others like it are underloaded, yet new gas-fired power-stations which require an income of £25-30/MWh are being built and prosper within the market. Generation costs are therefore higher than necessary."

He ends by saying:

"We invite a rationalisation of this economic behaviour."

The question that the Secretary of State must answer is this: how can he rationalise that perverse outcome? While he is at it, can he explain why the Government are still approving more gas power stations? Last month, his colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry approved a new gas power station at King's Lynn. It is an interesting case, because the King's Lynn power station will be wholly owned by the local electricity company. All profits from its sales will go to Eastern Electricity.

I invite the House to speculate on what will happen once that power station, approved by this Government, is up and running. Will Eastern Electricity play the market? Will it whoop with delight when it discovers that a coal-fired power station could give its consumers cheaper electricity than the one that it has just built? If Ministers are so wet behind the ears as to believe that that will happen, they should have taken not the money from Octav Botnar but lessons in how markets work in the real world.

Eastern Electricity will fix its purchasing so that it will take all the output that can be produced by that station, and to ensure that that is what will happen it will do what every other electricity company has done: it will give the new power station a 15-year contract, which guarantees that it will take all the electricity that the power station can produce.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): It is called competition.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend takes my punchline. I have marked him down and will bear it in mind against him.

The Government tell us that this is widening competition. It is not widening competition but closing down competition. Nobody else can compete, whatever their price, for the share of the market that those contracts

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guarantee the new gas-powered stations. In the next three years, one third of the entire electricity market will be sewn up in these sweetheart deals.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): In view of what the hon. Gentleman said about Fiddler's Ferry power station, will he tell the House whether he and his party are for or against the construction of the Connah's Quay power station?

Mr. Cook: I remind the hon. Gentleman—it is fresh in my mind because I re-read my speech last night—that he made the same request in my last speech. I have to give him the same answer, and it is straightforward: Labour sees no objection whatsoever to the Connah's Quay project, because it is proposed to use sour gas, which cannot be used to heat homes direct and cannot be used in ovens. Our objection is to sweet gas—a premium fuel—being turned into baseload electricity with the loss of half its calorific value. That is not only bad for coal mines but is a daft energy strategy. I hope that the hon. Member for Clwyd North, West (Mr. Richards) is capable of remembering that for the time when we debate coal again in the autumn.

That is why the Select Committee recommended that we should stop handing out licences to every new gas station and that we look at downrating electricity stations to meet peak demand, not running them flat out to meet baseload. The Government totally ignored those recommendations.

There is one other aspect of the rigged market on which I want to bring the House up to date—the interconnector with France. In the White Paper, Ministers welcome changes in the contract with France, which from April "will ensure that exports will occur"—
that is to say, exports of electricity from Britain to France. It is paragraph 7.106 if the Minister wants to look it up.

I checked last week with the National Grid Company on what exports have occurred since that statement that the changes will ensure that exports will occur. In April, Britain exported to France zero electricity. In May, Britain exported to France zero electricity. In June, Britain exported to France zero electricity. There was a change—I would not wish to deny to the House that since the White Paper there has been some change in our relationship with the French interconnector. The change was that, in each of those months, imports of French electricity were up on the same month one year ago.

I remind the House that we are paying more for the electricity from the French interconnector than we would for electricity from coal—from the pits that we are shutting down. I will happily give way to any Conservative Member who is capable of believing for one minute that France would dream of importing electricity from a foreign source at a higher price and at a cost of shutting 31 French pits. I am not surprised that there are no takers, because we all know that there is not the remotest prospect of the French paying over the odds for an import that will damage their domestic industry, which is precisely what we are doing.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): As in so many areas, the hon. Gentleman does not seem to have understood the Select Committee report, if he has read it. The report clearly states that most of our electricity companies purchase French electricity because it is cheaper for the company. Although the distortions of the nuclear levy might ultimately make it more expensive, for the companies it is cheaper.

Is he saying that companies should deliberately buy more expensive electricity rather than take what is cheap and on offer? Does he accept that some electricity companies, such as Yorkshire, are buying less energy from the interconnected? Indeed, Yorkshire is not buying any French electricity this year, compared with last.

Mr. Cook: The net effect is an increase. In one sense, I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention, because it takes me on to my next point. He is absolutely right. The reason why the electricity companies find it profitable to pay more to import French electricity is because——

Dr. Hampson: They pay less but the nonsense of the levy makes it ultimately more costly.

Mr. Cook: They claim it back. We are daft enough to pay them the nuclear subsidy on all electricity from France. Since March, the Government have not paid a penny in the subsidy that they promised to British coal mines, but they have paid millions of pounds to subsidise electricity imports from France. I remind the hon. Gentleman, who seems to have forgotten it, that recommendation (7) of his own Select Committee was:

"Electricity supplied from France should cease to be non-leviable. EdF's ability to negotiate contracts to supply-baseload . . . should be made conditional on UK generators having non-discriminatory access"

through the French network. Again, those recommendations were ignored by Ministers.

Dr. Hampson *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cook: That is what the hon. Member recommended to his Government.

There is a contradiction here. Ministers have consistently rejected all the recommendations of the Select Committee to challenge the rigged market. Ministers tell us that they accepted the recommendation of the Select Committee. What they mean—I have listened carefully to what they say—is that they accepted the recommendation of a subsidy. But I again have to say that that was not what the Select Committee recommended.

Before the Secretary of State tries to pull that one on the House, let us be quite clear what the Select Committee recommended. Yes, it recommended a subsidy of 16 million tonnes for electricity generation, but it did so with the parallel recommendation that there should be a requirement on the generators in return to contract for 21 million tonnes of additional coal. What the Government did was to offer generators the subsidy without making them give a commitment to buy any extra coal.

Instead of buying that extra coal, the generators are running down coal stocks at power stations. I have two observations to make about those coal stocks. First, I would have more sympathy with the generators' claim that they have more coal in stock than they need if they had not been so busy importing coal for the past five years. According to their own calculations and their own logic, those imports must now be a mistake. If they do not need all those coal stocks at the power stations, they did not need all the imports that have added to our balance of trade deficit, thus increasing pressure on manufacturing industry to achieve more exports to pay for the coal that they did not need.

My second observation is addressed more to the Government than to the generators. In the three months since we last debated the issue, Lord Ridley has passed on, but I debated against him often enough to know that he would not want his role to go without recognition just because he is not here to listen. It was Lord Ridley, after all, who—15 years ago—wrote the strategy that the Government have followed so faithfully. He composed a paper before the Government came to power, explaining how a Conservative Government could run down the coal industry and weaken its power. I looked at it again this morning, and noted that its first recommendation was for the Conservative Government to

"build up maximum coal stocks, particularly at the power stations".

That is why, throughout the Government's term of office, we have had large coal stocks. The aim was to prevent miners from stopping work; now there is a danger that those same stocks will be used to put them out of work for good. That is why the Select Committee recommended that the generators should be required to hold not less than 20 million tonnes of coal—double the level at which they are apparently aiming.

The White Paper, for once, did not ignore that recommendation. In paragraph 13.23, Ministers committed themselves to having talks with the generators about stocks

"as a matter of urgency".

May I ask the Secretary of State what happened to those stocks? What is his definition of urgency? Why are the generators behaving as though the White Paper had said nothing about the level of stocks? When the generators have run down the stocks, there will be no point in turning around and asking Britain's coal mines to increase output; by that time the mines will be closed. They will have been filled in and flooded—and not just the 12 that the White Paper claimed to have saved.

The House must now face up to the gravity of the crisis in the coal industry. Between them, the pits not included among the 12 are already producing more than 30 million tonnes. That is all that the generators will buy from next year onwards. On present markets, not only will all those 12 pits go by March; so will some of the others that have yet to figure on any closure list. That will be a tragedy for the surrounding communities—communities that were built because a pit was there; communities that will have no work when the pit is gone. It will also be a tragedy for the nation, because with those pits will go our access to our coal reserves.

Silverdale has figured in the press as one of the pits that may be next for closure. The shaft and tunnels at Silverdale give access to 30 years' supply of coal. No one else in the world would be filling in shafts that give access to such an immense national resource.

The other week, the Chancellor of the Exchequer shared with us his insight into the economics of the coal industry, observing:

"Coal is a rather old-fashioned way of generating electricity."

I concede that it is rather old-fashioned in the Chancellor's constituency, where his Government have just closed the last pit; but if it is so old-fashioned, why have the last two dozen power stations ordered in the United States been coal-fired? Why does the United States expect coal consumption to rise by one fifth in the next decade? It should not be difficult for Conservative Members to obtain the United States coal figures: they need only ask that notable donor to the Tory party, Lord Hanson, who owns most of the pits. He may not take kindly to the news that the party into which he has poured so much money is describing his operations in America as old-fashioned.

Not only have we the largest coal reserves in Europe; as Conservative Members want to talk about the cost of production, let me tell them that we have the most efficient coal mines in Europe. We are busy closing them down, while other Governments are working hard to keep open the least efficient pits in Europe. The case for saving Britain's pits is not based on nostalgia for the past; the case for saving our coal industry is based on their success in the present.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): What percentage of the coal that will be burnt in the new coal-fired power stations in America has come from opencast mines?

Mr. Cook: A number of mines in America are not as deep as ours, but they are not opencast mines by any stretch of the imagination. *[Interruption.]* Pearson and Hanson, which owns them, runs deep mines, but they are not as deep as ours. Pearson is a wholly owned subsidiary of Hanson. *[Interruption.]* I hear an hon. Member ask where else in Europe Governments are seeking to keep pits open. Germany is now providing its coal industry with three times the amount that our Government have contributed to the British industry.

America has opencast and deep mines, as has Britain. It is for that very reason that the majority have been closed. If the hon. Member for Colne Valley wishes to make a case on behalf of opencast, he must consider the point that I have been making throughout my speech about the market for coal. If the current position continues, opencast as well as deep mining in Britain will be in trouble.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The hon. Gentleman referred to Germany. Does he concede that, according to the most recent figures available to us, in 1991 the German coal industry received £9 billion—pounds, not ecu—of authorised state aid through the European Commission? Does he accept that we should investigate the imbalance vis-a-vis the British coal industry?

Mr. Cook: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on getting in a pro-coal and an anti-European point simultaneously. I agree with the thrust of his remarks, which is essentially correct. If we take the European perspective—although I suspect that the hon. Gentleman may not wish to do so—it is insane that in Europe we are closing down the most efficient pits, which produce the cheapest coal, while other Governments are providing substantial subsidies. The German Government, supported by the Common Market, are doing so to keep open pits that produce coal at three times the price at which it is produced in Britain.

Dr. Hampson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman once.

As I have said, the case for Britain's pits is not based on a nostalgic affection for the past; the case for saving our coal industry is based on their present success. Ironically, only last week British Coal issued a press release showing

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that productivity had risen by a quarter in the past year, and that, in the past eight years output per man had arisen by 300 per cent.

If any other industry had shown such spectacular advances, Ministers would have showered it with Queen's awards; they would be queuing for photo-opportunities with the success story. The Prime Minister would be memorising statistics in front of a mirror, in order to reel them off at Question Time. Instead, because it is the coal industry, this industry is treated with vindictive vandalism by Ministers who are determined to prove that they were right all along when they told us that 31 pits would have to close.

The White Paper was not about how to keep miners' jobs; it was about how to keep their own jobs while ending the miners' jobs. The White Paper was always a fraud and, since the two closures, it can be seen to be a fraud. It must be seen to be a fraud even by the Conservative Back Benchers who were taken in by it last March. I forgive them for being taken in at the time; I am prepared to accept that they voted in good faith, thinking that they would save 12 pits, but they now know that they did not. We shall not forgive them—and the miners will not forgive them—if they let themselves be taken in again.

I give Conservative Members this warning: if the Government get away with it tonight, more of the 12 pits will close before the House returns from the summer recess. If Conservative Members want to save those pits, they must do it tonight. They will not get a £10,000 bonus if they vote with us tonight—that is a cynical ploy used by the Government—but they will stop more pit closures, halt the destruction of more coalfield communities and prevent the loss of more coal reserves. That is what we shall vote for tonight; it is what the nation wants the House to vote for tonight, and it is what Conservative Members should join us in voting for.

5 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Hunt): I beg to move, to leave out from 'House' to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'welcomes the Government's acceptance of the principal recommendations of the Report by the Trade and Industry Committee "British Energy Policy and the Market for Coal" (HC 237), and in particular the offer of a transitional subsidy for additional sales of United Kingdom underground coal for electricity generation, the wide ranging package of measures to assist the regeneration of coal field areas, the commitment by British Coal that they will offer to the private sector pits which they do not themselves wish to keep in production, and the Government's intention to bring forward as rapidly as possible the legislation necessary to privatise British Coal.'.

The amendment stands in the name of several of my right hon. Friends, including the President of the Board of Trade. I am sure that I speak for all hon. Members when I say how pleased we are that he has been able to return home and that we wish him a speedy recovery to full health.

I have participated in many coal debates in the past 10 years, for several years as the Minister with responsibility for coal, then as Secretary of State for Wales and now as Secretary of State for Employment. I hope that the many hon. Members who have participated in the various debates will accept that there is no monopoly of concern for the coal industry from one party rather than another. If Labour Members reflect for a moment and read the reports of the many debates in *Hansard*, they will find that concern for the coal industry and its employees could be found in all parties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) scored a magnificent try against the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) when he pointed out that, under a period of Labour Government, 277 pits had closed. The hon. Gentleman immediately leapt to a conclusion; *Hansard* will show that he used statistics relating to the last period of the Labour Government, but he made a fatal error. My hon. Friend was, of course, referring to the period of Labour government between 1964 and 1970. During that period, 277 pits closed. In 1967, just about 60 pits closed.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: The hon.Gentleman may not like the facts, but I am going to give them to the House.

Under that period of Labour government, in one year, 60 pits closed and, in the following year, just under 60 pits closed, so just over 120 pits closed within two years. If my right hon. and hon. Friends refer to *Hansard* of that time, they will read the barrage of criticism from all parties against the then Labour Government because 185,000 coal industry employees lost their jobs in their local collieries.

Mr. Campbell *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I shall give way in a moment.

As I said, 185,000 jobs were lost in the collieries, and there were no generous redundancy schemes then. The amount of money received by someone leaving the coal industry at that time was pretty mean, and Labour Members said so at the time. There was no enterprise company charged with bringing new life to coalfield communities,and there was no opportunity for employees leaving the coal industry to find another job or another chance. When the hon. Member for Livingston seeks to put on one side that period of Labour Government, he does himself and his party an injustice. The concern expressed at that time was expressed by all parties.

The hon. Member for Livingston is right to recall that there were substantial further pit closures in the 1970s under a Labour Government. I think that by 1979 the number had grown to 353. We have to ask why that happened.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Because they were all worn out.

Mr. Hunt: No, not because they were all worn out. Of course, that was true in some cases, but——

Mr. Ronnie Campbell *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I shall not let a rather silly comment pass—I am going to deal with it. I ask you to note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) is trying to change the subject quickly, but I shall not let the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) get away with it. I shall give way, but I am going to deal with the point raised. *[Interruption.]* Labour Front-Bench Members should not get excited.

Mr. Ashton *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I shall deal with the sedentary comment made by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw who can then

respond. The pits were not closed because they were all worn out. He has only to read the statements made at the time by Labour Ministers: the pits were closed because there was no market for their coal. He has to ask himself why. It was because the domestic market contracted dramatically; people stopped burning coal in their homes and started burning what the hon. Member for Livingston referred to as the sweet premium fuel called gas. He forgot to mention, however, that its calorific value is much higher than that of coal.

If the hon. Member for Bassetlaw reads *Hansard*, he will find statements made by Labour Ministers in which they said that, sadly, there was no market for the coal and it would therefore be wrong to keep the pits open, even though there were still a number of substantial recoverable reserves.

Mr. Ashton: I came to the House a year or two before the Minister. I arrived in 1968 in a by-election, during a pit closure in my constituency. Unemployment was running at 1 per cent. and miners who wanted to move to another pit were found jobs—they were not forced into redundancy. One of the reasons for the closure, which the Secretary of State has not mentioned, was the price of oil. It was at rock bottom until the war between the Arabs and the Israelis in 1973, which caused it to rocket. The price trebled around the world and, incidentally, it also caused inflation to treble, a problem for which he has always blamed the Labour Government. Every miner who wanted a job at another pit was moved. Thousands moved to my constituency where there are still three profitable pits. The Secretary of State offers only half-truths, like all solicitors and cheapjack lawyers who do not have a brief.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman offers a lot of bluster but very few facts, as befits an occasional columnist for a newspaper—I shall not embarrass him by saying which newspaper. He should reflect on what he said. I will not embarrass Opposition Members by asking how many of them burn coal in their own homes—*[Interruption.]* I suppose that the record will not show that there was a small smattering of individuals.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hunt: I will give way in a moment.

The point that I was making stands. There was a savage contraction in the domestic market for coal.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: I am not surprised that the Government want to close the 12 pits. A few years ago, the Secretary of State was the Minister responsible for coal and at that time I worked in Bates colliery. We went through the colliery review procedure, which was fairly new at the time, and Bates colliery won. The right hon. Gentleman was the Minister responsible for coal and that pit still shut. I was a miner at that pit and I know all about it. There were still 29 million tonnes of coal in that pit and it could still be working today.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman will recall that British Coal spent some time considering the report of the independent——

Mr. Ronnie Campbell *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that British Coal spent some time considering the report and, in the end, it did not accept the view that the hon. Gentleman has just put forward.

The hon. Member for Blyth Valley has just made a point that I made earlier. Pits closed when they still contained a substantial amount of coal because the market changed. I examined the case for Bates colliery very carefully at the time. I was convinced that British Coal had made the right decision. However, it was a matter for British Coal to determine.

Mr. Riddick: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hunt: Yes, in just a moment.

The issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East should not be shrugged aside easily. From time to time, coal must face substantial changes in the energy market.

Mr. Riddick: A few moments ago, my right hon. Friend challenged Opposition Members to say how many of them burnt coal in their own homes. Is he aware that my local Labour-controlled council—Kirklees council—has, over the past year, forced hundreds, if not thousands, of my constituents to stop burning coal by imposing unnecessary smokeless zones on the rural parts of my constituency, despite the fact that emission figures of smoke and sulphur dioxide in those areas fall within the guidelines set by the Department of the Environment and the European Community? Is that not plain Labour hypocrisy?

Mr. Hunt *rose*——

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you draw the attention of Conservative Members to Government legislation regarding smoke control zones?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) has raised a very important point. I wonder how many Opposition Members have been councillors in local authorities that have decided not to install coal-fired units in local accommodation. I could quote many examples of that. However, I simply raise that matter to refute the point made by the hon. Member for Livingston.

I want now to consider what happens today.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North) *rose*——

Mr. Barron *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I should give way to the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron).

Mr. Barron: I should like to take the Secretary of State back to the point about pit closures. Will he name any Conservative or Labour Government who have ever closed coal mines in this country for foreign coal imports?

Mr. Hunt: There has always been a level of imports from other countries and that has been the case under all Governments—*[Interruption.]* I am answering the point raised by the hon. Member for Rother Valley. I have always seen a level of coal imports——

Mr. Barron: What about power stations?

Mr. Hunt: I have been present in many coal debates when Opposition Members have urged the Government to put a cap on the level of imports as if protectionism was the answer for the coal industry. I reject that argument. The coal industry now faces a substantial change in the energy market and that must be faced with reality instead of trying to introduce open-ended subsidies, which the Select Committee on Trade and Industry did not suggest but which was implicit in the comments of the hon. Member for Livingston.

Mr. John Evans: The Secretary of State has referred to the difficult period in the 1960s and 1970s when quite a number of collieries closed. The Secretary of State represents a north-west constituency and he will acknowledge that a substantial number of small collieries in St. Helens and Wigan closed for two major reasons. The first was because they were reaching the point of exhaustion and the second was that many of their reserves could be exploited from a brand new big colliery called Parkside.

Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the vast difference between that period and the closure of Parkside is that Parkside has about 30 million tonnes of coal reserves which will now be lost to the nation and will remain in the ground for ever?

Mr. Hunt: I will deal with that point by referring back to the point made by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw, who said that the pits closed because they were worn out. The answer is not as simple as that. Some pits were exhausted while some were economically exhausted. Some could be accessed from other shafts in other mines. I am aware of all that. Equally, some pits had a substantial amount of coal which could still have been mined. However, the market, in the phrase used by a Labour Minister at the time, had collapsed.

I am trying to explain how I believe coal has a future. However, it will not have such a future if we go down the route advocated by some Opposition Members of trying to introduce an open-ended subsidy and of trying to keep alive uneconomic pits.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunt: I will give way in a moment, but I want to make this point because it is very important.

The hon. Member for Livingston said that output per man shift in the past few years has increased substantially. That is true. Since 1979, this Government have invested a substantial amount of money in support of the coal industry. The figure now totals £18,000 million. In the last financial year, that support has enabled British Coal to have a fixed capital programme of more than £180 million. There will be a similar figure in this financial year. It is good that the industry has responded by improving its output per man shift.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I will indicate when I am ready to accept interventions, which will be in just a moment after I have made my next point.

The hon. Member for Livingston should consider what happened during the period of the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979 to which he thought my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East was referring. Listening to the Labour party, one would think that Labour has a monopoly of concern for improving output per man shift. However, I will remind the House of the figures.

In 1974, when the Labour Government took office, output per man shift was 2·94 tonnes. What was the output per man shift by 1979? Having listened to the hon. Member for Livingston, one would have thought that output per man shift had increased substantially by 1979. In fact, it had declined from 2·94 tonnes to 2·89 tonnes.

In the period that I have referred to, there was half a decade of inaction in respect of the support being given to coal and in respect of the response of those who worked in the industry. Opposition Members should reflect on that for a moment before they quote the nonsensical figures that they have put forward from time to time—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Livingston cannot dispute the figures for output per man shift. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bassetlaw keeps shouting, "Nonsense". He thinks that he has made a point. He has not made a point at all, because output per man shift has been calculated on the same basis over the period that I am talking about, and, of course, it relates production to the number of people in the industry.

Let me deliver the figures again. In 1974, it was 2·94 tonnes per man shift, and in 1979, it was 2·89 tonnes.

Mr. Ashton: What was the total tonnage?

Mr. Hunt: I am responding to the points raised by the hon. Member for Livingston. That is what debating is all about, even if the hon. Member for Bassetlaw does not understand it. Output per man shift was announced by British Coal just a short time ago as having reached 8·5 tonnes per man shift.

Mr. Ashton: What is the total tonnage?

Mr. Hunt: That is a creditable achievement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I keep hearing a sedentary intervention from the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), "What is the total tonnage?" If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, he should rise in his place and see whether the Secretary of State will give way; otherwise he should stay quiet.

Mr. Hunt: I am going to answer the hon. Gentleman. Do not let me miss an opportunity to put the hon. Gentleman right.

I now quote from the National Coal Board, as it then was, summary of statistics. I can now confirm that all undergound output per man shift in 1974 was 2·94 tonnes and in 1979 it was 2·89 tonnes. What about the output? National Coal Board mines output in 1974 was 116·9 million tonnes, and in 1979 it was 109 million tonnes.

Mr. Ashton *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman should heed your words, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is about time he stopped his nonsensical sedentary interventions. I have been seeking for the past few minutes to deal with the points that were raised by the hon. Member for Livingston. The speech of the hon. Member for Livingston read rather like the curriculum vitae for George Orwell's Minister of Truth. I have never heard such a rewrite of history.

Mr. Ashton: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You rose to your feet and criticised me—probably quite

rightly—for making interventions from a sedentary position. The Minister will not give way, although he keeps challenging me. What is the total tonnage for this year and what is the forecast for next year?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is not being fair to anybody—either myself or the Minister. I heard him ask from a sedentary position, "What was the total tonnage output?" I heard an answer given. Whether or not the hon. Gentleman likes the answer is another matter, but the Secretary of State gave way.

Mr. Hunt: We go from bad to worse with the hon. Gentleman. We are, of course, dealing with tonnages which are well known to the House, and up-to-date figures are set out not only in the energy review but in the Select Committee's report.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: Just one moment. I was dealing properly with the hon. Gentleman's sedentary intervention. I do not want to occupy the House any more with his sedentary interventions, but I was giving the output per man shift figures for 1974 and 1979, and his sedentary intervention was, "What was the total output?" I have now given the total output figures for 1974 and 1979, and he is still not satisfied, but, of course, those figures do not prove his point.

The point that I was making is that we should concern ourselves in this debate—I hope that hon. Members will address the real issues, and the real issue which the hon. Member for Livingston did not address—*[Interruption.]* I would be obliged if Opposition Members did not criticise their hon. Friend so much by saying that he has not dealt with the issues. I am dealing with issues to refute the hon. Gentleman's point.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: Just one moment. As we look forward to the future. let us consider the consequences of the second substantial shift in the marketplace for coal that is now used for electricity generation, just as we considered the first substantial shift in the marketplace away from coal being used in the——

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hardy: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hunt: I shall give way again in a moment.

The point that I am making is that we have to address the substantial shift in the market for domestic coal, just as we did between 1964 and 1970; now, we look at the shift in the market for coal for electricity generation.

The Government carefully read the report of the Trade and Industry Select Committee and accepted its main thrust. Specifically, if Opposition Members will recall, we accepted the main recommendation and offered a temporary and declining subsidy for additional sales of British deep-mined coal. We have asked the industry to provide us with firm evidence of the additional sales that it believes that it can secure and the amount of subsidy that it will require.

If hon. Members look at the Order Paper, they will see that, immediately following this debate, there is a motion on financial assistance to industry, which

"authorises the Secretary of State to pay, or undertake to pay, by way of financial assistance . . . sums exceeding £10 million in total but not exceeding £120 millon in total to support sales of coal produced from underground mines in the United Kingdom."

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I shall give way later.

That motion, of course, releases the necessary funds to keep the commitment that was made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. I shall put the record straight again and report exactly what my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade said in his statement on the coal industry on 25 March. He said:

"I cannot guarantee that supplementary sales will be achieved by British Coal."

Later, he said:

"Finally, let me remind the House of what I said earlier. There can be no guarantees. The market for coal is complex and unpredictable. Even among the experts, opinions differ. I have done all that I reasonably could, consistent with economic realities and legal constraints, to increase the opportunities for British Coal.

It is now for British Coal to make the most of these opportunities. The outcome will be settled, as it should be, in the marketplace. Our policies will give the industry every chance of strengthening its position and achieving future success. It is now up to the people who work in the industry to build on this."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 1230-31.]

I had to quote that statement because the hon. Member for Livingston did not quote *Hansard*. He confined himself to quoting newspapers. When we quote newspapers, we deny the existence of debates and statements in the House. Nothing could have been clearer than my right hon. Friend's point, and I have quoted it in order to put the record straight.

Mr. Hardy: Is it not incredible that, a few moments ago, the Secretary of State boasted about the vast amount of public money that the Government invested in the coal industry and yet the same Government have been party to rigging the market to prevent the coal industry from taking advantage of the most astonishing increases in productivity to which the right hon. Gentleman might refer?

Is the Secretary of State aware that, a few weeks ago, before the President of the Board of Trade was taken ill —one hopes that he will be quickly back to the House to maintain the debate—his hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) and I were present at a meeting at which the President of the Board of Trade said, "Isn't it a pity that the enormous increase in productivity in the mining industry did not take place earlier?"

The previous chairman of the board had to get to his feet to contradict the President of the Board's point, because that increase in productivity has been taking place almost consistently for the past four or five years. Having achieved record productivity, unmatched in the rest of British industry, is it wise for the Government to write off their investment in mining communities as they are doing?

Mr. Hunt: I very much welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments about my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. I am grateful to him for ensuring that they were made by the Opposition. So far as the allegedly rigged market for energy is concerned—*[Interruption.]* All right —so far as the rigged market for energy is concerned, it is rigged in favour of coal because——

Mr. Stevenson *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: Let me answer the point.

As the President of the Board of Trade pointed out, there is a subsidy of about £1 billion a year, which goes directly to ensuring that the market is weighted in favour of coal. We are now dealing with a market that is becoming freer, and decisions are being made by energy generators in the context of that freer market.

If Labour Members re-examine the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, they will see that several recommendations have been broadly accepted by the Government. The Government have accepted the first recommendation relating to the reform of working practices. They have accepted the broad thrust of recommendations Nos. 14, 15, 16 and 17 relating to the subsidy for additional sales of coal and recommendations Nos. 27, 28 and 29 relating to the establishment of an independent licensing authority. The White Paper in paragraphs 30 and 31 proposes extra funding for the support of clean coal technology. In the White Paper, the Government have broadly accepted paragraph 32 relating to the annual report of the energy commission and the energy advisory panel.

As I said previously, the future of the coal industry has been debated in a way in which such matters should be debated—with informed reports from Select Committees. However, the Government are not bound to accept all of the recommendations. For example, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) pointed out earlier, it would be illegal to accept recommendation No. 7.

Recommendation No. 11 relates to the reduction in output from opencast mining. I simply ask those Labour Members who are sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union and who have made it clear that they do not want to see any reduction in jobs in the opencast coal industry and the nuclear industry to reflect for a moment. Trade unions throughout the country have made it clear that they do not want to see any reduction in jobs in the oil and gas industry.

Dr. Hampson: My right hon. Friend will appreciate that the Select Committee tried to strike what we called a "balanced energy policy". In a way, that "balanced energy policy" could be interchanged with what the Leader of the Opposition called an "integrated energy policy" in a debate in December 1975. I remind my right hon. Friend that the Leader of the Opposition said that the Labour Government had

"an effective policy for the development of oil and gas resources but a policy for our coal industry and also for our nuclear industry."

His balance was interesting—he did not put the coal industry first. He said:

"This is a policy of which we should be proud".—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1975; Vol. 902, c. 164.]

That sort of balance and integration was at the heart of the Select Committee's proposals.

Mr. Hunt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for putting the record straight.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): First, I declare that I am sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union. I also have a local interest in opencast mining. Many of us are fearful of, and opposed to, the extension of opencast mining on green belt land and land that is contaminated by previous workings. Some of us want to see a more strenuous approach taken by the Secretary of State and his colleagues, especially with regard to mineral planning guidelines, so that local authorities and local communities can make their own decisions—and not be pressed by Whitehall into accepting the national needs as perceived by Ministers—and safeguard the environment at a time when British opencast miners submit their hideous opencast applications.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman criticised me previously for the length of my speech. I simply point out to Labour Members that I am prepared to give way, but they must accept that my speech will be much longer as a result—*[Interruption.]* I will deal with the point, although the shadow Secretary of State for Employment criticised me for making too long a speech in a previous debate after I had given way to 25 interventions. I believe that Ministers and Opposition spokesmen should give way and I now respond. However, in giving way, I hope that Labour Members will recognise that my speech will be longer as a result.

Mr. Robin Cook *rose*——

Mr. David Hunt: Let me deal with that point. I understand that the hon. Gentleman has already given considerable advocacy to the views of his constituents on environmental issues not only to the Minister for Energy but to the Secretary of State for the Environment. He will know that there are checks and balances in the system to ensure that environmental considerations are taken properly into account.

Mr. Cook: I think that my hon. Friends are concerned not about the length of the right hon. Gentleman's speech but about the fact that, in the 35 minutes that he has been speaking, he has not once addressed the crisis in the coal industry. If he maintains that the crisis is caused by a free and open market, which I think he referred to earlier, will he now address himself to the central point of our case, which is that British Coal cannot sell coal to the generators at a price that would produce electricity to the consumer at a cheaper price than from any other source?

Mr. Hunt: I have already said that we must deal with a dramatic contraction in the market for coal for electricity generation. To deal with the hon. Gentleman's specific point, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade made it clear to the House that he accepted the broad thrust of the Select Committee's recommendation that a subsidy should be provided to ensure that genuinely additional sales of coal for electricity generation could be provided by ensuring that the difference between world energy prices and the cost price was covered by such a subsidy.

Mr. Stevenson *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I shall deal with the point raised by the hon. Member for Livingston and then I shall give way.

The subsidy is there and available not only to British Coal but to the private sector to ensure that the private sector can take advantage of genuinely additional sales of coal to the electricity generators.

Mr. Robin Cook: The House is aware that the subsidy has been in place since March. The question I put to the Secretary of State is this: now that the subsidy is in place and the price of coal could provide cheaper electricity than any other source, and if it is a fair market, why will the

generators not buy it? If the Secretary of State will not answer my question, will he answer the question from ICI? Why is ICI being asked to pay twice the price for electricity that it would pay if the generators bought that coal?

Mr. Hunt: I remember another recommendation made by the Select Committee *[Interruption.]* This directly answers the point made by the hon. Gentleman. The Select Committee recommended that electricity generators should keep a minimum of 20 million tonnes at the power stations. At present, the figure is 30 million tonnes. That 30 million tonnes at the power stations obviously has an effect on the market. I have made it clear that the subsidy is there. Provided the House approves the subsequent motion on the Order Paper, the subsidy will be in place and the money will be available. It will then be for British Coal to ensure that it secures those additional contracts.

Mr. Cook: I am delighted that the Secretary of State referred to the same commitment that I referred to earlier —that is, that the generators should maintain stocks of not less than 20 million tonnes. Currently, the two generators propose to reduce their stocks to 10 million tonnes. May I take it from what he said that the Government will order the generators to maintain a level of 20 million tonnes, which will release additional markets?

Mr. Hunt: As far as the tonnages kept at the power stations are concerned, I understand from my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) that we are discussing with the electricity generators what the level should be. What I said is true: although the recommendation was 20 million tonnes, the amount at the generators today is 30 million tonnes.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): My right hon. Friend has referred to what the Government have offered to do to help British Coal to bring its price down in order to enter markets that would otherwise not be open to it. He has also mentioned that it is up to British Coal to find those markets and, in many ways, I agree with him. Does he accept, however, that it is very difficult for British Coal to find all the markets that it might want for generation if the generators are insistent on building new gas-fired power stations and will not offer coal-fired power stations for sale at a reasonable price?

Would not it help enormously to overcome the problem of finding markets for British Coal if the generators were reminded of their duopoly position and of the obligations they have? They should be encouraged to sell surplus coal-fired power stations at a realistic asset price rather than tfy to sell them at a price equivalent to the cost of building new high-technology power stations that those sold-off power stations would then have to compete against?

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend has made an important point that I will bring to the attention of the generators. I will also bring it to the attention of the Director General of Electricity Supply, because, although he is aware of the problem, my hon. Friend's point carries an important message for the industry.

British Coal has opportunities open to it. In the long term, its success will lie in its productivity being continually improved and its overheads reduced. I strongly believe that privatisation is urgently necessary for that industry not only because it will remove the constraints of public ownership but because privatisation will do even more to secure a proper future for our coal industry.

If the jobs of miners were preserved artificially, that would be done at the expense, immediately, of employees in other energy industries whether nuclear, gas or opencast.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): At the expense of gas.

Mr. Hunt: As my hon. Friend has said, it is a fact that every new gas-fired station will result in increasing job opportunities in that industry.

It is most important to offer real hope for the future. That will not be done by seeking to persuade miners that they have long-term employment prospects in an industry faced with a contracting market. They know that themselves. When they go down the pits, they know that most of those pits have a strictly limited life. [HON. MEMBERS: "Come on!"] Oh yes, they do. I have been underground in nearly 30 coal mines and I have seen some wretched conditions caused by narrow seams. I have seen coal produced with high chlorine, sulphur or ash content. I have seen limited seams that offer a limited life.

Surely it is far better to keep faith with those we care about in the coal industry by ensuring, now, that we provide jobs for the future by putting the necessary investment into those coal communities to provide additional jobs. My experience as Secretary of State for Wales has led me to the conclusion that one does not keep jobs in the Rhondda valley, for example, where once there were 50 coal mines, but now there are none, by artificially prolonging the life of exhausted pits. One provides jobs for the future by bringing in new industries and providing new high-tech opportunities.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): My right hon. Friend is speaking as though we had a free and open market in energy supplies, but he knows very well that that is not the case. He knows that the nuclear industry is guaranteed a market for every kilowatt hour that it produces and that the gas industry and Electricité de France have privileged access to energy markets, which are not available to coal.

Three months ago, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, to whose return to the House and full health we look forward at the earliest opportunity, gave an undertaking that he and the Government would work to widen the market for coal. That action, alone, can secure the future of the 12 so-called reprieved pits.

Can my right hon. Friend tell the House what specific steps the Government have taken in those intervening three months to underpin the market for coal? Have they reined in the French connector supplies and, given the prospect of the dash for gas, extended the market for our coal?

Mr. Hunt: A great deal of activity has taken place. It is the party of instant results that has ensured that we debate the subject today. I very much hope that we shall see an opportunity for not only British Coal but the private sector to secure genuine additional sales. We will, of course, continue to strive for that.

I hope that fair-minded Members will acknowledge that, when I was Minister with responsibility for coal, I did my best to secure additional markets for it. In the present

[Mr. Hunt]

market atmosphere, however, it is difficult to secure them, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) recognises that.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): The Secretary of State has referred to my constituency and I should tell him that it had, at one time, 63 coal mines, and not 50 as he said. He has suggested that he is closing coal mines on two grounds—first, because they have a finite life and, secondly, out of kindness, common humanity, because of their poor conditions. I presume that the right hon. Gentleman will extend that practice to the rest of the United Kingdom and give it the benefit of his humanity as well.

Will the right hon. Gentleman address the issue that is of vital concern to people in the industry, perhaps not those in south Wales, because most of the pits have closed, but certainly in the rest of the United Kingdom? It is no good talking about the finite life of a particular colliery or a particular coalfield when pits with hundreds of years of coal reserves left in them are being closed. If he is hell bent on closing those pits, will he provide some alternative work for the people in that industry, rather than simply deciding to close those pits because of the Government's dogma and their 10-year pursuit of the mining industry?

Mr. Hunt: I recall standing with the hon. Gentleman at Oakdale business park, where a great deal of money has been spent on restoring a derelict site—the old banana tip in Rhondda. I hope that that business park will result in many new jobs coming to the Rhondda valley.

The hon. Gentleman should remember, however, that we are dealing with the market for coal, and not any of the other matters that he sought to attribute to me. I hope that he will accept that Wales offers good examples of communities looking to the future. They are entitled to do so because of the substantial amounts of partnership money that is available through the private sector and the public sector working together. The announcement of £243 million for England and Wales represents such partnership money and is available to provide and secure job opportunities.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Get on with it.

Mr. Hunt: I am still answering the point raised by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers). I will come to a conclusion in a moment, but it is right to answer the points raised.

I should like to remind the hon. Member for Rhondda that I am proud of the fact that, together with Lord Walker and the then National Coal Board, I created an organisation called British Coal Enterprise Ltd. That organisation has just published its annual review of activities, the eighth such report, for 1992-93 and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will read it. It lists 87,500 job opportunities that have been created since 1984-85. I believe that that is a good result. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should not allow his hon. Friends on the Opposition Benches to belittle the work of British Coal Enterprise Ltd., which has done an excellent job. It will continue to have the full support of the Government.

Mr. Cash: I, too, pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for the work that he did in his previous capacity. Indeed, he and I worked very closely together in relation to the coal strike of 1984. I pay tribute to him also for his work in connection with British Coal Enterprise.

Does my hon. Friend agree that one of this country's main difficulties is the increasing level of public expenditure? Does he know that, in terms of central Government expenditure alone, the cost of closing the mine at Trentham, let alone the one at Silverdale, will be £85 million to £90 million in the first year and that that will be barely offset by the amount of money coming back?

Is my right hon. Friend aware of Conservatives' concern about monopolies? The lack of access, under a privatised regime, to the core contracts of mines is itself an offence against the principles that the party stands for. That is compounded by the lack of a level playing field in Europe. My right hon. Friend should understand that some of us who agree with him in respect of many issues take a very strong view about the way in which this whole matter has been dealt with, as it offends Conservative principles above all else.

Mr. Hunt: I want to see a level playing field in Europe. That is why I am very much in favour of the Maastricht treaty, which goes some way towards restoring that situation. My hon. Friend has done a very good job for his local colliery, but he will accept that it lost a considerable sum of money last year. Ultimately, it is for British Coal to determine the future of each colliery.

The future for coal depends on the market—in particular, the tonnages that can be sold to the generators. The Government cannot create an artificial market for coal without damaging many other jobs. Coal must compete with other energy sources. We cannot just pretend that nuclear energy, gas and oil do not exist.

What the Government can do is create the opportunity for additional sales. Following publication of the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, that is exactly what my right hon. Friend did. The subsidy that the Government have made available to British Coal—this is reflected in a later motion on today's Order Paper—will help the company to match world prices for sales over and above their core contracts with the generators. With that subsidy, and with increased productivity, coal has a future. That future will be secured better in the private sector, and the Government will bring forward early legislation on privatisation.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): If that is the case, why is the Aberthaw contract of the Tower colliery, in which there has been considerable investment, and which is one of the last 20 supposed to be safe, being cut by 200,000 tonnes a year? Why has the right hon. Gentleman said nothing about the way in which management—Mr. Neil Clarke and the chairman of the coal board—have backed out of efforts to find new markets and have been absolutely silent on the question of the fight for greater markets for coal? Is there any collusion between the Government and the chairman of the coal board to facilitate a management buy-out?

Mr. Hunt: I gave way to the hon. Gentleman because I have had tremendouse respect for his background in the industry and, indeed, for his valiant fight for the true interests of miners, especially at a very difficult time for the industry. Obviously, decisions about individual collieries must be a matter for British Coal. The hon. Gentleman

will remember that when he was involved, in a full-time capacity, with the National Union of Mineworkers, that was always the basis of decisions.

No Government—Labour or Conservative—have ever tried to second-guess British Coal or the former National Coal Board about decisions on individual collieries. That is why I have tried, in this speech, to put forward the view that jobs in coal, as in any other industry, must depend on the industry's success.

The reality is that the market has changed. Industrial change cannot be avoided. It would be totally wrong to destroy jobs by imposing high electricity prices on industry. This country cannot, in a very competitive world, afford to have an economy preserved in the past. Our industries have to be efficient if they are to compete in the future. *[Interruption.]* One of my hon. Friends has shouted, "The chemical industry."

That is a very good example. Our chemical industry is one of the most successful in the world. If we are to ensure that it remains a world leader and that the jobs depending on it are retained, we cannot shackle it with high electricity prices.

With regard to those who are leaving the industry, the Government have provided opportunities—not only with the £243 million regeneration package or with the support for British Coal Enterprise, but also with the whole regeneration strategy that we have endorsed since 1979. This has been done before. It has been done at Shotton and Corby and in other communities affected by industrial change. Unemployment in Corby is now below the national average—something that not even the doubting Thomases of the Opposition would have forecast in 1979.

From this debate, there is a clear message to the coal communities. First, I strongly believe that coal has a future in a highly competitive energy market. The support that the Conservative Government are providing will secure that future. Privatisation will create a profitable industry able to survive on its own. Secondly, where pits close, new businesses and new jobs will be created to replace those that disappear. There is a future—a future for coal, and a future for coal communities. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to throw out the motion and support the

5.56 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I have heard many Energy Ministers speak, but I have never heard a more disgraceful speech than the one that has just been delivered by the right hon. Gentleman. Many thousands of people in the mining communities will have expected from the Secretary of State a serious account of the Government's energy policy. I contrast the right hon. Gentleman's speech with that of the Secretary of State for Defence, who, just after Question Time today, announced a defence review. The Secretary of State for Defence tried to measure our resources against our commitments.

Successive Energy Ministers, of whom I am proud to have been one, have been custodians of 300 years' worth of coal reserves—1,000 years, if the coal under the North sea is included—and of other energy sources, notably nuclear power, as well as gas. If the policy that the Secretary of State mentioned were applied to the farming industry, with its huge subsidies and set-aside grants, there would undoubtedly be an outcry from Conservative Members representing——

Mr. Eggar *rose*——

Mr. Benn: I want to make my point. The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to comment in his winding-up speech. This ought not to be treated as a student debate. Those who are listening are entitled to hear the arguments so that they may compare——

Mr. Eggar *rose*——

Mr. Benn: I do not intend to give way at the moment. People listening to the debate ought to be able to compare the arguments.

There has been reference to the period of the last Labour Government. I am very proud to have been the Minister who expanded the market by authorising the Drax B coal-fired power station; who agreed to and made possible the sinking of the Selby coalfield; who signed the agreement with France and said in the House that its purpose was to export British coal by wire to France—the argument that was put forward in the House when this was done; and who reached an agreement with the National Union of Mineworkers that, where pits were closed because of exhaustion, as sometimes happens, or where pits were closed because of dangerous working, as is sometimes necessary, or where pits were closed because there was access to the coal reserves of other shafts, the union would be offered a veto.

In truth, the NUM had a powerful argument—that very often there were reserves that the Coal Board did not want to explore. I offered the union an exploration grant of £500,000 for the purpose of establishing whether those reserves existed in every pit. I hope that the Minister will not try to cover up the brutality of his policy by making debating points about the previous Labour Government.

Mr. Eggar: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: I shall give way, but I am making a serious speech and do not want this to become a mere knockabout.

Mr. Eggar: The right hon. Gentleman said that he was proud to have signed the interconnector agreement with France and that he signed it because he thought that he was exporting coal by wire. Why, therefore, did he agree with the French terms, which meant that the French could export nuclear electricity to this country without giving us the ability to break that agreement legally?

Mr. Benn: The Minister is totally wrong. The interconnector was a physical connector, and the contract with the French was signed subsequently. The Minister's assertion is like saying that if one orders a ship, one must have ordered it to import goods from Japan. Ships are capable of carrying goods both ways. [HON. MEMBERS : "Oh, no."] It is the truth.

The Government should also mention the fact that, when the new Labour Government took office in early 1974, we discovered that the previous Prime Minister had told the Central Electricity Generating Board to import Australian coal. By the time the coal was delivered, it was so expensive that the British generating board sold it at a loss to Electricité de France because British coal was cheaper. Also in 1974, the generating board wanted some 22 nuclear power stations, which had all been set in hand by the previous Government. That number was cut back to two.

So much for the past. It would be a tragedy if anyone from a mining area listening to this debate thought that it

[Mr. Benn]

was just about what happened 20 years ago. The people listening to this debate want to know why pits are being closed and I submit to the House that it has nothing whatever to do with market forces.

Anyone who has been reading articles by Brian Crozier in *The Times* recently may know something about it. When the Government came to power in 1979, they were determined to break the National Union of Mineworkers and were prepared to sacrifice the British coal mining industry in order to do so. The Government precipitated the strike in 1984. I have forgotten which Minister said that, when there was some industrial action earlier, they were not ready for the strike.

Anyone who thinks that Arthur Scargill started the strike had better read what actually happened. Cortonwood had been given a long life; when the Government decided to close it, the local branch officials told the national officials, "We don't want you here." They wanted to decide it themselves and Arthur Scargill was told by the branch officials at Cortonwood that they had decided to resist that decision and appeal to the NUM for support.

The articles in *The Times* were not news to any of us. Brian Crozier, that paranoid nut who ran a private security service, managed to persuade the Prime Minister of the day that a miners' leader who wanted to keep the pit open was engaged in trying to bring about the Russian revolution in Britain. I do not know how that man could have been listened to by anyone. Hon. Members should read the book if they do not believe what he said. We know that David Hart was put in by the then Prime Minister to wreck the agreement between MacGregor and Scargill, which might conceivably have brought that strike to a more reasonable conclusion.

The then Prime Minister treated the miners as the enemy within. Like many other hon. Members, I spoke to many miners who had served in the second world war. They bitterly resented being described as "the enemy within" by a Prime Minister who had never even served in the armed forces in the second world war. From the beginning—from the "Ridley plan" through the strike—this has been a policy to destroy the National Union of Mineworkers. That is what it is about.

The Government should not try to tell us about their generous redundancy terms, because they bumped them up to get people to leave the industry. How much of the £18 billion support for the industry has been used to buy out men from the industry? How much of it has gone into redundancy arrangements? Some miners are told that if they do not accept redundancy pay, they will be put in low-paid jobs, and the redundancy pay that they receive six months later is then related to their low pay.

When they receive their redundancy pay, they want to use it to pay off their mortgages, but the Government will not let them do so. So much for a Government who believe in home ownership. Miners in my constituency who took up the offer to buy their own houses, believing that the industry was safe, thought that when they were made redundant they would at least have a roof over their heads. But when they went to the DSS, they were told that they could not spend their money. It is not real money but a coupon. It is a lump sum of unemployment pay and they will get nothing from the DSS until they have spent every penny of it. The Government are fraudulent in their presentation of the case.

When the pits are closed, what happens? The environment in the areas where the pits have been is stripped and opencast. Local authorities are not allowed to prevent the opencasting of areas because the Government have taken away local authorities' power to determine whether opencasting should take place.

I have the privilege to represent what was a mining area —the last pit in Chesterfield closed 10 days ago—and I know that what the Minister said was wholly untrue. Last October, when the Government were forced back by a great outcry of public opinion, they pretended that they would do something simply to buy the support of enough Conservative Members of Parliament to get the measures through. When what they saw as the hubbub had subsided, they decided to carry on with closing the pits.

It is a disgraceful story because this country is richly endowed with energy sources and needs a national energy policy. It is sensible for Governments to say, as they do in other policy areas, that they will conserve gas. The previous Labour Government said that we would not allow the oil companies in the North sea to flare the gas. My right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition and I provided for flaring controls to prevent gas being flared until the gas-gathering pipeline was available, so that gas would be available.

We did not even develop all the fields that we discovered. We had discovered a field in the Irish sea but held back its development. We could do so because it was in public ownership. We did not have to exploit everything that we discovered. We cut the nuclear component from the 22 power stations demanded by the CEGB to two. We developed the mining industry, with elaborate arrangements that involved consultation with all users of coal and electricity.

I will not say that this Government have betrayed the mining industry, because one must believe in something before being able to betray it. This is a search-and-destroy mission against the National Union of Mineworkers.

I shall finish with a political point. In 1984-85, the NUM warned people that if it went down, others would follow. Anyone looking back, 10 years later, will see that that is exactly what has happened to the health service and local government. The Government are determined to destroy not only the NUM but the trade union movement, because that is the main obstacle to what they are really about—enriching their friends and impoverishing those who create the nation's wealth. I saw figures the other day showing a 14 per cent. reduction in income among the poorest people and enormous profits made by those who have either acquired privatised assets or plan to do so.

Let us not forget that Mr. Hanson will be waiting to buy the pits that we are told are uneconomical. Such people pour money into the Tory party. *Business Age*, which is not a left-wing magazine, has produced a figure of £71 million as the amount donated to the Tory party. In return, donors have a chance to buy in those assets. Some Tory Ministers who were in the Cabinet that privatised particular industries sit on the boards of the companies for which they have legislated. This is a corrupt Government and people understand that they are about corruption. Ministers come along and make a lot of funny speeches without a note on the Dispatch Box. They advance a wicked argument, which does not carry any credibility.

The Government can close the pits, but they cannot abolish miners. Thousands and thousands of miners and miners' families in this country were proved right. Arthur Scargill was described as a scaremonger, but he was right. He was re-elected. He is more popular than the Prime Minister—everybody knows that. He is more popular because he told the truth; what he said in 1984-85 was true.

The Government, facing awful scandal—the profits made from the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, the Maxwell pensioners and Polly Peck—are trying to destroy the lives of highly skilled engineers who work underground with high technology and who created the wealth on which the first industrial revolution was built. One day, we will need those people again to rebuild the country on the basis of its energy resources.

6.12 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): In one sense, I agree with the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). Clearly, we face a serious state of affairs in our mining communities, and it is not confined to the pit areas. The mining equipment industry produces substantial exports of about, I believe, £400 million a year, so subsidiary industries are dependent on what happens in the coal industry.

We heard enormous passion in the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, but has he forgotten what has happened in the years since he was the Secretary of State for Energy? Do I have to go back to the White Paper that he produced? Do I have to remind him of the balanced energy sources for which he argued?

At the heart of the Opposition's case is the argument that, supposedly, the market for coal is rigged. The primary reason, it is said, involved the nuclear industry. Yet, when Secretary of State for Energy, the right hon. Gentleman said that one had to have a nuclear ingredient. Twice he said that Windscale had to be enlarged and that "no energy Minister could recommend to the House"—[*Official Report*, 15 May 1978; Vol. 950, c. 174.]
other than having the nuclear ingredient. He cited the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, because there were problems involving nuclear power. But we now have problems of air pollution and the burning of carbon fuels. The environmental lobby argues about how clean the nuclear industry is compared with the coal industry. Has the right hon. Gentleman forgotten not only history, but what he has said in the House?

Of course, the Leader of the Opposition was once an oil spokesman. Of course, he defended the oil industry and the jobs in that industry, and he was right to do so. It is a major industry. The Liberal party's spokesman on the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), rightly defended that industry.

That is why the Select Committee called for a balanced energy strategy, just as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield had done all those years ago. No modern economy can be totally dependent on coal or have a coal-dominated energy strategy.

When Labour Members call for an energy strategy, they deceive the nation. They are calling for a strategy fixed for coal. For the past three years, the energy industry in this country has been fixed for coal. How could one say otherwise when, on privatisation of the industry, the electricity companies were required to buy huge tonnages —70 million and 65 million tonnes of coal?

That was way above the amounts that they would have bought in an ordinary energy market. In addition, they did so at a price which, at £1·85 a gigajoule, was substantially more than the world price of about £1·30—and below that if one is shipping into a coastal power station.

Once we removed the rigging of the market in favour of coal, any independent business man had to say that alternative cheaper sources were available. Opposition Members constantly argue on behalf of manufacturing industry. The Select Committee on Trade and Industry is now preparing a report on the competitiveness of British manufacturing industry. Is it, in principle, wrong to seek to give British manufacturing industry the cheapest possible power source?

Opposition Members are readily saying that we should continue to protect the old position and force the electricity companies to continue to buy British coal, when it is more expensive than foreign coal or when cleaner alternatives are available.

It is a tragedy for the coal industry that alternatives have become available, but that is due to the march of history. We have developed a new gas turbine technology which was not available when the White Paper of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield was published in the 1970s. That turbine technology is an increasingly more cost-effective and efficient system of burning gas. That has changed the value of gas as a premium fuel. In recent press releases, British Coal has acknowledged that fact.

In the press release it stated that the threat that it had anticipated had become even worse. It states that gas was "reaching full capacity earlier and running at even higher efficiency levels."
That is one of the industry's key problems. In addition, summer is with us, and the industry is presented with another problem: it has to persuade people to buy coal.

The huge existing coal stocks present a big problem, but there are other factors in the equation. The Select Committee thought that imports constituted one of the two most important factors—the second was existing surface stock levels. However, that first factor is currently not the real problem. There is a low demand for coal because it is the summer, and gas is coming on to the market quickly and at ever-increasing efficiency.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): The hon. Gentleman has said that manufacturing industry and industry in general will be subject to higher prices if we maintain the coal industry at its current market levels. Why has the Major Energy Users Council been complaining about the high cost of energy now and over the previous few years?

Dr. Hampson: I do not want to sound patronising, but hon. Members and people outside the House have not bothered to read the Select Committee report. It contains a section on why the heavy users have serious problems, which we have addressed. The report contains recommendations on that, and I have sympathy with those users and their problems. The heavy users such as ICI and the paper industry—not industry as a whole—have a case.

However, the general argument is different. The Select Committee report acknowledges that there is pressure on the coal market. People should not cite the Select Committee report as though it contains a series of absolutes. We were making generous assumptions, and hoping and praying that we could strike a better deal for the coal industry.

[Dr. Hampson]

We were stretching the figures, in believing that the market could possibly reach 16 million extra tonnes. From all the evidence given at the outset, most of us knew that the market could only be about 12 million tonnes. Due to the conditions that I have just outlined, the market is less than that, and the industry is under even greater pressures.

The Select Committee added a potential 3 million tonnes to the non-electricity industry in our calculations. I do not want to bore the House with a description of how we reached that figure, but we were speculating and we must now return to reality. We must not cite the Select Committee's report as if it constituted an alternative strategy which is not now being pursued.

In many respects, the Government are seeking to do what the Select Committee recommended. British Coal has a future; a certain number of pits—we did not say how many—have a future if we can reduce the production costs of deep-mined coal to those of world prices, which are largely determined by the huge opencast pits opening all over the world. That requires the NUM and the mining unions to make great sacrifices. It is no good the unions, and the Opposition Members who represent them, digging in and saying no change.

The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) said that great improvements in productivity have been made in the past four years. That is of course true, because, in the past four years, particularly since privatisation, new disciplines have been introduced into, and new competitive pressures have been exerted on, the industry to try to lower its costs and get to grips with inefficient practices. The industry has no future if we cannot reduce further its costs.

The first key factor of the Select Committee's report which the Government have acknowledged is that we must subsidise our prices in new contracts to match those of world prices. We said that we would try to squeeze the imports as much as possible, and try to squeeze French imports. The Government are desperately trying to do so, and companies such as Yorkshire Electricity are not accepting French imports. However, that alternative supply still exists for others. We have also squeezed orimulsion, but those are all small amounts in the equation.

Let us not deceive ourselves that there is a real choice. There is an efficient gas industry, and not one Labour or Conservative member of the Committee wanted to pull back from the position that it has reached. We could easily control it, in the way that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield did, because licences and consent must be granted.

The Government rightly said that, with huge gasfields such as Liverpool bay, with its sour gas, it is pointless not accepting that jobs are at stake, and that that natural resource should go into electrical supply. Unfortunately, if that is done, it squeezes the coal market—but the Select Committee said that that should be done.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I wanted to intervene some moments ago, but the hon. Gentleman got carried away. I refer to his earlier point about productivity. The Secretary of State made great play of productivity, but I was not clear about his comparisons.

If the hon. Gentleman will cast his mind back to the 1970s, productivity included that involved in the drivages of roads, and so on—which at that time were undertaken by employees of British Coal, or the National Coal Board as it then was. Today, drivages are undertaken by private contractors, and do not appear in British Coal's figures. Therefore, the basis of the Government's statistical comparison is totally fallacious. They are comparing unlike with like, so those statistics are invalid and should not be quoted.

Dr. Hampson: I will not enter into that technical argument, which we dealt with to some extent in the Select Committee—and we have had the Boyd report. It is a technical issue, as to what sort of drivages are best in this country. Other countries use different technological techniques and operate different kinds of pits. The point is that, however they get the coal out of the ground, it is cheaper on the world market than the product that our deep mines can produce. That is the dilemma.

So, we have to free our operators, including British Coal—the hon. Gentleman knows from the evidence that it submitted to the Select Committee that it is totally in favour of this—from various legislation introduced since the 1940s, to allow more flexibility, so that they can make better use of working time to achieve higher productivity and get costs down.

I pay full tribute to the developments in productivity of the past few years, but coal is under pressure from the twofold competition of world coal prices and a highly efficient gas industry. A British Coal press release dated 30 June rightly boasts that output per man is 23 per cent. higher than one year ago, yet that is a terrible catch-22.

Nuclear is, because of past strategies, static at around 20 per cent., but gas is increasing, and in the next two years will reach 25 per cent. That squeezes coal down to about 50 per cent. Of that coal burn, there are cheaper and environmentally cleaner coal imports. At a time when demand for coal is diminishing, productivity is dramatically improving. Fewer pits and fewer men can produce sufficient coal, even in an increased market.

Opposition Members do not have a solution any different from that of the Government.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Dr. Hampson: No, I will not give way. I was accused by the Chair in the last coal debate of speaking too long. On that occasion, I allowed six interventions—and today I have allowed three, which is very generous. I must bring my remarks to an close.

High-technology pits allow a smaller work force to produce sufficient output, even if the market stabilises. The Committee's report has been distorted by misinformation. For example, we were told today that other Governments help their industries. The British Government have a huge record of giving help. The rest of the European Community countries are running down their coal industries to a much greater extent. There is virtually nothing left in Europe, apart from in Germany.

Mr. Barron *rose*——

Dr. Hampson: The hon. Gentleman can make his point in his own speech. I would like him to read the Select Committee report, which gives in table 2 the figures for the rundown from the 1970s to the 1990s. We and the Germans are in almost exactly the same position. Our output fell from 108 million tonnes in 1973 to 75 million tonnes, and that of the Germans from 99 million tonnes to 71 million tonnes.

Germans are pouring proportionately the same amount of money into coal as we are into nuclear, but they are doing that to protect the rundown of coal. The Belgians, the French, the Spanish and the OECD in general are running down their coal industries at a faster rate than this country has done over the past 20 years.

Mr. Barron *rose*——

Dr. Hampson: No, I will not give way.

The coal debate is riddled with myth. Even a distinguished presenter of the "Today" programme this week endorsed, or at least did not challenge, Arthur Scargill's claim about coal reserves. Arthur said yet again that there is "more than a thousand years of coal", and that it was a tragedy that such a great resource was available and unused. All the various estimates are in the Select Committee's report, if only people will analyse them.

Mr. Benn: They are wrong.

Dr. Hampson: No, we are not wrong. The report says that there may be about 300 years of coal left in the United Kingdom, but questions how much of it will be practicable to extract from the 50 existing pits. Practicalities reduce the term to something between 25 and 40 years. The report says—all the Labour members of the Committee signed up to this—that it is closer to 25 than 40 years in respect of existing pits.

The Select Committee spells out the fact that the real dilemma for British Coal is the investment required for new pits, such as those in Nottinghamshire and Selby. It costs about £400 million to £500 million at present-day prices to sink a new deep mine, apart from obtaining planning permission in places such as East Anglia. Coal that may be available for 200 years is not in the vicinity of existing pits. It is time the existing mining communities woke up to that fact, and stopped being deluded by people such as Arthur Scargill.

Not one expert—left, right or centre—in the world anticipates that, in the next 30 years, given the likely world price of coal, because of huge opencast pits opening in Australia, South Africa, South America and North America, any Government will spend £400 million to £500 million on a deep mine, because the unit cost of coal produced there could not conceivably compete with imports.

6.28 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Although I was a member of the Select Committee, I do not intend to dwell on its report, as did the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson). The Committee had to deal with a situation that should never have been allowed to develop. As Select Committees are of habit all-party and must achieve a consensus, they cannot entertain radical proposals.

The Government probably hoped that they would get more time out of their announcement of three months ago. The public, understandably, are confused and concerned that, despite assurances and the rescue plan that was eventually forced on the Government, nothing appears to have changed.

The programme of privatising gas and electricity has meant that, whether wilfully or through lack of foresight, coal is being squeezed out of the marketplace. Unless the Government are prepared to acknowledge that and do something about it, the coal closure programme will accelerate.

Some hon. Members implied that those of us who make constructive comments against the accelerated closure programme have an old-fashioned idea about the role of coal. The coal industry has been declining, and all sides have recognised the change in the market.

Two questions must be addressed, the first of which is how to manage that decline sensibly and constructively and take account of the needs of communities. Secondly, what strategic calculation is required to ensure the retention of long-term flexibility and choice?

People are beginning to realise that the Government have created such a distortion that coal will be squeezed until it is closed off as a significant alternative in a short time. Any Government who allow that to happen will rightly be accused of total irresponsibility and vandalism in respect of a major energy resource. The Government are in danger of being accused of that unless they take some action now.

British Coal is not our only coal producer, but it is our major one, and it appears to have its mind set on the belief that the only way to get the industry into profit is to contract. But contraction is becoming a spiral towards near-oblivion. It is directed not at a target figure but at a figure that is reducing all the time. There does not seem to be any will to market coal or to enter into the spirit of competition.

Today's newspapers show that the industrial market for coal is disappearing at an alarming rate. There is a lack of confidence among British Coal customers about a commitment to provide a future source. Customers do not believe that there will be guaranteed security of supply, and any company that gets itself into such a situation is on dangerous ground.

The industry is contracting. The pertinent points made by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) were extremely well put, but they were not even acknowledged, let alone answered, by the Secretary of State. As a Liberal Democrat, and to some extent a referee in the confrontation between the two major parties, I must say that the hon. Member for Livingston spoke for 29 cogent and effective minutes, while we had 55 minutes of waffle by an unprepared Secretary of State who did not answer any of the points raised.

One of the pertinent questions asked by the hon. Member for Livingston was, how is it that British Coal can provide a source for energy supply which is cheaper than gas or nuclear fuel, but cannot find a market? That question simply echoed in the air but produced no response whatever from the Government. Every electricity consumer and every major industrial user, not just ICI, wants an answer to that question, but it has not been addressed.

The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Hampson) is a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, as I am. He acknowledged that, as a Member representing a constituency in the north-east of Scotland, where tens of thousands of people are employed in the oil and gas industry, I would not vote for measures that will put them out of work. However, a Government with any foresight could have created a sensible and managed energy policy under which such a choice would not have to be made. That is the Government's failure.

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

British Gas started with a monopsony in North sea gas, because it was the only customer. When it was privatised, and the technology for gas-fired power stations was developed, it was inevitable that the oil and gas-producing industries would try to find a market. The gas-fired stations provided just such a market, and that got round British Gas.

It is interesting that British Gas frequently argues that gas is too good a fuel to be burnt in that way. That is a legitimate point, because, after having always taken an interest in energy matters, one of the most startling pieces of evidence that I heard on the Select Committee was that the life of North sea gas is longer than the life of British coal. The presentation of that piece of evidence was historic. That is an extraordinary transition, and part of the reason for it is that there has not been a strategic calculation about what the right level ought to be.

We cannot retain our flexibility and choice with 10, 12 or 15 pits, because such an industry will be small in world terms, and its ability to compete will be restricted. The question that arises is whether anybody has more management drive and more commitment to technology and marketing than British Coal.

The other question that the Government have not answered is whether they are determined simply to reduce British Coal to the smallest possible viable and profitable corporation and then sell it to the management or anybody else; or whether they will give the coal reserves to someone who might make more of them. Even Labour Members sponsored by either of the coal unions must recognise that someone other than British Coal running a pit is rather better than having it closed, even if they would not like to face that choice.

It is deeply depressing that the Government have argued that, as North sea oil and gas have created for themselves a market for electrical generation, they should be allowed to exploit it. However, in the month that they gave clearance for that, they introduced new taxes in the North sea that will discourage the finding of more oil and gas, which is in the national interest.

Mr. Ilisley: I appreciate the difficulty of the argument about whether it is better to retain pits in public ownership or under a different type of management, if that means that they will stay open. We would not agree to just any form of management taking over collieries, because the terms and conditions of employment could be lowered to such an extent that it would not be worth while for union members to work in them. The competence of the management is another factor in a scenario in which the market is contracting. At Monktonhall, mineworkers pumped hard-earned redundancy money into a venture that could fail and lose their investment.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is correct. As he knows, I have supported the right of the Monktonhall miners to take over their colliery, and I hope that they will succeed. It is frustrating that they have more difficulty getting access to finance than some of their competitors, who would like to profit from their difficulties.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but the wider issue is that, in the national interest, we must ensure the maximum viable coal industry. The Government's strategy ensures that we will not achieve that. There is a danger that the coal industry will be reduced to such a level that it will be too small to maintain viability and any standing as a world player, as it was in the past. That is worrying.

The environmental argument is a little spurious, because, while the Government use the contraction of the coal industry and the expansion of other sectors as environmental justification for their policy, they overrule local planning authorities to ensure the dramatic expansion of opencast mining. They do that against the wishes of local communities, in a way that is regarded as extremely damaging to the environment.

One colliery, Brynhenllys in Wales, was drawn to my attention yesterday. It is an anthracite opencast mine, that will effectively displace the deep-mined anthracite colliery in Betws. In spite of being repeatedly refused by the local planning authority, plans have been approved by the Secretary of State in the past month.

There are many other examples all over the country of the Secretary of State having given planning permission for the expansion of opencast mining to allow deep-mined collieries to be shut down. I am not convinced that that is an environmentally constructive approach.

Mr. Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does my hon. Friend recognise that the problem is even worse than that? Under the existing mineral planning guidance, local planning authorities, knowing that they will be overruled by the Secretary of State if they turn down an opencast application, find themselves reduced to placing extra limits, such as increasing the height of the banks, or weakening in some minor way the grounds for the application. Those planning authorities know that, even when they feel strongly that an application should be rejected, they will probably be overruled, so they feel that they might as well make the best of a bad job.

Mr. Bruce: I understand that, because, ultimately, it only involves more and more planning time. generally, the public do not want to see a dramatic expansion in opencast mining, and the Government appear to be prepared to overrule the balance of pits. That has produced the net effect that my right hon. Friend has described.

The Government continue to insist that, somehow, what is happening is simply the operation of a free market. What has happened in the past three months has proved that the free market is not working, because coal is cheaper than any other source of fuel, yet the market has not changed. It cannot possibly be a free market, in spite of the argument about stocks. It is all about market positioning —people making calculated strategic decisions to determine their place in the market.

The market is also distorted by the regime that the Government have created. They have created a privatised electricity industry, where the nuclear industry is guaranteed a market, regardless of the price for everything that they can produce. The Treasury appears to take the simple view that it simply wants the maximum revenue from the nuclear industry. The fact that one other aspect of the Treasury's books will cost millions—if not billions —of pounds, in redundancy, community development and so forth, does not appear to enter into the calculation.

There is also distortion because nuclear power is expanding its share of the market. It has a privileged position inside the public sector, with its debts being

written off. That is not fair, free market competition, regardless of whether one is pro or anti-nuclear. My position is well known.

At the core of the debate about THORP in the past week was the question of who would underwrite the £13 billion-worth of contracts. The answer is simple: the consumer will underwrite them. That is not a free market, but a guarantee of being able to exploit one's position in the market, where one cannot lose. Coal does not have that opportunity or advantage, but is squeezed out as a direct result.

It is true that gas-powered stations must be licensed, but the Government deliberately allowed a scramble to take place, because they wanted that distortion to arise. I have made my position clear. I do not support measures to reverse that process, but I believe that the distortion should not have been allowed to happen in that way in the first place. That puts some obligation on the Government to have a rethink.

The Minister made his point about the French interconnector. I have seen the supposed arguments, and I am not convinced by them. The interconnector was supposed to be a two-way, not a one-way, process, and that suggests that at least half the difference ought to be recoverable. The Government have never satisfactorily explained why not.

Although I have no expectations, the Minister and the Government ought to acknowledge that they have made a mess, and that they have created distortion in the marketplace, partly driven by malice, partly driven by strategy and partly driven by ideology. The Government have not come clean, and they have not been open or honest. If they had said, "We have made a calculated decision that the coal industry should contract to a certain level because it is too dominant within the electricity supply market, and we are creating a playing field to achieve that," it would have been honest. It might not have been acceptable, but it would have been honest.

The Government have acted totally under the counter, and we have had to guess and second-guess their motives. I am sure that, whatever their motives, they are not in the national interest. The Government should think again.

6.44 pm

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). Like him, I shall do my best to make a constructive speech because I believe that we should attempt to find a solution rather than go back over the past and try to attribute blame. My estimate is that there is as much anguish and disappointment among Conservative Members as there is among Opposition Members about the fact that we are not finding the market for coal that we expected three months ago and about the fact that there is still much to be done if we are to save the majority of the pits that we set out to save in March and April.

At the time of the White Paper, we were promised that the generators would be encouraged to sign contracts, which they were some distance away from signing then. That has now been done and in notes to hon. Members both National Power and PowerGen have let it be known that they have signed or are on the verge of signing five-year contracts. We have moved forward in that respect.

We were promised that there would be a dramatic reduction in imports of coal. With one or two minor exceptions, coal imports are negligible at the moment. So be it; they should have been negligible a long time ago. If they had been, we should not have had the stocks that we are now discussing. We were told that steps would be taken, albeit modest steps, to cut the amount of electricity coming from France through the link. Like the hon. Member for Gordon and others who have spoken this afternoon, I am disappointed that we have not made further progress on that. However, we may hear a little more about that from my hon. Friend the Minister.

We were also told that in the longer term there would be closer scrutiny of planning consents for opencast coaling and for combined cycle gas turbine stations. That is still long term. One hopes that the matter is being worked on and that the steps that need to be taken now so that long-term action will occur are being taken now, and that thought is being given to tighter controls and less ready planning consents for opencast coal and for gas-fired power stations. We were also told that there would not be retrospective change to planning consents that had been given for gas-fired power stations and that there would not be retrospective action against nuclear power stations or nuclear plans. Many hon. Members on both sides agreed that that was wise and proper.

Yet the fact remains that we have not sold any coal over and above what we would have sold if the White Paper had not been produced. We have to wonder why. We know that Nuclear Electric is doing better than it has done in the past and that it is taking a few extra per cent. of the market available. We can, if we like, blame the warm weather, but I suspect that the position would have been the same if we had had the coldest spring for 100 years. I believe that the reason for our present difficulties is largely that we have a record level of coal stocks. As the generators are now in the private sector, and as they want to reduce the financial burden of those stocks, they are less inclined to buy the coal that we should like them to purchase. They have obligations to their shareholdres to run the stocks down for financial reasons.

I intend to evaluate three areas with a view to finding a remedy for the current situation: first, the Government's role; secondly, British Coal's role; thirdly, the role of the generators. We all know that the privatisation of coal is at the end of a long chain of privatisation. As a result, there is little doubt that the coal industry has suffered, as all fair-minded people would accept. It would have been far better for the coal industry to be privatised before the electricity generating industry was privatised. It might have been even better if, when the electricity generating industry was privatised, it had been privatised with the coal contracts already in place. That would at least have been a consolation prize for the coal industry if it was to be privatised at the very end of the chain. That has not happened and there is no point in wishing to change the past. We cannot do that.

The fact remains that the coal industry was constrained in a number of ways because it was in the public sector. It was constrained in its working practices and in its investment, and it is only through lifting the coal industry out of the public sector and into the private sector that we can largely get rid of those constraints. Therefore, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to press ahead with the privatisation of the coal industry as quickly as possible, even if that is not entirely acceptable to Opposition

[Dr. Michael Clark]

Members, who perhaps would prefer the industry to be in the public sector. As the hon. Member for Gordon said, it is surely better that pits stay open and that the industry survives under different ownership than that the industry collapses and dies under public sector ownership, retained only as a matter of political principle and dogma. New ownership and new commitment will lead to new morale and new opportunities for the coal industry.

When my hon. Friend the Minister studies the privatisation package, he should consider the possibility of regional packages, with coal mines being sold off in regional groupings so that there is a commonality of interest within the area. That should also include selling off, with deep-mined coal, some of the opencast sites or some of the planning consents for opencast sites. That would make the package more attractive to a purchaser as it would give him the cheaper coal that comes from opencast mining in addition to some of the more expensive liabilities of deep-mined coal.

There are examples of the publicly owned British coal industry not taking the action that would almost certainly have been taken if the industry had been in the private sector. One example was when, a few weeks ago, British Coal announced that it had not been as cost conscious on the surface as it should have been. It decided to cut expenditure—and that, unfortunately, means job losses on the surface. There is considerable doubt as to whether British Coal has ever looked properly at manning levels on the surface. At the same time, it has looked always with a critical eye at manning levels and productivity underground.

The Government should point out to British Coal that, if it is to become the prime coal mining company of this country, it should not be importing 100,000 tonnes of coal from Poland to sell on the domestic market simply because British coal is not appropriate for the domestic market. Surely any private sector company would make sure that it was producing coal that was appropriate for the domestic market. Why is British Coal bringing 500,000 tonnes of Colombian coal into both the Thames and the Mersey? In total, that is the equivalent of probably one and a half pits' worth of coal. It is complacent of British Coal to continue to import coal for resale when it should be selling its own commodity.

If British Coal were in the private sector, it would take appropriate steps—as do many private sector companies —to ensure that there was a market for its commodity, even if that meant joint ventures with some of its customers. In the private sector, British Coal would have had joint ventures to ensure that clean coal technology was moved into a demonstration plant and that gasification was also available to make sure that more coal was sold. Those joint ventures would have been a useful way of doing that.

My second point concerns British Coal's dilemma. It does not know whether it represents British coal as a company or as a national industry. As a nationalised concern, there is no doubt that it takes the view that it is the guardian of both the company and the industry. But as an industry that is about to be privatised, British Coal is now beginning to look for the first time at its organisation. It is not as interested as it should be or as it used to be in the industry in general. That is why it has only belatedly agreed to offer pits for sale. That is why it has allowed faces that are difficult to mine to deteriorate and has occasionally lost machinery at those faces without making adequate efforts to pull that machinery out. I understand that several million pounds' worth of machinery has been lost at both Markham and Rossington.

British Coal is also removing face machinery, sometimes justifiably to put into other pits and into other faces where it is needed, but sometimes at a face that is working, for scrap. It would be far better if that machinery were left in place and offered for sale with the pit to some future operator. But British Coal is not absolutely certain that it wants those pits to continue, because they will compete against the hard core of pits that the company will be keeping for itself. Asking British Coal to sell off pits in good working order is not like asking turkeys to vote for Christmas—it is like asking them to organise Christmas, and British Coal certainly does not intend to do that.

My final point concerns generators. Ideally for the British coal industry, there would be private coal mines supplying generators that were not only private but plentiful, as that would do away with the duopoly that exists at present. There is an excess of generating capacity, and it is said that that excess is being offered for sale. But, as I said in an intervention in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Minister, the price that is being asked for the excess capacity in the generating industry is not the written down value of the generator or its true asset value but a price equivalent to the cost of building replacement modern capacity of the same type as Drax. In other words, the generators are prepared to sell off surplus generating capacity only if they can obtain a price equivalent to the price that they have to pay to replace it with modern engineering.

That is not a real world situation. The generators occupy a privileged position: they know that they now belong to the private sector, but they still enjoy the benefits of the duopoly that resulted from their transition from state ownership to the private sector. They are retaining assets built and transferred to them by the state—assets which should still be used for the general benefit of this country and not as some pawn in a game played by the generators.

It is true that the closure of power stations must be notified to the regulator and that the reasons for that closure must be stated so that they can be examined, but I believe that, in addition to that, the regulator should be considering carefully the generators' explanations as to why they are not offering the stations for sale at a reasonable price. Third parties seeking to purchase a power station from the generators should also have the opportunity to make representations to the regulator, and the regulator should be obliged to see whether the existing owner is trying to sell at an unreasonably high price.

I welcome the statement made by Professor Littlechild in March this year, in which he asked for more time between the announcement of the closure of a power station and the closure itself. It is gratifying to know that National Power is now acting on that recommendation by giving adequate notice of closure so that buyers may be able to come on the scene. I hope that others will follow the example set by National Power and take note of Professor Littlechild's request.

I am not seeking artificial markets or permanent subsidies for coal. I am not advocating the preferential

purchasing of coal. Nor am I seeking Government-inspired or Government-enforced contracts. I am seeking equal opportunity for coal as a fuel; a free market for coal and, in the absence of that, more intervention by the regulator until the free market can be truly established; diversity rather than a duopoly of customers; proper acceptance of the importance of coal in this country; full recognition of the contribution that coal miners make to our economy; and an acknowledgement that the coal industry still has an important role to play long into the future.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I remind the House that between 7 pm and 9 pm there is a 10-minute limit on speeches.

6.59 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): As it is not 7 pm, I think that I shall be in order if take a bit longer.

If logic and reason were to prevail, the Labour party would have won the argument many years ago. Regrettably, the irrational arguments and the luddite approach of Tory Members have led to the demise of the industry.

The problems have been with the chairman of British Coal, its industrial relations officer, Mr. Kevin Hunt, the President of the Board of Trade, and the Minister for Energy. I have to say that they must be as thick as two short planks not to accept our reasoned arguments.

Following the debate on the White Paper, we wrote to the President of the Board of Trade, listing eight points. Rossington pit which is in my constituency, was one of those to be mothballed. We asked him to give an assurance on those eight points. He passed it on to the Minister for Energy, who passed it to the chairman of British Coal, because he said that it was an operational matter.

Correspondence has passed between the chairman of British Coal and myself, but none of the eight points were answered. If the Minister were to listen instead of prattling on to his Parliamentary Private Secretary it might do the industry some good: he has done nothing so far. The eight points are vital to a mothballed pit. The coal Minister has had them once but I will send them again tomorrow.

I do not want to take up too much time, but it is vital for Rossington. British Coal is taking steps to remove essential machinery that will make Rossington pit inoperative. The Minister should get off his backside, go to British Coal and do the job for which he is paid, instead of sitting back like Pontius Pilate.

The national interest is crucial, but one would not think so from the policy decisions made by the Government. The balance of payments will be affected, but that will not be the concern of the Government as they will not be in power after the next election. We cannot have a long-term energy policy if we allow market forces to prevail. We are allowing market forces to prevail and then complaining about this policy or that policy.

The report of the Trade and Industry Select Committee was a waste of time. The Government had no intention of taking any notice whatever of any of its recommendations. They intended to hold back the tide and groundswell of public opinion until it had abated. They are a bit like King Canute. Unless we can jiggle or marshal market forces, there is no way that we shall have a suitable energy policy.

I received a letter from National Power, in which it talks about the amount of coal that it is taking, but that is declining. I take what the generators say with a pinch of salt. They are in it for profit, not the national interest and in days gone by the Queen would have sent her troops to behead people for committing such treasonable acts against the country.

Opposition is coming not only from the National Union of Mineworkers, the Labour party or the general public but from the Association of British Mining Equipment Companies, which cannot be described as a supporter of the Labour party or the NUM. It says:

"Should the 12 pits earmarked for rescue in the White Paper not now be saved, we will be back where we started after the initial announcement last October, and the Government's review will have been a waste of time and effort."

Of course, all the consultation that the Government go through is nothing but a sham—a public exercise to take the sting out of the matter and to pretend that they will take note of the consultation. The Government's arrogance is such that they will take notice of nothing—nothing but their own irrational ideas. That is a tragedy.

I regret that the Government did not get their troops in this evening because we would have heard the usual loudmouthing, shouting and bawling about an industry that they know nowt about. They have big gobs but no ears. If they opened their ears, they would certainly hear a logical, sound and responsible argument from Labour Members. I do not want anybody to say that Tory Members are interested.

The so-called rebels have been mentioned. One or two of them joined us in the Lobby last time, and one or two talked about it but jibbed at the last moment. I am very concerned about the rebels because I am sure that they will survive any argument like a snowflake in hell. I listened to the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) put his logical argument. When he was Chairman of the Committee that considered the Associated British Ports (No.2) Bill, he vetoed every amendment tabled by members of the Committee. Why? Because of his vested interest with one of the subsidiaries.

Dr. Michael Clark: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Not only is that dishonourable, but it is absolutely untrue. I had no interest with any subsidiary that made representations before that Committee. If I had, I would have declared it in the Register of Members' Interests and would have declined to sit as Chairman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) will have heard that assurance.

Mr. Redmond: I understand and I will withdraw the remark if it is untrue, but the hon. Gentleman vetoed every amendment so as to stop the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill from being debated on the Floor of the House. I ask myself why. He has declared his interest in British Gas. That may be understandable because British Gas was involved in the arguments at about that time. We need to ensure that hon. Members speak honourably and have the interests not only of the coal industry but of the country at heart. I do not mind people trying to kid people, but at least they should be honest and tell people exactly where they stand.

I do not think that there will be many Tory rebels this evening. Will it be another case of catch as catch can? I do not think that sufficient Conservative Members will

[Mr. Redmond]

support the Labour motion, but if they are concerned about the national interest and the welfare of this country in the 21st century and do not want us to be held to ransom by the coal barons of the world they will certainly support our motion this evening.

7.9 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): On behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), I totally disagree with the suggestion of the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) that he was dishonest or dishonourable in any of his conduct in relation to the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill. It was a disgraceful comment, which I feel that the hon. Gentleman should have withdrawn more fully.

I am one of the Government's most loyal supporters. It gives me no great pleasure to criticise their policies on the coal industry, and to underline the disastrous consequences of what has been done over the past 12 months for north Nottinghamshire in general, and my constituency in particular.

At the end of January, the Select Committee recommended ways in which to obtain a greater market for coal. The White Paper, unfortunately, rejected many of the Select Committee's recommendations, but the Government reprieved 12 of the 31 pits on the original hit list. Some of my hon. Friends believed that that did not ensure a long-term future for the coal industry, but our advice on what should be done was not accepted.

Since the White Paper, two pits have closed, another is likely to close and there is a strong likelihood that others will follow. In my county, four pits have closed since March, and Rufford will close before the end of the year. That represents a loss of 4,000 jobs; it is a desperately serious blow for Nottinghamshire—particularly north Nottinghamshire—and the associated businesses and communities that depend on the coal industry.

The debate is timely. I respect my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but I had hoped for a more positive indication about the future than he was able to give us. The Government must not just wring their hands and say that there is no market for coal. The coal industry operates in a market that is rigged against it, and only the Government can unlock the inbuilt disadvantages under which the industry currently operates.

During the last debate, we aired the issues of the French connection, the levies and the ease with which the gas industry can start up its gas turbine power stations. I will not go into all that again. Meanwhile, however, our indigenous industry, which has reserves for hundreds of years, is slowly bleeding to death. It must be folly to stand by and see the pits that contain those reserves close one by one, despite past investment of hundreds of millions of pounds, the new technology and the pride that miners take today in the achievements of their pits. We have highly skilled and professional mine workers who take a pride in their jobs.

Even as the debate proceeds, thousands of miners are being put on the dole, with thousands more of their dependants living with little hope for years to come. Miners have worked hard to bring their costs down. Their productivity has never been higher. All they ask now is an opportunity to compete on equal terms with alternative sources of energy, and they are not getting that at the moment. The miners are seeking not higher subsidies or larger redundancy packages, but a signal from the Government that they have an equal place in the energy market with competitor fuels.

The closures are happening not because coal is uneconomic, but because it does not have that equal opportunity. As the Coalfield Communities Campaign urges all hon. Members in its most recent briefing for this debate, the Government must reappraise the situation in the energy market in the light of what has happened since last March, and I urge that course on the Government.

Last month, the Department of Trade and Industry set up a Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire coalfield regeneration partnership, whose object is to use European funds to attract inward investment into the coalfield areas. I was astonished to learn that the only local authority to be represented on that body will be the county council. Mansfield district council and Newark and Sherwood district council, which represent the communities most affected by the closures, will have no voice on it. The county council will spend the money, but those at the sharp end are excluded from membership.

That has created astonishment and resentment in the communities of north Nottinghamshire. The fact that the districts most affected by the closures are not represented on that body is another own goal by the Department of Trade and Industry. It does nothing to assuage the feeling of resentment and uncertainty caused by the pit closures in those communities.

I ask the Government to look at what has happened at the pits which have closed or are about to be closed—or those which, like Bevercotes in my constituency, are laughingly described as being "mothballed". In October, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade gave a specific pledge that the pits that British Coal did not want would be made genuinely available to the private sector. I accept the honesty and integrity with which he made that statement, but since then—as hon. Members have said—equipment has been dismantled and removed. Moreover, two months after the White Paper, British Coal had still not advertised the pits for licence to the private sector. Only within the last couple of weeks has it done so.

British Coal must know, as every hon. Member in the debate knows, that, once coaling ceases, pits deteriorate and become less attractive. Equipment that has been expensively installed in such pits must not be taken out. When I took this matter up with the chairman of British Coal, he informed me:

"it is not our intention to offer collieries as going concerns."

There we have it. If British Coal is not going to mine the coal, no one else is going to mine it as a going concern, and pits will be run down to an unacceptable level. Surely that is not what the President of the Board of Trade had in mind when he said that those pits would be genuinely made available to the private sector.

I fully understand British Coal's wanting to recover and retain its assets, but it must be remembered that these are also public assets, and the Government and Treasury ought to want those assets transferred to the best advantage of the taxpayer. The taxpayer has a right to make sure that otherwise good working pits should not be vandalised to the point of uselessness to any purchaser.

Private operators have a part to play in the future. They should be encouraged to do so, and the Government and British Coal should be much more closely involved in

ensuring that it is done. I seriously urge the Government to do that, in the interests of the much more prosperous coal industry that we all seek for the future.

7.18 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): This afternoon the House has witnessed one of the most complacent speeches from a Minister that I have heard in the past 10 years. The way in which he dealt with an issue that is extremely important for the nation was an abuse of the Dispatch Box. In March, the Government produced a White Paper of 150 pages, which we debated four days later. Equally, it is an abuse of the House that today's debate has to be held on an Opposition day—we have had to use an Opposition day to bring a Select Committee report and recommendations before the House for them to be voted on. The Government requested the report but could not find the time—indeed, denied the House the time—to debate it.

The Secretary of State's speech was a reflection of the Government's bankrupt policies on the mining and energy industries. When the industrialists who have been watching—let alone the mining communities and the miners themselves—see how we treat an extremely important industry, they will know that they have a great deal to worry about, not just with regard to the mining industry.

Despite what the Government would like us to believe, we are not deciding the fate of individual pits; we are deciding whether we will have a mining industry at all and what are the long-term implications for the nation's energy supply. As the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) said, unless the House accepts a package of measures similar to that proposed by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, of the pits that are on the reprieved list, one pit a month will close. In addition, the figures do not stack up—we shall have only 15 pits operating in two or three years' time. The Secretary of State, however, could only put up his hands and say, "We surrender; it is the market, and there is no alternative." He has clearly swallowed the White Paper's argument hook, line and sinker.

The White Paper states that the need for generating stations, capacity, choice of fuel, type of plant, and so on are commercial matters for the market to decide. I challenge the Government: has not the nation got an interest, a view or a say? We are considering the future of one of the nation's strategic industries, an industry on which all other economic activity is built, but we are allowing the nation little say.

Energy is an industry that consumes the nation's natural resources and pollutes our environment. That is reason enough for the issue to be a matter for all of us. In the final analysis, it is the taxpayer who picks up the bill for every lost job. How can the Government argue that the industry should have carte blanche when it comes to writing out bills that the nation must pay? How can any Secretary of State, especially any Secretary of State for Employment worthy of the name, defend a decision that will cost the nation 100,000 jobs?

The Secretary of State told us that the President of the Board of Trade was right to state on 13 October 1992 that 31 pits should close. He said that the Government were right to plough on regardless in March and to substitute—which is all that they have done—the prolonged pain of phased closures for the big bang of one mass redundancy. Twenty-one pits have now closed.

Setting aside the fact that it cannot be right to abandon 300 years' worth of valuable coal reserves and that it cannot be right to close pits that produce the cheapest deep-mined coal in Europe and spend millions of pounds making people redundant, is it not lunacy to import coal while paying our miners the dole? Is it not lunacy to allow the French to use the interconnector to export their power, as has been amply proved this afternoon? Is it not lunacy to close established deep-mined pits, to open new, environmentally damaging opencast mines and to abandon cheap coal-fired electricity in favour of more expensive gas generation?

I wonder which report I signed, because the distortions that I have heard this afternoon about the cheapness of gas-fired electricity as opposed to coal-fired electricity are not justified by the report to which I added my signature. The cheapest electricity is produced by coal—that is plainly stated in the report. The second cheapest is gas generated, the third is nuclear-generated, and the fourth comes from the French interconnector.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) *rose*——

Mr. Caborn: I shall not give way, as I have only 10 minutes in which to speak. The cheapness of coal has been well documented, but more important is the way in which the Government are now allowing 25 to 30 per cent. of the industry to be disrupted in a five-year period; over five years they are allowing us to move from no electricity being gas generated to between 25 and 35 per cent. being gas generated. The energy industry is a long-term industry and such a move is very disruptive. That is at the centre of the Select Committee's argument.

Central to the Select Committee's inquiry was the very question that the Secretary of State asked: is there a larger market for coal? We considered the issue from a sound economic and commercial perspective and came up with the answer that yes, there is a larger market for coal.

Mr. Duncan: Where?

Mr. Caborn: A larger market for coal could be found if the Select Committee's 39 recommendations were followed. The inquiry was conducted in the open, not behind closed doors. All the evidence was made public, on television and on radio. The difference between the Select Committee and the Government was that the Select Committee approached its task with an open mind. We did not try to defend the decision made on 13 October 1992—which, unfortunately, is what the Government have done. They have tried to defend the indefensible.

The President of the Board of Trade said, in his opening remarks to the Select Committee, that he was prepared to introduce legislation to widen the market for coal. Instead of doing so, when it came to the final decision, he ducked it. There is only one actor on the energy stage who can take the necessary action; it is not British Coal, PowerGen, National Power or the nuclear industry but the Government. Only they can rectify the discrepancies in the model of privatisation for the electricity industry. That is the only way in which we shall have a sustainable coal and mining industry.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Caborn: No. It is unfortunate that the White Paper did not deal with the core issue of the 39 recommendations, which was to widen the market for coal.

Mr. Duncan: Where?

Mr. Caborn: If the hon. Gentleman is so illiterate that he cannot read the Select Committee's report, he should not be here. It is all very well for the Minister for Energy to poke fun—we have seen a disgraceful amount of that today from Conservative Members. In March, the Government denied the Select Committee a reasonable answer to the 39 recommendations, and they have done so again, but the judgment will be made not in the House but outside. That judgment is coming.

Unless there is a response to the key issue in the 39 recommendations, which is to open the market for coal —which only the Government can do—I predict that, in the coming two to three years, the number of pits will be reduced to 14. That will be a reduction from the 130 pits and 150,000 miners in 1985 to 14 or 15 pits and about 15,000 miners. The Government will have sold out the nation. It is probably not the Government but generations to come who will pay the price.

7.28 pm

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): The statement that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade made last October was totally rejected by a huge number of people who had no contact with mining or manufacturing and very little contact with coal itself. They totally rejected what he had to say. However, I am very sad that my right hon. Friend the President is not with us today and I hope that the strong pressure which many of us put on him over the past few months did not contribute to his recent illness. We all wish him well.

Many people did not accept what the Government said last October. I do not want to return to those arguments, because we have been over them time after time. However, I still do not believe that the Government took adequate steps to ensure a long-term strategy and future for British Coal at that time. We should have taken steps to control the French interconnector. We should have ensured that we could sell British electricity through France to southern Europe where there are purchasers. We could have slowed down the dash for gas. I was not looking for anyone else to be put out of work, but I cannot see why all the jobs must be lost in one industry and connecting industries.

I am sure that all hon. Members have received letters from the Association of British Mining Equipment Companies. A constituent of mine who is involved in that association wrote to tell me:

"The implications for our industry will be the loss of the major part of our domestic market".

We are all aware that any manufacturing industry requires a strong home market on which to export. Members of the association to which I have referred will suffer.

We did not do those things back in October and we now have a reducing British market for our coal. We have generators with large stocks because we are using more power from gas. Obviously, those generators must decide what to do with those stockpiles. We have overproduction. As we have already heard, mines are more efficient than they have ever been and they produce more coal, more cheaply than ever before. There is no argument about that. However, via British Coal, we are using taxpayers' money to make miners redundant and we are sealing underground millions of pounds' worth of equipment for which the taxpayers have paid.

We are now in an era of industrial vandalism, the likes of which we have not seen since there were Luddites in Yorkshire. It is true to say that those Luddites did nothing like British Coal is allowed to do now. That vandalism is being perpetrated by British Coal. When business men are willing to consider ways of using the assets for the benefit of United Kingdom plc and all those who want to work in the industry, why cannot the Government and the coal industry help them to go forward and make the best use of those assets to everyone's advantage?

Of course, there is a strong case for reshaping the coal industry. The sooner it is reshaped, the better. It has to be reshaped now so that it may survive and prosper in the future. If it does not, we will not have a strong mining industry. I am aware that my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy has often said that he sees a future for the coal industry.

I am not against privatisation, because I believe that privatisation holds the best solution for the future of the industry. However, we cannot and must not expect the present British Coal organisation to be the vehicle for privatisation. Those running the business are too entrenched, and they have undoubtedly already shown that they are afraid of real competition in the industry.

If the Government want to introduce legislation to privatise the coal industry, I will support my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy, but only on the basis that the present British Coal organisation is broken up into at least three clearly separate, competing coal mining and marketing companies and that other industrial investors are authorised to operate coal mining at other pits on an equitable commercial basis.

Only through that kind of action will the Government ever see a return on the £7·5 billion which has been invested since 1979 in the coal industry for new coal faces and equipment. There is no argument about that figure. However, two thirds of those mines are now closed or under threat. That is really taxpayers' money down the drain. The value of that investment at 1993 values is £10 billion. That is a huge amount of money. Many other industries would be thriving if they had received that level of investment over many years.

Some £500 million has been spent in the Yorkshire area of Barnsley in the past 10 years to reconstruct the industry totally. All that has now gone. All the mines are closed, including the £20 million washing plant at South Kirby and the larger washing plant at Woolley. The recent blowing up of the Woolley washing plant was a terrible act of vandalism.

I have some very pertinent questions for my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy. When he replies to them later, I will decide what action to take in respect of the debate. However, I must tell my hon. Friend that I could not possibly support the Government, and I am sure that he would not expect me to do so given the stance that I have taken over the past few months. It may be helpful if my hon. Friend were to answer my questions.

Will my hon. Friend tell the House and the country how much we are paying for electricity from the French interconnector? I recall that the Select Committee on Trade and Industry found that we were paying 3·38p per unit on base load. I understand that the regional electricity

companies have recently negotiated a reduction from 2·8p to 2·6p on base load. How expensive is our French electricity?

Can my hon. Friend confirm that we have renegotiated a similar reduction for our French electricity? I trust that we are not paying a 30 per cent. premium to the French and closing our mines, paying redundancy and scrapping machinery which has cost the taxpayers of this country many millions of pounds.

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will say a word about coal imports. We are now importing 100,000 tonnes of house coal—not cheap power station coal. House coal can be, and was, mined in Yorkshire. It should have continued to be mined there. The 0·5 million tonnes arriving via the Thames could be supplied by British mines. As we already know, 300,000 tonnes are to be imported by British Coal for a processor on Merseyside via PowerGen's Fiddler's Ferry terminal. That could be Yorkshire coal. Fiddler's Ferry was built by PowerGen for power station coal, not for high-grade processor coal at the expense of mines in this country. It is nonsense to allow that to happen.

What about the mines for licence? I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment was sincere about British Coal making such mines available to potential operators. However, I suggest that British Coal is afraid of competition. It wants to ensure that it has a continuing monopoly. Surely a Conservative Government would not want to see an on-going coal monopoly.

Is British Coal management simply looking forward to privatisation and the golden spectre of share options in a privatised monopoly? Anyone wanting to consider licensing one of the mines destined for closure would experience great difficulty. Every obstacle is put in the way of people wishing to license such a mine. There is no prospectus and no description and there are no figures. There is nothing but a map reference. I am sure that we would not all go on a treasure hunt with a map reference. Anyone seeking to dispose of assets or any business would provide proper information for those considering licensing or purchasing.

British Coal also demands that a letter is signed relieving the organisation of any liability if any information provided is inaccurate. I cannot see why British Coal does that because it does not provide any information. It is ensuring that nothing is inaccurate by providing no information. What a way to sell our assets, and particularly our national assets. That is rather like buying a second-hand car from Arthur Daley with the additional disadvantage of being blindfolded so that one really cannot see what one is purchasing. That is no way to progress.

We want to see a future for our coal mining industry. Many of us want to see a private coal mining industry as opposed to one that is closed down. However, we want it to have the safeguards that any mining industry should have because safety is very important.

I suggest that some, if not many, of the mines could have a future for the mining of specialist coals for niche markets—direct to processors and the house coal market. We all agree that that is much smaller that it was several years ago; nevertheless, it is still there.

The Government should ensure that closed mines are removed from British Coal control and placed in a separate organisation so that their potential can be fully and freely investigated by companies that wish to compete with British Coal and with each other. That urgent matter needs urgent attention.

7.38 pm

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): I also regret that the President of the Board of Trade is not present. I wish him well. I should have preferred to make my criticisms to his face rather than from afar. I should like to know where his hon. Friends are. Are they at his bedside? Very few of them are present. Even the Minister is not listening to me. Is this not a serious business? Where are they?

Throughout my lifetime, headlines have always read "The coal industry is in crisis". If we continue with the Government's policies, there will soon be no coal industry in which to have a crisis. It is a very serious condemnation of the Government's policies that this is happening. I blame the Government for what is happening. I am just as disappointed as the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) in the Minister's antics. I want to treat the matter very seriously. I come from a mining background. The Secretary of State clowned around and used statistics and a host of other items that were totally irrelevant to the crisis that the people in the Public Gallery and elsewhere have to face. *[Interruption.]* Okay.

The Government's formula for the closure of economically viable collieries is pure propaganda. Their subsidy and help are to no avail. After the debate—I emphasise that—*The People* exposed how the miners' staff superannuation fund was dipped into to subsidise redundancies to the tune of more than £400 million. That was never mentioned on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Eggar *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Clarke: The Minister may shake his head if he wishes.

There was a total lack of effort in encouraging generating companies to buy British and secure a market for coal. That is also a condemnation of the Government. The Pontius Pilate attitude has been mentioned in respect of the energy market, but a subsidy of £1·3 billion a year is built in for nuclear power. There is no relaxing of attitudes in respect of the argument for the extension of the life of Magnox power stations—another recommendation in the document that is being bandied around.

Will Magnox stations be closed? The $64,000 question is, what are the Government going to do with those stations? How much will it cost to phase them out? We would then see the real cost of nuclear power. Will the people of Britain again foot the bill for those stations, or will we recommission them again and subsidise them until another Government take them over in the near future? There are no market forces for nuclear power, but there are market forces for the coal industry.

I am sure that all hon. Members have received a letter from the Association of British Mining Equipment Companies. I make a plea on its behalf. It represents the finest mining engineering companies in the world, which sell their products to China, for example, and other countries. The association says that it needs an indigenous industry for research and development—we have used that argument before—and for customers and jobs. The Government do not seem to care a tuppeny hoot about the mining industry, but there is a knock-on effect on skilled labour, jobs and important export potential.

[Mr. Clarke]

Ignoring the Select Committee's reasonable, sensible options was the road to closure. The Government's reply was aimed to con the public or to cool them down. They obviously conned their Back-Bench rebels. That was what really mattered to the Government; that was their motivation. That is the conclusion which any logical person will come to. Who will pay for that? It will be the miners and mining communities. The people of this country will pay the highest price for the closures and the "Heseltine folly".

Miners do not talk behind people's backs—we do not talk about people who are ill—but the President of the Board of Trade carries joint responsibility with his colleagues and everyone who voted to support this policy. They are guilty.

There is an opportunity. Conservative Members have said that they cannot change matters. They can change them. The formula that the Government put to the country as a panacea is not working. They can change matters because they can support us in voting to prove that the people of Britain will give their children a better inheritance, that miners will not be denied the right to work, and that common sense, decency and democracy will prevail. Will hon. Members please use their common sense, take off their blinkers and support the Opposition?

7.44 pm

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): The history of the industrial revolution is that the organisations and economies that embraced technological change and took advantage of it flourished and went from strength to strength. Those that resisted change and introduced subsidies to prop up obsolete products and practices have declined and, as in the case of eastern Europe, ruined their economies.

There is no escaping the fact that, over the past 20 years, we have witnessed a fundamental shift from heavy industry towards a manufacturing and technology-based society, partly because we developed the new technologies ourselves and party because of the emergence of developing industrialised countries in south America and the far east, with their low-wage labour inputs. In the light of that new competition, it would be extremely naive of us to think that we can sustain markets when our production costs are up to 10 times more than those of our competitors.

The steel industry, for example, was the victim of a grossly ambitious plan, encouraged by successive Governments, which resulted in overcapacity, over-production, big losses and huge subsidies. Billions of pounds of taxpayers' money was spent to produce steel that nobody wanted. Even with the massive amount of money that was poured into our steel industry, we could not compete with world prices, yet, despite that, people still argued for the industry's retention.

Thankfully, under this Government, the waste of resources was ended. We now have a steel industry which is a leaner operation which has been allowed to build on its strengths. Fifteen years ago, it employed 200,000 people. Now, it has a dedicated work force of about 45,000 and it has reached new levels of productivity and excellence.

Nevertheless, it must be recognised that if an industry with improved practices still cannot compete, we must let it go. The Japanese shipbuilding industry used to be one of the greatest in the world, but now barely a ship is built in its waters. The Japanese recognised at an early stage that the costs of that labour-intensive industry were becoming unrealistic and unsustainable as its neighbours such as Korea started to develop their own docks. Japan did not fight that logical progression. Instead, it chose to diversify its industrial and manufacturing base into new and developing sectors where it could once again be a market leader.

The past few months have seen a debate about the future of the British coal industry rage at all levels. *[Interruption.]* It has not escaped my notice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) is trying to interfere with your judgment. However, I shall ignore that for the moment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that no one interferes with my judgment when I am in the Chair.

Mr. Richards: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was certainly not meant to reflect on your integrity.

Newspaper headlines have bemoaned the demise of king coal and how it spells doom for the United Kingdom. They talk of the scaling down of the coal industry as a new and vicious phenomenon dreamt up on a whim. Of course, that could not be further from the truth. From a peak of employing 1·25 million miners in 3,300 mines at the end of the first world war, the coal industry has undergone 75 years of continued retraction.

The decline has occurred under both political parties. Between 1964 and 1970, the then Labour Government, recognising the over-production and over-capacity of the coal mining industry, closed down some 288 pits with a loss of 186,000 jobs. Furthermore, the United Kingdom has not been alone in scaling down its coal industry. The number of miners in Europe has dropped from 1·5 million in the 1950s to a present total of under 200,000. Belgium closed its last pit in 1992 and France envisages the loss of its remaining 20,000 mining jobs by the year 2005.

It is an inescapable truth that one cannot continue producing something that one cannot sell. The market for coal has been in decline for three generations and we have all had a hand in its demise, including Labour Members. Over the past 50 years, millions of individuals have made the crucial decision not to burn coal in their homes. Since 1947, domestic use in Britain has fallen from 37 million tonnes to just over 5 million tonnes. Of course, the environment is better for it. Having said that, I have no doubt that coal has a part to play in the future generation of electricity in the United Kingdom.

The Point of Ayr colliery near my constituency is a good example of a mine which is competitive, in which there has been new technology and new investment and, most importantly and crucially, which has a market for its coal. I grew up in the coal mining valleys of south Wales. I am only too aware that mining is a dirty, difficult and dangerous task. I cannot help but think that many of those people who are outraged by the recent and necessary closure of mines have perhaps an over-romantic vision of what coal mining entails.

I know many miners who have health problems—dust on their lungs, shortness of breath, eyesight permanently

damaged by working in low light and hearing impaired by industrial noise. *[Laughter.]* I am fascinated that Labour Members find that amusing. I do not find it amusing, because I know miners who suffer from those problems. All the miners whom I know can recall a colleague who has either been killed or seriously injured underground.

What has happened to the 1·25 million miners who have left the coal face in the past 80 years? The answer is that the industrial revolution has provided them with new opportunities to make a living.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Richards: Labour Members voted against those opportunities and I shall give some examples. The Government intend to spend £160 million to build a barrage in Cardiff to develop that city. It is the greatest development in any city in Europe and will create tens of thousands of jobs. Labour Members, including the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) voted against that development.

The Labour party also voted against the White Paper on coal. That White Paper will lead to the development of Connah's Quay power station and will create some 3,000 jobs. The Labour party, including the hon. Members for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) and for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), voted against that White Paper and, therefore, against those jobs. When I asked the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) whether he was for or against the development of the Connah's Quay power station, all he could say was that he had nothing against the burning of sour gas. He did not say firmly that he was for that power station.

The once dirty and smoke-filled mining valleys of south Wales, which relied almost entirely on coal mining to provide employment, are now the silicon valleys of the United Kingdom. The demise of the traditional industry did not spell the end of the communities in that region but marked a new beginning—a new chapter—in the industrial revolution. New investment has been flowing into Wales——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.55 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I have listened to the debate from the beginning. It has been made plain today that the hon. Members for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) and for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), and the Secretary of State, know nothing about mining. The hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West talked about everything, including Japanese shipbuilding, the liquorice works and everything else, but not the mining industry. He demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt that he knows nothing about mining. The Minister knows little about the mining industry.

We are in the present position because those who are dealing with the destiny and future of miners and mining communities, and the nation in general, know little about the mining industry. The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West talked about the necessity to import coal, but omitted to explain about the dumping of coal in the United Kingdom at the low prices at which it is produced in the producing countries. One of the problems that miners and mining communities face is that they are being used by this Government and Governments abroad for the dumping of coal in the United Kingdom.

Recently, the journal published by National Power reported that it had introduced the first load of coal at the Royal Portbury dock in Bristol:

"The first cargo of coal has arrived at the new bulk handling terminal which has been developed by National Power. The 43,000 tonnes cargo from the United States via Amsterdam arrived on board the MV Ascension. It took three days to unload."

In addition to the problem of dumping coal in the United Kingdom, we are experiencing a higher deficit in the balance of payments than ever before. The Minister and the Secretary of State are allowing coal to be dumped in the United Kingdom, at the expense of miners and their families.

The Secretary of State quoted many figures for the output per man per shift. However, his figures related to output per man per shift for men underground: he was talking about face workers, not the total industry for the periods for which he was making comparisons. It was totally unfair of him to mislead the House and the country by quoting figures that are grossly incorrect. Many of the points made by the Secretary of State were totally inadequate, totally irrelevant and against the best interests of the mining industry in general.

The mining industry is my prime concern, because, like many other Labour Members, I worked in the pits until I came to Parliament. We spent most of our working lives in the pits, and looking after the interests of the miners and the families. We often depended on the mining industry for our living. Because of the attitude and policies of the Government, we are now seeing the demise of the mining industry. They have no regard to what is happening in the industry.

The Secretary of State spoke about British Coal Enterprise Ltd. Anyone who asks how many jobs that organisation has created in his constituency, however, cannot get a firm answer, because many of those jobs are just myths.

The remaining colliery in my constituency, Sharlston —in which I, too, worked—closed after the announcement by the President of the Board of Trade in February. In addition to that pit closing, another factory shut within the same period, and a further 1,300 jobs were lost. Within a few weeks, more than 2,000 jobs were lost from my constituency.

When we ask the Government what action they will take to help those areas to generate jobs, there is little response from anyone—from the Minister responsible for mining or from those in the Departments of Trade and Industry and of the Environment. They have given little support to my constituency and other similar regions in their attempts to generate job opportunities.

Miners have always played their part in sustaining our economy. Reference has been made to the industrial revolution, but we need not go back that far. When the country was at war, the miners played their part in the war effort by ensuring that energy was provided.

My hon. Friends on the Labour Benches may recall that, when the five-day week was brought in, the Government requested miners to produce more coal. Those miners gave up their Saturdays to produce that extra coal to meet that Government demand. No one can say that the miners have not produced coal or played their

[Mr. William O'Brien]

full part in sustaining our economy. The Government's rewards to the miners and their communities for their efforts are extremely poor.

The Secretary of State referred to a report on output figures of the past eight years. That report revealed that output per man shift for every person working in that industry had increased in eight years from 2·5 tonnes to more than 8 tonnes. I challenge the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West to name any other industry that can match the results achieved in the past few years by the effort and hard work of the miners.

Mr. Richards *rose*——

Mr. O'Brien: Sit down. The hon. Gentleman would not give way to my colleague, so I will treat him in the same way.

It is obvious that the miners have given their all in their efforts to meet the requests of Governments. I am proud to belong to the mining fraternity and community. It is an industry worth fighting for, and that is why this debate appears on the Order Paper, at the initiative of the Labour party.

We should defend the mining industry, and the Government should answer for their actions towards it.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: I am sorry, but I have little time left, and there is a lot to be said.

I could say a great deal in support of the mining industry and miners' families, in addition to the points raised by my hon. Friends. Because time is short, and because so many other hon. Members want to speak, I shall dwell on my pit, Sharlston, which closed speedily after the President of the Board of Trade made his announcement in February.

I said then, and I repeat now, that the men of Sharlston and their families were treated shabbily by the Government and by British Coal. That pit had a proud record of producing coal: it broke its own productivity record year after year. The work force were second to none in terms of output.

8.4 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I wish to make a few observations, having watched the debate develop in the past months.

One of the advantages of the parliamentary system in which we play our part is that no one is immune to the letters received directly from his constituents. All of us recall the mountain of letters that we received when the first announcement about pit closures was made last year.

I hope that the House will accept that I am trying to address the issue honestly when I say that I was well aware at the time that a raw nerve had been struck by the initial announcement. The general feeling was that it had offended a basic sense of decency. That feeling was based on a number of suspicions.

It was felt that the decision was prompted by short-term considerations; that the price of gas, which appears competitive at the moment, might not be sustained in the long term, and that the decision had not been made in the context of an overall energy policy, as it deserved to be. Above all, it was felt that those working in the mining industry, who had dramatically increased their productivity rate, had been peremptorily treated.

The mountain of letters followed. Our duty as parliamentarians was surely enhanced when we were forced to consider the issue in detail. That is exactly what I and many of my colleagues have done.

As the House may be aware, I have experience of the oil industry, a parallel industry in the energy sector. I have seen oil traded across international markets for many years. That experience taught me that the energy sector is bound not just by domestic economics, but by international ones and by international costing. That applies equally to the coal industry.

Opposition Members may not realise that, although I represent a rural idyll, my constituency also has a deep mine, Asfordby, which has received tens of millions of pounds investment. It is set to be one of the most successful in the coal industry. I welcome its success, which I want to encourage.

In trying to wrestle with the problems that the original announcement caused, one must accept, as my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) graphically explained—I am sorry that his explanation was not welcomed by Opposition Members—that the coal industry is an industry in decline. We must face the realities of that decline.

It is all too sad that, as the coal industry shrinks, we fail to sing the praises of the oil and gas industries, which have risen to take the place of coal as the major electricity generating sources. The oil and gas sectors have been a tremendous triumph, but we hear far too little about the success that private enterprise has brought them. We hear far too much from the Opposition about what has happened to coal, but they fail to appreciate what is happening elsewhere in the energy sector.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Duncan: I will do so, because I know that my hon. Friend holds strong views.

Mr. Winterton: Does my hon. Friend accept that using gas for energy generation is extremely wasteful, whereas its use for domestic appliances is extremely efficient? Does he also accept that we have finite reserves of gas, whereas we have almost unlimited coal stocks underground?

Mr. Duncan: My hon. Friend has beautifully encapsulated all the fallacies of his position. First, gas reserves, like oil reserves, are extensive, but both are finite. Secondly, it is not for Members of Parliament to make commercial judgments in a field in which professionals are better able to judge. The further we remove ourselves from those decisions, the better. It is not for us to judge whether gas or oil will run out. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is."] I think that it is not.

There has been mention of the French interconnector. The contracts for the purchase of electricity through the interconnector were undertaken by the last Labour Government. There would be severe penalties should we withdraw. Furthermore, withdrawal would be in breach of article 30 of the treaty of Rome.

I should like to address the charge that the industry is rigged. It is self-evident that National Power and PowerGen are a duopoly for the generation of electricity. More important, they are—to use strict economic

language—a duopsony. They are the country's two buyers of coal and, indeed, of other sources of energy. However, although they have market power, they judge that they can generate electricity more cheaply by using gas.

Let us imagine what the situation would be if there were five, six, seven or even eight purchasers of gas or coal. It is probable that they would all make the same assessment. The actual structure of power generation does not in any way alter the basic fact that coal is too expensive and that the mines cannot find a market. The charge that the industry is rigged simply does not stand up to investigation. It is not right to suggest that developments are having a detrimental effect on what would otherwise be the fair play of the market.

In my view, the Government are right in trying to alleviate the difficulties created by the transition of an industry that is in decline by reason of other sources of energy generation. They are doing the right thing in trying to pave the way for privatisation of the mines that remain and can produce coal effectively and efficiently.

However, I seek an assurance that some money will be made available to assist the Union of Democratic Mineworkers in what I hope will be an effective management and employee buy-out, so that the work force, who have been so effective in improving productivity, may have a chance to show what they are capable of. I hope that, in this regard, my hon. Friend will be able to give me some comfort.

I look in vain for any specific Labour commitment to keeping mines open, to shelling out the enormous amount of money that would be involved. It has been argued today that so much money has been poured into the mines that they must all be kept open for fear of losing the benefits of the subsidies. That is an extraordinary argument. If it is proved that mines can survive only with continued enormous subsidies, it is better to close them now than to pour good money after bad and cause unemployment in the gas and oil industries.

I hope that, on reflection, people will realise that the Government's decision, though difficult, is the right one, and that no purpose will be served by efforts to hold on to an industry that is in decline and cannot be sustained without the investment of many billions of pounds that could be better spent elsewhere.

8.14 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I spent a few minutes pondering which part of the speech of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) had been passed to him by the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary. At first, I thought that it was the reference to a coal industry in decline—something that was mentioned earlier in what resembled a GCSE economic history paper. Conservative Members ought to talk about the British coal industry in decline, for the industry throughout the world is not in decline. Indeed, there is expansion in Asia, Africa and elsewhere. The percentages are in double figures, and that situation has prevailed for many years.

Let me give the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton some information about the French interconnector. The contract was signed in 1981. I do not know how good the hon. Gentleman is at figures, but he should be able to work out that 1981 was two years after 1979, when the Concservative Government were elected. But there is a point that is often overlooked. The French interconnector contracts were renewed this year, following the debate about what was happening to to the British coal industry. At that time, the Government knew that the equivalent of 6·5 million tonnes of coal, in terms of electricity generation, was being imported. To my knowledge, only one regional electricity company decided not to participate. If there had been some Government action in respect of the French interconnector, the pit closures that have occurred since the end of March might not have been necessary.

I made a speech in the House last October, following the announcement that the two remaining mines in my constituency would be subjected to changes. Kiveton was to close altogether, and Maltby was to be mothballed. Since then, it has been announced that Maltby is to be put on a development status basis. The Minister, having replied to an Adjournment debate that I initiated on this subject, will know that in the past two months 700 men at Maltby have been made redundant, despite the fact that it is one of the most profitable mines in Britain.

The Government's amendment to the motion indicates that they will offer to the private sector pits that they do not themselves want to keep in production. The Minister knows that that is not true. The Maltby work force, together with people in the City and others in the private sector, have been trying to make a bid so that the mine might be kept in production, but have come up against a point-blank refusal. In fact, the Minister refuses even to meet the people concerned.

About 150 people are left, but they are not producing coal any more. The bonus scheme that was related to the level of production has ended. Information that I have received from British Coal contradicts that, but it is a fact that people now working at the mine do not have a chance to earn bonuses. Thus, they have suffered in terms of weekly income, despite assurances that they would be protected.

My interest in the Kiveton colliery is shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), as two mines were amalgamated many years ago. Kiveton is one of the 12 market-tested pits. I have spoken to men and management a number of times since the term "market-tested" came into vogue. What has it meant for the workers? The machine shifts have been reduced in number from nine a day to six, as was announced two weeks ago. On that basis, 50 jobs have disappeared.

The mine's market amounts to only one third of its current production. It is selling into a market that is being supplied by one of the mines that the Government are offering to the private sector. Anyone interested can have a go at the coal mine, but not at the market that used to go with it. It is quite clear that, unless something happens with regard to future contracts with the electricity supply industry, Kiveton, together with the others on the list of 12 market-tested pits, will close.

What is the reason for this? Currently there is a contract for the supply of 40 million tonnes, including 8 million tonnes from open-cast mines. This time next year, the quantity will be 30 million tonnes, of which 7 million tonnes will be from open-cast mines. The implications for the deep-mine industry will be severe, as must be clear to anyone who takes the trouble to study the situation. Today, the Secretary of State for Employment repeated something that the Minister has said occasionally: that the answer is to contract more coal by the use of subsidy.

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

What is happening about introducing subsidies? At the last Department of Trade and Industry Question Time, on 23 June, in answer to a question about how many requests the Minister had received from British Coal for a portion of the subsidy for expanding the coal market, the Minister said:

"My right hon. Friend and I have not received any specific requests for subsidy from either British Coal or private sector producers."—[*Official Report*, 23 June 1993; Vol. 227, c. 295.]

I received a letter five days later from the chairman of the British Coal Corporation, who said:

"We made a very competitively priced offer to the generators for additional sales. This has been rejected by National Power who say they will reassess the market for coal in the autumn. And, while we await a formal response from PowerGen, the public statements of both generators have offered little comfort, suggesting that they would be willing to buy more coal, but possibly not a great deal, probably not until some months have elapsed, and then only at very low prices."

That is another of Mr. Clarke's more morale-raising speeches since he has been appointed chairman of the British Coal Corporation.

The Minister and the chairman of British Coal Corporation cannot both be right. The chairman cannot have made a competitive offer to the generators while no one has asked for a subsidy from the Minister—or can he? I want the Minister to tell us when he winds up the debate. My information is that the rules with which people must comply before receiving a subsidy mean that they do not know how much subsidy they will have before they make a formal approach to the generators and receive a formal contract in return. They must agree provisional terms before going back to the DTI and asking how much subsidy they can have. It is an absolute sham and the Minister knows it, because he is part of the conspiracy by saying that nobody has asked for a subsidy, while British Coal says that its offers have been rejected.

The Government have the power to do something about the current crisis in the deep-mined coal industry. They must know that, by this time next year, when nearly 25 per cent. of current contracts will come from opencast coal mining, there will be a massive reduction in deep-mined pits. They tell us that they are holding discussions with the generators about coal stocks. If they wish, they can act now to ensure that that does not happen.

However, I doubt whether they will do so because, since the introduction of the White Paper in March, their actions have been consistent with the view reported to them in 1991, when they appointed N and M Rothschild, a merchant banker in the City, to look into the privatisation of the British coal industry. That first report, which was leaked to the Opposition and denied by Ministers, said that in some 12 months' time we would be down to 14 deep mines. I predict that that will happen if something is not done to stop it.

I am fed up with seeing people stand up and wring their hands about the problem. Privatisation does not come into it. In 14 months' time there will be no industry to privatise because the deep-mine industry will have gone, and the Government will have been a major part of the conspiracy to get rid of it.

8.23 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I agree with the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) about opencast mining. The prospect of new opencasting of green field sites has become unacceptable at any price, whether environmental or in terms of the need for deep-mined coal.

Although our coal industry has declined, many of us feel that it should not become extinct because it is in the national interest that we should retain a four-fuel potential well into the next century.

I have made speeches on the White Paper and shall not repeat all that I said then because it is all on the record, but the problem remains the same: how do we retain a short-term market in order to retain a deep-mine potential for the future?

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke about a freer market for coal. What he said is true but it should be a freer market in the sense of putting on the market those pits which British Coal does not need. However, if the market is the same in terms of where we sell the coal, I see no point in anyone wanting to buy a pit unless they have a contract to sell the coal. If the amount of coal about to be burnt is exactly the same, it is not a freer market but simply a different market for exactly the same amount.

We now realise that the generators, not the Government, control our energy policy. That concerns me considerably. In the near future, little more than the core contract will be required, and it will take at least 18 months before we can see what coal stocks are likely to be required. As and when coal is sought, it will be sought not on a contract basis but on the stock price that we want at the time. That is no way to get people to invest in the industry or to look to the future.

In the short term, the Government must concentrate on the question of stock. I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Minister is currently negotiating stocks and discussing import substitution.

My main concern, which I have discussed in previous debates, is about the relationship between coal-fired power stations and research and development. However much we discuss the short term, unless we have a policy on coal-fired power stations the coal industry has no future.

The over-capacity of generation, which has come about through the building of new gas-fired power stations and the successful operation of nuclear power stations, has caused that pressure on older coal-fired power stations. Of those, a capacity of 500 MW has already been closed and we hear of more closures to come. Another problem for coal-fired power stations is emission control, which must involve research and development if they are to have a future.

In the previous debate I spoke about the need to retain intermediate power stations. I have discussed with my hon. Friend the Minister the High Marnham and Cottam power stations in Nottingham. Those intermediate 2,000 MW power stations would be ideal for refitting and for using the new technology, which is not necessarily market oriented because it rarely is. We have offered to fund some new technology through extending research and development for the next three years, but it is not a sensible basis for investing in new technology, research and development, if at the end of that time there is no use for the product. We will be unable to fit the topping cycle—the

latest technology—or anything on which Britain has worked for centuries. We have the best coal burn technology in the world.

I remember going to the United States before 1979, when I was interested in energy and the United States was consulting our technology to see how best it could burn its coal. That technology has now been developed in the United States and if we want it we must buy it back from them. The last thing we want is the same thing to happen to the topping cycle, which is the ultimate in terms of coal burn and using gas for clean emissions.

I desperately want my hon. Friend the Minister to say whose responsibility it is to declare an overall strategy and policy for coal-fired power stations up to the year 2,000, which is not far away, and beyond. Where do research and development fit into that overall picture? Unless we act, we are simply whistling in the wind when we discuss the coal industry, production, costs and so on, because there will be no market for them. I am convinced that we need to retain the potential for a deep-mine industry in this country. I have no mines in my constituency, but I speak because I have an interest in Nottinghamshire and coal, which has a role to play. We must ensure that it fulfils its role.

Unless the Government are able to concentrate on the short-term stock levels, the estimated coal burn over and above the core contract of the 16 million tonnes that we are prepared to subsidise, a strategy for coal-fired capacity and the need to refit and modernise before the year 2000, I see a bleak immediate future for miners. The future is bleak at a personal level—of which hon. Members can speak graphically—and, more importantly, in terms of the long-term balance of fuel supplies.

When my hon. Friend the Minister replies to the debate, I hope that he will respond to those salient points —the short-term prospects in the next 18 months and the energy burn and coal-fired strategy for which the generators are not responsible. The generators have a business to run and they are seeking to do so as best they can, but the four-fuel policy is the Government's policy and the Government must be able to provide an overall strategy for coal-fired generation.

The youngest station was completed in 1974, which is a long time ago. None of us can envisage a new coal-fired power station being built in our lifetime, but we can envisage utilising the capacity of existing power stations, and refitting and modernising them to take us into the next century and ensure a future for Britain's deep-mined coal industry.

8.32 pm

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): It is 102 days since the Government published the White Paper on coal, and 98 days since the House had the opportunity to discuss it. In the space of four days, the Government put together a quick fix to persuade people to vote with them. That political fix is rapidly becoming unglued.

The Government promised a subsidy that would keep 12 collieries open while they were market testing. The Government have been unclear about the length of time that that market testing should take. Since March, four pits have closed in Nottinghamshire. There are grave concerns at Rufford, Bilsthorpe and Calverton about the future of those mines as market-testing pits.

The House knows that the men at British Coal have decided to close Rufford colliery. Last week the Prime Minister said that that decision was taken for two reasons: first, there were geological problems and, secondly, the men had voted to close the colliery. He was wrong on both counts. If, 12 weeks ago, that pit was fit to be kept open, what has changed geologically since then? The answer is that there has been a recognition within British Coal that its marketplace is so limited that, although it is technically possible to keep the colliery open, there is not the financial strength to do so.

There are 600 men at Rufford colliery, but only 226 of them voted for the closure. Rufford is closing because of British Coal's vindictive tactics. The men at the colliery were told that, if the pit was not closed before December, they would lose £10,000. I am not criticising people for taking tough decisions. The Minister for Energy should give a clear response tonight and help the industry. His colleague, the Secretary of State, talked about compassion being shown not just on one side. If the Minister has compassion, he should state tonight that, following consultation with the chairman of British Coal, he will extend the period beyond December. That would give people confidence.

The men of Rufford were also told that, if they did not take the money now and the pit was not closed before the autumn, they would not have the chance of another job. They were told that, if the pit was closed now, they would be transferred. That was held out as their hope for the future.

That is how miners in Nottinghamshire and across the country have been treated. The miners have done everything asked of them and more. Let us consider the record. They have increased productivity by 150 per cent. over the past five years. They are producing coal at half the cost of Germany. In the past six years, the price in real terms of coal from the pithead has not increased. Is it any wonder that all across Europe people think that we are crazy for closing our collieries?

The hon. Members for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) and for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) talked about their collieries such as Point of Ayr and Selby. They said that those collieries had a secure future. I beg them not to be taken in by guile because the logic of the marketplace speaks for itself. The contract with the generators is for 30 million tonnes next year. If we take off opencast mining—possibly 10 million tonnes—we will be left with a good period of closure over the next six to 18 months. I believe that that closure period will reduce the number of collieries to, at best, 15, and perhaps even to 12 —there will be consequences for privatisation.

We would be left with a rump of collieries. Conservative Members who argue for splitting that group are talking about slitting the throat of the rump of the industry because the energy market is a tough market. We need groups of pits of three, four or 12 to ensure that the industry survives. The call for privatisation sounds the death knell of the industry.

It may well be right to talk about the strengths of the Selby coalfield, but I make a prediction. Given the rate of extraction at Selby, the fact that there is a danger of flooding in the Vale of York, the pressures in the ground at York, and the fact that the overheads at Selby are split between a group of collieries, it is possible that, instead of being the pit of the 21st century, Selby will be closed by the year 2000 or 2005.

There has been talk about additional new contracts with the generators, but such events will not happen for a

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long time. The facts speak for themselves. National Power holds 19 million tonnes of coal and PowerGen holds 14 million tonnes. What is at issue is not the price of coal being offered for the new contracts, but the volume of the contracts.

People have talked about the recent hot weather. If I had a fridge full of lager cans and someone knocked at my door saying that I could buy cut-price lager, but I had no place to store and cool the lager, I would not buy it whatever the price. That is the position in which the generators currently find themselves. It is clear that no additional contracts will be forthcoming. At best, if the Government use their best endeavours, the additional contracts will be small.

The future of the deep-mined coal industry in this country looks extremely bleak. If the Government care about the future and do not want to renege on the commitments that they have given the miners, they must do something about the problem. First, they could move quickly on the nuclear review. Earlier this year, the Minister for Energy promised a nuclear review and said that he would announce its terms before the recess. Will he repeat that statement tonight? Will he confirm that the nuclear review will be announced and will take place quickly? The coal industry will survive only if space is made within the energy market.

It is clear that gas has many advantages. It is fascinating that gas can be subject to a 15-year contract but coal has one of only five years. It was astonishing to hear Conservative Members argue the case tonight for opencasting, because decisions about that should be made locally. It is obscene to tear up fields, pull down hedgerows and knock down trees, when the need for coal can be supplied from the deep-mining industry.

What is the Minister doing about creating a European energy market, and discovering the element of subsidy in EDF—the French company? It is clear that we do not have open access to the European market. The Minister must act quickly to save what remains of the British coal industry.

The Minister probably knows the real hostility that is felt over the Government's backing of British Coal on the pension fund issue. British Coal employees think that it is obscene that, as they see it, they are paying from their pension fund the cost of their own redundancies. That is not right or proper; it is immoral, and it will be challenged in the courts. I hope that the challenge will be successful.

We want more than anything else a coal industry that is successful, and in which people are rewarded for their efforts.

8.40 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): Although there was a sombre hue to part of the speech of the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping), I am glad to follow him, because he sought to move some of the cloud of doom from Nottinghamshire to Selby, which I have the honour of representing.

In the light of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, I will place on record comments that I hope will restore the perspective. They were made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade in the House on 19 October last year:

> **"After the contraction of the industry that we are contemplating, British Coal will still be the largest contributor to electricity generation in this country. I confirm that the Selby group is a core part of the future of the British coal industry. We have invested £1·3 billion in that group of pits, which has played its part in securing the improved productivity upon which the long-term viability and, therefore, the future of the industry depend."—[*Official Report*, 19 October 1992; Vol. 212, c. 214.]**

Perhaps I may, without embarrassing him, sound a note of agreement with the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), while disagreeing with something said by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). I do not believe that coal is in decline; the hon. Member for Rother Valley is right when he says that it is a fuel with a future in the international dimension. I believe that it is a fuel with a future also in Britain, quite apart from having the lion's share of electricity generation that it has traditionally enjoyed.

Gigantic sums have been invested in pits such as the Selby group. When the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) made his challenging speech about the British coal industry's future—from the point of view of someone like yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who spent a lifetime in the pits—he was at pains to itemise the enormous increase in productivity that British Coal has achieved over the past decade. He said that the figure had increased from 2·3 million tonnes per man shift 10 years ago to 8 million tonnes per man shift today. I believe that the exact figure is 7·86 million tonnes, which must be a record average.

When one places that against the figure of more than 30 million tonnes per man shift that is regularly achieved at Selby, one sees the dividend from the unprecedented scale of investment made there by this Government and since the end of the war. One sees also the dividend from manpower productivity that such investment secures.

One must agree with the hon. Member for Rother Valley that there is a future for the coal industry in Britain, based on pits such as Selby where there has been huge investment and staggering productivity is being achieved, which can challenge and beat any importer and even dumped coal, if we are allowed to have our way.

The hon. Member for Normanton, who is a near neighbour of mine in Yorkshire terms, made a plea for the coal industry in general and for his constituency pits in particular. That is the dilemma. Given the productivity achieved at Selby as a result of massive investment, it is self-evident that if the entire British coal industry is to have a future, investment and output must be concentrated on the pits where productivity is on the Selby scale. That means facing a continuing contraction of less productive, less effective pits in different parts of the country and concentrating on those such as Selby.

That is not simply a self-interested, constituency point, because a large proportion of those employed at the Selby group come not from my constituency but are miners who were redeployed from pits in south and west Yorkshire. The logic of concentrating coal mining on high-productivity pits such as Selby is that it offers a genuine prospect of continuing employment in coal mining for those who want it. Even within the Selby complex, a number of miners were attracted by voluntary redundancy terms. In recent years, we lost 3,000 workers voluntarily, which has helped to increase the group's productivity even more dramatically.

If one combines the scale of support for relocation, retraining and re-employment that the Government

manage to provide through British Coal Enterprise Ltd. and by other means with the corresponding huge investment in modern pits such as Selby that has been seen since 1979 and even more dramatically since the 1984 strike, one gets the best of both worlds. One achieves a world-beating British coal industry with prospects for the future, redeployment of manpower, and the sustaining of the old coal mining communities.

The Government have pursued an acceptable and rational policy. They made effective use of the huge amounts of money that they poured into the industry, and have tempered the winds of redundancy for those who will be displaced from older pits. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to continue with that double-barrelled approach of rational, if costly, investment resulting in a high-productivity, low-cost industry, and of offering hope to miners of redeployment in other industries or of being drawn to areas such as Selby, where many miners have already been redeployed.

8.49 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): The right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) spoke about the mining complex in his constituency. I remind him that it was the last Labour Government who provided the investment for that complex under their "Plan for Coal" between 1974 and 1979 when a market of 150 tonnes was planned. The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but if he checks he will find that that is the case.

We are beginning to see the level of the deception perpetrated by the Government on the public and the mining industry since last October when the decision to close 31 pits was followed by a tremendous public outcry. That showed that people were sick to death of what the Government were doing to the industry. In October, dozens of Tory Members ran to the press saying that they would not vote for the measure unless more than 20 pits were saved. With one or two notable exceptions, all those hon. Members backed off and supported the Government's proposals.

The White Paper was published in March, but it was basically a worthless document, designed simply to placate Conservative Members and decieve the country into believing that some parts of the industry were to be saved and some collieries reprieved. It was a quick fix to get the Government out of a hole. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) said, only 12 weeks after the proposals were published, collieries that were supposed to be reprieved are being closed. Production has already ceased at about 20 pits and the reprieved pits are again in line for closure. In addition to three that have closed already, another three in south Yorkshire seem to be under threat.

Not a penny of subsidy has been paid by the Government to support the industry. The extra tonnage due to be sold to the generators has not been sold to them. The aid to the industry suggested in the White Paper was a complete sham. Some of the collieries not even mentioned in October or referred to in the White Paper, the safe 19 collieries, are also under threat. Some of the 12 that have been reprieved or put out to market testing might be saved at the expense of some of the collieries which at that time were said to be economic. That shows that there is no economic case for the closure of any of those collieries.

Comparison of the performance of one colliery against another, profit comparison, is futile. The Government are trying to reduce the amount of coal being produced because there is no market for it. It was wrong for the President of the Board of Trade to speak on a number of occasions about uneconomic pits, because it is simply a case of taking out lumps of the market.

The arguments that my colleagues and I have advanced since October, especially in March when the issue was debated, have proved to be correct. There is no economic case for closure; the Government are simply removing tonnages and the White Paper failed to address the problem of the market for coal. We have said that time and again, but that market could be addressed if the Government had the political will to do that. They have not done anything to increase the market for coal.

The Government have not done much for the coal industry since 1974, the days when the Government of whom Baroness Thatcher was a member were forced out of office because of the coal strike. In October, Lord Parkinson reiterated the philosophy that the Government have attacked the industry since 1974 because they blame it and the National Union of Mineworkers for their loss of office at that time.

Most of the coal industry's problems arose from the privatisation of the electricity supply industry and the creation of a rigged market. The creation of the duopoly of National Power and PowerGen gave those companies the opportunity to buy coal from any source. That followed lobbying by Lord Marshall of Goring, the then chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board, who made no secret of the fact that he wanted to buy coal from other than British Coal. He told a Select Committee on Energy that the CEGB took 85 per cent. of its coal from British Coal and that that would have to change. He did not advance any economic or diversity arguments for that but simply said that it had to change.

The privatisation of the electricity supply industry gave the go-ahead for the dash for gas. There was such a flurry of applications that British Gas had to increase its price by 35 per cent. in respect of stations not already contracted. Killingholme gas station opened on 19 April with a staff of 35. It is completely false for Conservative Members to say that jobs in oil and gas will be lost. Some 19 GW of gas-fired generation are likely to come on stream; that is equivalent to about 30 million tonnes of coal, which—surprise, surprise—is the contract for next year's coal market. Gas-fired generation from stations that have not yet even been built could totally eclipse the contract market for British Coal. No jobs have been lost as the stations have not yet been built and, in any case, 35 people are required to man one such power station.

For years the Government have refused to implement any sort of sensible energy policy. Their only policy is to leave it to the market. The Government have totally rebuffed all opportunities for coal. The Select Committee on Energy, which is now disbanded, took evidence on clean coal technology, about which some hon. Members have spoken.

There is no way in which the Government will back such technology. They closed the pressurised fluidised bed combustion plant at Grimethorpe and have no intention of looking at any advanced technology using clean coal. The operations of our competitors, especially Texaco in America, are far in advance of anything that has been done in this country. It is the old argument, which was also

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advanced in respect of the fast reactor, that we do not want it here and will not spend on it, but we will buy somebody else's technology when it is up and running and everybody else has bought it.

Hon. Members have spoken about how the market for British coal can be improved. Despite the damage to our balance of payments, we have the capacity to import millions of tonnes of coal which is dumped, sold at less than its cost of production, by other thriving coal industries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) spoke about the new coal terminals. On 23 June, the *Financial Times* carried a photograph of the Portbury dock at Bristol, which is one of the biggest terminals in the country, with the capacity to handle 7 million tonnes of imported coal a year. On the day that the photograph was taken, a 37,000-tonne ship was unloading coal for National Power. Gladstone dock on Merseyside will open later this year and will have a capacity to handle 5 million tonnes a year.

That is nothing new: we have been talking about it for years during debates on the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill. When the Select Committee on Energy looked at the coal industry, it warned of the effect, and the conclusions of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry are nothing new, although the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) referred to them as if they were set in concrete. The Energy Select Committee issued those warnings years ago.

I have already mentioned the threat from gas and the 30 million tonnes that could eclipse the coal industry altogether, but gas-fired generation is not cheaper than the existing coal-fired generation. On the contrary, it is more expensive. The gas-fired generators are also bidding to the pricing pool at a negative price, so they are, in effect, submitting a contract to give their power away. Due to the workings of the pool price mechanism, those gas-fired generators take the marginal cost into the pool and take the highest cost capacity. Bidding with a negative bid and taking out the highest cost capacity, they say, "Thank you very much," and make a profit.

Last week, it was announced that the subsidy to nuclear power for the year was £1·35 billion. Nuclear power has a guaranteed market, but privatisation exposed the sham of the nuclear power industry—it is far more expensive. Other factors to be considered are that 93 per cent. of opencast sites are on green field sites and that power prices have increased by 32 per cent. in the past year, an increase into which Professor Littlechild requested an investigation. Blue Circle Cement complained that the price——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

9.2 pm

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): It is a matter for regret that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade cannot be with us for the debate. I know that I am not alone in wishing him a full and speedy recovery.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment made some powerful points about the 353 pits closed by Labour Governments, from 1964 to 1970 and from 1974 to 1979, with the attendant loss of 185,000 coal industry jobs. That is certainly a fair point to make, but tonight we must address the reality of the present situation and the prospects for tomorrow. That is what the men, in what remains of the mining industry, want to hear in the House.

Those prospects look decidedly bleak. The market for coal has effectively collapsed. The generators are clearly abusing their joint monopoly. Having challenged the Government on several points, the generators have won the day. They seem quite determined not to commit themselves to any new purchases before October or November; even then, they will not sign for long-term contracts, but propose to buy in parcels of 200,000 or 300,000 tonnes under tender. That will surely make the United Kingdom price collapse to below world market levels.

The generators know how that policy of buying short wrecked the United States coal industry in the 1960s and evidently they are seeking to emulate it over here. In May, British Coal offered the generators coal at 93p per gigajoule delivered to inland power stations. Even at that price, it was unable to find purchasers.

The generators want to close capacity at their older coal-fired stations. Some of those stations are 30 years old and have no gas cleaning. None the less, the owners are refusing to sell at a true market value; instead, they are demanding the replacement value for those antiquated assets because they do not wish for competition. Although there is a gross surplus of plant and of input fuels, the price of electricity does not go down. Where is the regulator? Where is the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? Where are the Government to hold the ring where patently there is no free market?

The British mining industry is in better condition today than it has been at any time this century. British coal can be produced at 80p per gigajoule, yet viable pits are being closed. Silverdale pit, into which £90 million was invested five years ago and which has a new drift, with 30 years of life, is to be closed. Both Rossington and Markham Main pits have seen £6 million to £7 million pounds worth of equipment buried. It is difficult to describe that as anything other than institutionalised vandalism.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): In Newcastle, we have no information that Silverdale is to be closed. We ask the question all the time. No one has told us that it is to be closed. I only wish that someone would tell us what is happening in Silverdale.

Mr. Eggar: It is not closing.

Mr. Churchill: I heard my hon. Friend say that it is not to be closed. I am delighted to know that and I hope that remains the position. To see such an investment put into jeopardy would be a serious matter.

Meanwhile, British Coal is importing about 100,000 tonnes of Polish coal, and the figure will rise as more pits close. In addition, about 500,000 tonnes of Colombian coal is being landed at Thames docks and a further one third of a million tonnes at Mersey docks. Meanwhile, the generators are planning a major uplift from their stocks, which stand at 34 million tonnes. If they are allowed to run down their stocks too fast, there will be virtually no market for any coal above the core contracts in the current year, no matter at what price it is offered.

In the current year, the British Coal core contracts are down by 25 million tonnes to 40 million tonnes. The nuclear industry is increasing its output by 2 million tonnes to 24 million tonnes coal equivalent. Gas is up by

7 million tonnes to 11 million tonnes coal equivalent. The others are stable at 18 million tonnes, making a total of 93 million tonnes in the current year. That leaves uncommitted from the estimated fuel burn this year only 16 million tonnes.

That is sufficient to provide life and justification for the 12 reprieved pits; but if, as seems likely, the generators are allowed to uplift 11 million tonnes of their 34 million tonnes of stock, that leaves only 5 million tonnes uncommitted in the current year, of which 2 million tonnes almost certainly will go to imports, leaving just 3 million tonnes available in the current year. On that basis, there is no way in which the 12 so-called "reprieved" pits can have a future.

The Government should make it clear to the generators that there must be no rapid rundown of stocks. It have said it before, and I make no apology to the House for saying it again: we do not have a free market in energy. We have a heavily rigged market—indeed, a subsidised market in certain quarters. Between last year and 1996-97, the nuclear input will increase by 6 million tonnes coal equivalent and the gas input by 30 million tonnes coal equivalent—each million tonnes, in round figures, displacing a pit.

Both those energy sources have privileged access to the market. Gas can pass on the capital costs to the consumer of its newly built power stations. They were set up by the regional electricity companies, so they have a cosy relationship with them. Nuclear energy has not only privileged but guaranteed access to the market for every kilowatt hour that it produces. On top of that, nuclear power gets a £1,200 million a year subsidy. So much for the free market—it just does not exist.

The Government's amendment claims that they have accepted the principal recommendations of the Select Committee report. They have indeed accepted the key recommendation of providing a subsidy to the generators to burn up to 16 million tonnes of coal over the above the 40 million tonnes core contract. That appears to amount to a subsidy of £400 million to £500 million. Despite undertakings given by the Government, and specifically by the President of the Board of Trade, that the Government would use their best endeavours to widen the market for coal, which alone can underpin and give a long life to the reprieved pits, there is no evidence that they have any will or determination to do so. Without a wider market, there will be no additional sales. Without additional sales, no subsidy will be payable; that subsidy will remain entirely theoretical and uncommitted.

I will put three questions to my hon. Friend the Minister. First, have the Government told the new Government of France, at the highest level, that it is unacceptable to the House and to the country that taxpayers' money should be used to import electricity from France—the most expensive electricity on the United Kingdom market, with a price identified by the Select Committee of 3·4p per kWh—with the effect of putting no fewer than six British pits out of business?

Secondly, have the Government taken steps, as recommended by the Select Committee, to explore the possibility of gas stations being used for mid-merit or peak generation, instead of for baseload capacity? If that were done, a market could be provided for 10 additional pits.

Thirdly, are the Government willing to order the generators to draw down their stocks at no greater a rate than 5 million tonnes a year? That might prove critical in saving some of the 12 reprieved pits.

I fear that not enough is being done by the Government to underpin the market for coal. It is not enough to tell the mining industry, "Here is a subsidy—go out and find yourself a market." The Government must live up to their responsibilities and play their part in finding that wider market because, as many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, it is a rigged market.

It is about time that the Government made it clear that they are prepared to re-rig the market in favour of coal instead of against it. That could be done by establishing a neutral flow through the interconnector with France, by reining back gas stations to 70 or 75 per cent. of operations —at which point they would still be profitable, although not as profitable as was originally planned—and by curbing the rundown of stocks. Without those three essential elements, or a combination thereof, the 12 reprieved pits have no future and those pits, and others perhaps on the list of 19, will inevitably close.

We are presiding over the closure of the most efficient deep-mined coal industry in Europe. We are abandoning Europe's greatest national resource and condemning Britain in the 21st century to becoming dependent on imported energy, with all the implications that that holds for our balance of payments and our security of supply. The Government's short-term attitude to our long-term energy resources and their refusal to exert themselves to give coal a fair opportunity to compete on equal terms with other fuels in the years ahead means that, with a heavy heart, I shall be casting my vote against the Government tonight. The miners of Britain and the coalfield communities that depend on them deserve better from the Government than they have so far been offered.

9.13 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): I am somewhat pressed for time, as I understand that I must finish at about 9.20 pm. I shall be as brief and succinct as possible, as most hon. Members have been tonight.

First, I declare an interest, as I am sponsored by the National Union of Mineworkers. My sponsorship does not perhaps reach the large amounts that we have read about in connection with Mr. Nadir—that is quite a name to have under the circumstances—but it is something of which I am proud. I was a miner for 21 years.

I have been waiting since I entered Parliament to put one or two things straight. First, I want to tell the Secretary of State that I do, indeed, burn a coal fire, and have done so for many years. I did not want to intervene from a sedentary position when the challenge was made earlier in our proceedings.

The second thing that I have wanted to say for a long time concerns the term, "the enemy within", which was applied to me and to many others by the Baroness Thatcher in 1984. Under those circumstances and according to those criteria, I am very proud to be classed as the enemy within.

I want to regale the House with a story. My grandfather was a member of the Durham Miners Association. In 1940, some miners were working two or three days a week and the Durham Miners Association was having to pay out large sums in unemployment benefit—none the less, it

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managed to provide two Spitfire fighter planes for the benefit of the nation. Shortly after that, the association was responsible for collecting many thousands of pounds, which was a tremendous amount of money in those days, to try to help the Russian people who were fighting against German oppression.

When I hear Baroness Thatcher talking about the enemy within and when I think about my perception of the miners, I wonder just how much money went from the Grantham grocers to help the Government out during those troubled times.

Unfortunately, I was not called in the debates last October or in March, but at least I shall have my six minutes today. It was fairly obvious from the public response to the debate that followed the announcement by the President of the Board of Trade that 31 pits were to close, that the public did not accept that the free market forces system had worked.

In effect, the public were telling hon. Members on both sides of the House—at the time, there was a response from many Conservative Back Benchers—that they wanted the Government to do what they had elected them to do, which was not to leave matters to market forces but to govern the country. That was what people voted for, even if many of them voted for the wrong party and now realise their mistake. The public wanted the Government to act —to do something about the situation.

I am as sorry as anyone about what has happened to the President of the Board of Trade in recent weeks; I hope that he is soon back here among us. I should have liked him to be here to hear what I have to say, because I do not like talking behind people's backs—which, in the circumstances, is almost inevitable, as I am sure all hon. Members will understand. I shall refer to the Government instead.

The Government played for time. It is a sad fact that, if one is cynical, one is often proved right. Last October, I took the view that the Government were shocked by the reaction that they received from the public, and played for time. When I introduced a ten-minute Bill in December, I said as much. I said that we were not being kidded, that we knew what the end result would be. Sadly, we have been proved right.

It is not correct for the Government to say that they have accepted the main points of the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry report. In fact, the reverse is the case. I must say in passing that my union —the NUM—did not think that a very good job had been done, and was highly critical of the Select Committee report. Nevertheless, had the Government accepted the letter and spirit of that report, we should not be in the position that we are in today.

It is interesting to examine the recommendations that were accepted. The President of the Board of Trade said quite honestly, throughout the investigation, that the problem was the market. My view is that the market has been distorted since the denationalisation of the generating industry. In many ways, the present Government are not to blame—Lords Wakeham and Parkinson were the ones responsible for the destabilisation of our generating industry.

The only proposals that have been put forward since then have involved a subsidy, which the Government know will never be taken up—just as the colleries will not be bought by a private owner—because there is no market: the coal cannot even be given away. The second suggestion was for longer hours.

Wearmouth colliery, which is in my constituency, is doing extremely well. It is working better reserves than it has had in its 150-year history: it is working in coal 7 ft 6 in thick, unlike that mentioned by the Secretary of State when he talked about the thin seams full of chlorine and sulphur. Only 25 per cent. of its coal is finding a market. Although £20 million was invested in Wearmouth colliery, unless the Government interfere, it is doomed, as are many others.

Many of my constituents, not only miners, think that the Government have been responsible for a sophisticated piece of political chicanery, and that is what it is. I hope that one or two Government Back Benchers, some of whom have an honourable record of voting against what they do not believe in, may come to our rescue tonight. If nothing else, it would let the public see what is going on. On that happy note, I will conclude.

9.20 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): In some respects, the debate has been encapsulated in the last two speeches. We have heard a miner speak with authority, considerable personal knowledge and experience and great affection for his industry. We also heard the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) announce his intention to vote with us this evening because of his dissatisfaction with the manner in which the future of the industry has been handled. It is clear that, in the past nine months, this country has, on a number of occasions, been transfixed by the future of the coal industry.

It is perhaps no accident that the Government managers decided that this Opposition debate should be held at the same time as the announcement on defence cuts. It is certainly true that other issues apart from the coal industry are being given media attention.

It must be said that if the defence of the country depends on strategic considerations, our supply of energy is of equal strategic significance. It requires equal long-term planning and equal support from the Government at every stage in that process.

Today's debate has lacked some of the colour that we would have associated with it had the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) been present. We all wish him well in his recovery. As the speech of the Secretary of State for Employment showed, the debate was Hamlet without the President, although, at one stage, we had the ghost from Leeds trying to make a contribution.

If there is a tragedy today, it is the way in which the Government have handled the coal industry. The work force in the past two decades did everything asked of them. Those who in the 1960s and 1970s were offered the opportunity to seek other employment did so in the knowledge that there were opportunities for work elsewhere. The closures that the Labour Governments of that time carried out, although on occasions in times of controversy, were carried out in the knowledge that those individuals would be able to obtain secure employment in the future.

It is also clear that, in the past two decades, the coal industry has been capable of increasing its productivity by quite massive amounts. Now that the Secretary of State is

back in his place, I should like him to try for once to treat the debate seriously, as there was great play made of the apparent increase in productivity in the 1980s compared with the 1970s. However, he did not make clear his basis of comparison.

In the 1970s, the driving of roads into collieries to allow access to coal was carried out by British Coal employees. That meant that they were not producing coal but were going through stone, scrap and the like. That was not reflected in the productivity figures, and it was characteristic of the Secretary of State's disgraceful speech that he did not have the intellectual honesty to compare like with like on this fundamental question. He shakes his head. If he would care to dispute that point, I am happy to give him the opportunity to do so.

A number of hon. Members referred to the Select Committee's report, which said that no more consents should be granted for combined cycle gas turbines and that, since the publication of the White Paper consents for some 1,500 MW of CCGT power at Staythorpe, King's Lynn and others had been granted—the equivalent of some 10 million tonnes of coal, yet, at the same time coal-fired plants at West Thurrock, Palihan and Thorpe Marsh have been closed.

Thorpe Marsh, which is in Doncaster, is owned by National Power. In the May edition of *Power News*, the plant was praised for its thermal efficiency and excellent industrial relations. In March, the plant accepted 120 redundancies on the understanding that that would ensure its future. Since 1990, £40 million has been spent on the plant. The station consumed some 670,000 tonnes per annum—a third of the output of Bentley and Hatfield collieries.

Only 20 minutes up the road at Keasby a new 750 MW gas power station is being constructed. When the issue was raised on the Adjournment a couple of weeks ago by my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Sir H. Walker), the Minister for Energy said:

"It would not be appropriate for the Government to intervene on an issue of this kind."—[*Official Report*, 16 June 1993; Vol. 226, c. 972.]

I remind the Minister that the Government retain a 40 per cent. share in National Power and that £40 million of shareholders' money—in many respects, our money—has been spent on the station, to say nothing of the prospective redundancy costs. As the two collieries concerned were on the hit list, we can see that the consequences of the package of redundancies and closures will be considerable for that part of the country. I suppose that the cynic would say that it was merely an example of the wish being father to the thought.

We were told that gas-fired power stations are built on the assumption that coal-fired stations are dearer. The White Paper admits:

"At the prices in the prospective contract for British Coal suppliers from April 1993 onwards, the avoidable cost of generating electricity from large existing coal fired power stations (using 500 MW turbines) is generally less than the full costs of a new CCGT, assuming both run on baseload."

On the radio this morning, the Minister for Energy said that if there was a difference between the two it could be attributed to combined heat and power. *[Interruption.]* Some of us heard the radio programme this morning. Perhaps the Minister did not understand what he was saying. He said that the difference between coal-fired and gas-fired power stations was the thermal efficiency represented by combined heat and power. Today, the director general of the Combined Heat and Power Association issued a press statement suggesting that that claim was rather difficult to support because only 1 per cent. of the new power stations have CHP.

The difference does not come from that at all. The only difference between the two arises from the arrangement of the baseload efficiency of CCGT. Coal-fired power stations will not be able to operate on baseload. There is the rub. It is not simply a matter of markets or a matter of demand; it is a matter of how the markets work. The way in which the markets work is at the core of the problems of the coal-fired power stations, because they are not being given the chance to operate on base load. That opportunity is being afforded to the gas-fired stations, which do not need to operate on base load but are best suited to operate on an on-off basis. Those power stations are being given an unfair advantage. That issue was addressed in the Select Committee report, but not in the White Paper.

We have heard not only that British coal is less expensive than the CCGT product, but that it has had large amounts of Government assistance. The Secretary of State said today that it had been given some £17·8 billion worth of subsidy since 1982, but, since 1979, operating grants have represented less than 1 per cent. of Government grants to the coal industry. The money has gone on deficit grants to British Coal, but there have been no deficit grants since 1989. The money has been spent on increased pension costs, social costs, concessionary coal and the like. The grants have cushioned the blow of redundancy, but have not enabled coal to compete with other fuels.

The Government claim to have provided British Coal with an indirect subsidy through price support and the three-year coal contracts agreed after privatisation of the electricity industry; yet, in a formal submission made to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Government said:

"these understandings—

that is, the contracts and the money that was made available to those companies—

"are commercial arrangements between the companies concerned and . . . contain no element of state aid or price support."

Moreover, the United Kingdom Government have a duty to inform the European Commission of any indirect state aid to the coal industry. According to the Commission, no such aid has been provided by the United Kingdom since 1986.

We find that the central points made by the Secretary of State—that coal is dearer than gas, that productivity is somehow higher when the Conservatives are in power, and that the Government have given substantial amounts of money to the coal industry—have been shown to be completely untrue.

As to the recommendations of the Select Committee report, the Government have said that they support a subsidy, yet not a penny has been given. No figure has been set on the total amount available. Even the so-called subsidy differs from that recommended by the Select Committee, and my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) made that point forcefully in his speech.

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

The Select Committee subsidy was to go to the generators to buy additional coal; the White Paper subsidy is to go to British Coal to enable it to sell coal to the generators. The White Paper subsidy is restricted to the energy market; the Select Committee subsidy was also to go to the industrial market. The figures that have emerged from the coal report today suggest that money is required to give support to industrial users, given their current exodus from the coal market.

To the extent that any figure can be placed on the subsidy, it will certainly not exceed the sum that British Coal, with the encouragement of the Government, is trying to filch from the staff superannuation scheme—a theft which is curently being dealt with by the courts—and we will see what success it has in robbing, Maxwell-style, that pension scheme.

At the heart of our case against the White Paper is not merely the duplicity surrounding the proposal to subsidise but the Government's failure to deal with the basic reasons for coal's inability to compete with gas in a fair market. The Select Committee made several recommendations. It recommended that Nuclear Electric should cease to receive income from the fossil fuel levy, that combined cycled gas turbines should be used as mid-merit or peak instead of baseload capacity, that French electricity imports should cease to be non-leviable, that the Government should provide a subsidy to the electricity generators which should then be required to purchase additional coal and that a subsidy for additional sales in the industrial market should also be provided.

The Committee also recommended that the Government should adopt specific measures to support flue gas desulphurisation and clean coal technologies and should require the generators to hold coal stocks of at least 20 million tonnes. That amount is being held at the moment, and we should like to think that it will be held for some time to come although we know that the generators intend to allow the stocks to fall to about 10 million tonnes.

Such issues are the fault lines of the debate. They are the difference between those who support the Government's position and those who support that of the Select Committee.

In recent months and years, some people have been quizzical about the Government's support for the industry. This evening, we have seen Government Whips running around with bits of paper, putting pressure on hon. Members to speak. One of the individuals who was going to make a most pertinent speech was almost squeezed out and managed to speak only at the very end. In the previous debate, four Conservative Members voted with the Opposition and another four denied the Government their support. There were many who were, I suppose, giving the Government the benefit of the doubt; but we were pretty certain that the Government would not deliver.

We believed that the promise of a subsidy would not be enough to encourage the generators to buy more coal. It was clear to us that the Government would not use their powers to require the generators to maintain the levels of stocks. In that respect, we are waiting to see what the summer brings and what they are prepared to utilise during that period. We were certainly under no illusion that the Government would do anything to frustrate the attempts of Electricité de France to sell us nuclear power, which has proved to be the case. We were vindicated because we suspected that the Government would do nothing to interfere with the electricity market.

We were now able to see clearly what the Government's intentions were. As someone said today, they intended to get a quick fix. They got it and survived but they now need the continued support of their Back Benchers. This is an opportunity for those who gave the Government their grudging support last time to say that what they have offered since is not good enough, that they have betrayed the trust placed in them and that they have betrayed the coal industry and those who work in it and depend on it. I ask those hon. Members to join my right hon. and hon. Friends and their own hon. Friends in the Lobby to defend our great industry, the coalfield communities and our great national asset, our coal reserves.

9.38 pm

The Minister for Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): In his opening comments, the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) referred to the statement that was made earlier this afternoon. For a moment, I thought that the hon. Gentleman thought that he was still shadow spokesman for defence. I am not surprised that I thought that, because one of the noticeable things about the past few months has been the way in which the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has consistently hogged the airwaves on all energy matters. He really has been the invisible shadow energy spokesman. Looking at the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and the other Opposition Members sponsored by the National Union of Mineworkers, I can understand why the hon. Member for Clackmannan has been kept off the Opposition Front Bench on these matters.

When the hon. Member for Clackmannan said something positive, what was he urging? He urged intervention and Government decision taking and rejected any market solution. Having listened to the hon. Gentleman tonight, I can understand why the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) was on the Opposition Front Bench during the last coal debate.

We have had a good debate and 21 right hon. and hon. Members have spoken——

Mr. Robin Cook: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Eggar: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

The central issue of the debate, to which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) referred and which my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) mentioned, were the major measures announced by the Government following the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. Following that review and during the period of consultation on the White Paper, many opinions were offered to the Government. However, the one consistent theme was that there was an additional market for coal if only the Government would make available a subsidy to British Coal or to other private sector producers.

We have made that subsidy available. We have not guaranteed an additional market for coal because that is not within our control or within the control of the Select Committee. Nor is it within the control of the private coal

producers or British Coal. We have offered no guarantees. However, we have offered opportunities for additional coal sales and we have made available hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money to support that.

Mr. Churchill: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Robin Cook *rose*——

Mr. Eggar: I will willingly give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Churchill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Of course everyone understands that the Government were not able to guarantee a market. However, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade undertook, on behalf of the Government, to use his best endeavours to secure a wider market for coal. That does not simply need a subsidy—it requires a redressing of the imbalance against coal that is exemplified by the fact that the taxpayer is paying £1·2 billion a year in subsidy to Nuclear Electric, which has a guaranteed market for its output.

Mr. Eggar: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's point. However, the British coal industry receives considerable assistance. This Government have spent £18 billion on the industry since 1979. Every year for the past three years British consumers have paid £1 billion more to pay for electricity by buying British coal than they would have if they had bought electricity generated from imported coal. To say that the market is somehow rigged against coal is simply not accurate.

Mr. Robin Cook: I am most grateful to the Minister for observing the normal courtesies of the Front Bench. May I gently remind him that my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) spoke in the last coal debate because the Government put up the Secretary of State for Wales rather than the Minister for Energy to reply to the debate. As the Minister has just assured the House that there is no rigged market, will he answer the question that has remained unanswered since 4 pm? If it is not a rigged market, why is it that the generators will not buy coal at a price that will enable them to provide electricity cheaper than from gas, cheaper than from nuclear power, and cheaper than they can buy it from France? Why not?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman has never understood how a market works. He knows perfectly well that the generators and the independent power producers could readily have built new coal-fired stations. They were free to do that. They were free to take advantage of the cheap coal to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The generators have not done that, nor have the independent power producers done it. They have chosen to invest in gas stations. They have done that because they know that, in the present market conditions, gas is a cheaper way of producing electricity than coal is. Many independent decisions have been reached and many people have decided to invest in extra power generation. They have all opted for gas and not for coal. That is the true test of whether coal is competitive.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) referred to the redeployment of equipment at Bevercotes. I know of his concern and that of the UDM on this matter. I have been in regular close touch with British Coal on it. I have been assured by the chairman of British Coal that no assets employed at Bevercotes will be redeployed unnecessarily and that the corporation will take each decision to salvage major equipment from those pits on the basis of all the economic criteria. Of course, that includes the use of that equipment in other pits. *[Interruption.]*

It is all very well Opposition Members jeering, but this has been a useful debate, and I am trying to answer specific points that have been mentioned.

Mr. Barron: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Eggar: I will try to refer to some of the points that were made by the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) in due course.

My hon. Friends the Members for Clywd, North-West (Mr. Richards) and for Batley and Spen referred to the importance of safety considerations. We entirely agree with them. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) is also concerned about that matter. We are working very closely with the Health and Safety Commission. I am sure that British Coal will ensure that all proper measures are taken.

The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) used some extravagant language about the British Coal pension fund. That was rather out of character for the hon. Gentleman. As I have said, there will be no rip-off of the pension funds, either the staff pension fund or the mineworkers' pension fund. The question at issue——

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Doing a Robert Maxwell?

Mr. Eggar: It is no good the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) shouting about Robert Maxwell. I know how close Robert Maxwell was to the Labour party, but on this issue there is no similarity whatsoever, because British Coal and the trustees have agreed that the matter in dispute between them will be considered by the High Court. I am sure that British Coal will adhere to the decision of the High Court on the issue.

The hon. Member for Midlothian and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) referred to help for the British mining equipment industry. I have met representatives of ABMEC, and we are working closely with them on a package of measures that are geared to try to assist their export market and smaller companies.

My hon. Friends the Members for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) and for Rochford (Dr. Clark) referred to the closure of power stations. They urged that we should take measures to try to ensure that, if they are closed, those power stations are made available to the private sector. I entirely agree with my hon. Friends' wish for greater competition to be developed in electricity generation. I agree that the sale of power stations could be one way of achieving that competition. In the first instance, of course, it is a commercial matter.

I heard what my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), said about the price that is allegedly being asked by the generators. I am watching that matter carefully and I know that the Director General for Electricity Supply is considering the matter. I am sure that the generators will pay attention to the considerable interest that has been expressed in the House on this matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe is concerned about the modernisation of coal-fired stations, which will provide a number of opportunities.

[Mr. Eggar]

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) asked for financial support for management and employee buy-out teams—he especially mentioned the Union of Democratic Mineworkers. We have always made it clear that we want to ensure that any management and employee teams bidding for the industry will have a fair opportunity to bid against other buyers.

I have written to the President of the UDM informing Neil Greatrex that the Government will give support to management and employee buy-out teams that are bidding for the main privatisation. We are prepared to fund up to 50 per cent. of the eligible costs of employing consultants and advisers up to a maximum of £200,000 per team. I am sure that that will be welcomed by the House.

Mr. Duncan: What the Minister has said will give——

Mrs. Peacock *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Member has been here long enough to know not to intervene when another hon. Member has the floor.

Mr. Duncan: What the Minister said will give enormous comfort to those who have the vision to make the most of the assets that they see and their hard work. On their behalf, I welcome what the Minister said.

Mr. Eggar: I thank my hon. Friend. The UDM and the people of Nottinghamshire will recognise the reaction of Labour Members. They are not interested in the miners of Nottinghamshire having a chance to buy or own those pits. The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) has kept quiet. I am sure that he is distressed by those Labour Members who are sponsored by the National Union of Mineworkers who do not want the UDM to show this sort of initiative.

Mrs. Peacock: I am listening carefully to what my hon. Friend is saying about help and support for management buy-outs. Can he tell the House what help he will give to private sector investors who want to take over the mines that British Coal wants to close? Those people are not given any help at all except a map reference. That is not good enough.

Mr. Eggar: Some 14 pits have been advertised for licensing to the private sector. I understand that British Coal has received serious expressions of interest for a considerable number of those pits. If my hon. Friend feels that the private sector is in some way being prevented from proceeding with the purchase or leasing of pits, she need only come to me and I will ensure that that matter is properly investigated. That is how it should be.

It is clear from the expression of Labour Members that they do not want miners to be offered the opportunity to work in private sector mines. The only sort of mining they want is in the public sector. They are not interested in jobs for miners or their constituents, or in giving opportunities to individuals. They are simply interested in control by the National Union of Mineworkers and the public sector. The Labour party does not change at all.

Mr. Hardy: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Eggar: Normally I would give way to the hon. Gentleman, but he was not here earlier, so I hope that he will forgive me for not giving way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme commented on the whole issue of coal stocks. I understand his concern about that and I understand the point made by the Select Committee.

We are in discussion with the generators on the appropriate level of stocking. Even the Select Committee's recommended level of 20 million tonnes is nowhere near what is held now. At the moment, 33 million tonnes are held at power stations and an additional 14 million tonnes at the pit heads. Whatever is finally decided about the appropriate stocking level will not have any significant impact on the likely draw down of those stocks, at least in the next few months. One must be realistic about that.

A number of hon. Members spoke about the electricity trade with France. It is no good the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) saying that he thought that he entered into that contract because it was a means of exporting coal by wire. Does he really mean that he committed Her Majesty's Government to massive public expenditure without understanding the terms on which the electricity was to flow?

The hon. Members for Livingston and for Clackmannan have consistently urged us to breach international undertakings and to go against the treaty of Rome. They want us to go against all the evidence that was produced for the Select Committee about the legal powers.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) gave a typical sitting-on-the-fence Liberal speech, but he did not mention what was said about energy in the Liberal party manifesto. In that manifesto, the hon. Gentleman informed us and the electorate that 45 per cent. of our electricity could be generated by wind power.

Let me tell the House what that actually means. It means that we would need 100,000 windmills, which would take up 25,000 sq km of our country; 10 per cent. of the country would be peopled with windmills. Would the hon. Gentleman offer all Liberal constituencies as a site for a windmill? What would he do if the wind stopped blowing? Would he be able to guarantee that Liberal constituencies would not be denied electricity if that were to happen? Such is the energy policy of the Liberal party.

We know that it is the duty of the Opposition to oppose. We also know that the Labour party is the captive of its history. We know of the power that the NUM-sponsored Members still wield within the parliamentary Labour party. Today, however, the Opposition spokesmen, the hon. Members for Livingston and for Clackmannan owed it to the House to do more than repeat their normal brew of smears, innuendo, half-truths and misrepresentations.

The Labour motion urges that a guaranteed future should be given to the pits, but the Opposition spokesmen said nothing about how that future would be achieved. We heard no word as to which nuclear power stations they wanted to close. We heard nothing about which construction workers for North sea rigs or power stations would lose their jobs. Do the Opposition want Teesside workers or those in north Wales to lose their jobs? Not one jot was said about that.

The Labour party offered no explanation about how it would advocate breaching the terms of the treaty of Rome governing the French interconnector. The Opposition did

not tell us which legally binding contracts they would break. If they want more coal produced, however, such contracts must be broken.

It is worse than that, because the Opposition have not sketched out their long-term vision of Britain's coal industry, except for the hon. Member for Livingston who said that he would oppose its privatisation. He and his hon. Friends have not said whether they would renationalise the industry. The hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) is nodding in agreement—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Caborn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Caborn—and I hope that it is a genuine point of order.

Mr. Caborn: The views of the Select Committee are being neglected, and the House is being misled. In no way did the Select Committee ask for any contract to be broken.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland) *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 286, Noes 308.

Division No. 315] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Richard
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Cash, William
Chisholm, Malcolm
Churchill, Mr
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff

Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael

Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 285.

Division No. 316] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor

Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Richard
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Cash, William
Chisholm, Malcolm
Churchill, Mr
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*

Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's acceptance of the principal recommendations of the Report by the Trade and Industry Committee "British Energy Policy and the Market for Coal" (HC 237), and in particular the offer of a transitional subsidy for additional sales of United Kingdom underground coal for electricity generation, the wide ranging package of measures to assist the regeneration of coal field areas, the commitment by British Coal that they will offer to the private sector pits which they do not themselves wish to keep in production, and the Government's intention to bring forward as rapidly as possible the legislation necessary to privatise British Coal.

Coal Sales (Financial Assistance)

10.29 pm

The Minister for Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): I beg to move,

That this House authorises the Secretary of State to pay, or undertake to pay, by way of financial assistance under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, sums exceeding £10 million in total but not exceeding £120 million in total to support sales of coal produced from underground mines in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): In our earlier debate, I tried to get an answer to a question but no response was forthcoming in the Minister's reply. In a letter to hon. Members dated 28 June, the chairman of the British Coal Corporation said that British Coal had

"made a very competitively priced offer to the generators for additional sales",

which had been rejected. The Minister said five days earlier that no one had actually asked for the subsidy to secure additional sales for British Coal. Could he tell us whether, when British Coal asked the generators, it knew how much per gigajoule the subsidy would be, or whether it was trying to negotiate with the generators without knowing how much the subsidy would be?

Mr. Eggar: Nobody knows what the level of subsidy is. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have noted from the parliamentary answer that I gave about two weeks ago that we have asked for a response both from British Coal and from private sector coal producers to assist us in setting the level of subsidy. To paraphrase my answer, we have basically asked for information regarding the world price of coal as they perceive it—as the hon. Gentleman will understand, there is a dispute about the level of the world price of coal.

We have asked producers for an indication of what their production costs are and, on that basis, we should like to proceed to set the level of subsidy that is available. I apologise for not being able to address the hon. Gentleman's point in my earlier remarks, but I can assure him that it was not a valid one, because there has as yet been no application for subsidy from British Coal.

Mr. Barron: Is the Minister telling the House that British Coal did not have the subsidy when it tried to negotiate additional sales and made the offer that has fallen through and been rejected by National Power, and probably also by PowerGen?

Mr. Eggar: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, by definition, British Coal did not know the level of the subsidy when it entered into whatever commercial negotiations it entered into with National Power. He has only to look at the answer that I gave.

The House will be aware that the White Paper outlined the Government's intention to offer financial support both to British Coal and to private sector coal producers who could secure a genuinely additional market for United Kingdom underground coal for electricity generation at world-related prices, where that was consistent with the relevant European Community provision. The Government propose to provide that support under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982. At this stage, I propose to set the limit for expenditure on the subsidy at £120 million.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Will the Minister make sure that he explains to the House how the subsidy works, in terms both of timing and of prior knowledge? He appeared to be saying to my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) that, at the time of negotiation with the generators, the scale of the subsidy is not known. That being so, how can anyone wishing to take advantage of the subsidy know what its value is?

Mr. Eggar: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. Further exploration is needed. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman understands, there is a genuine difference of view about the world price of coal.

Mr. Barron *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Eggar: It is no good the hon. Gentleman shaking his head. We have received representations from a number of different parties arguing about the world price. There are genuinely conflicting views, and much depends on what one factors in for transport costs and so on. In order to assist us with setting the level of subsidy, we have asked for information not only on what people perceive the world price to be—the House will understand the difference between spot and contact prices and so on—but also on production costs, because, as the Government and the Select Committee have repeatedly said, the subsidy is the difference between the world price and the production cost. At this stage we are waiting for additional information.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We know that at least two of the 12 market-tested pits have been closed as a result of all the shenanigans that have gone on. What will happen to the other 10? We cannot afford to wait a long time. There was speculation that, without this debate, British Coal would close one of those pits on each day of the miners' conference. This debate probably helped to prevent that for a while.

Here we have 10 pits that are still in the market-tested regime—we think. Let us assume that they want to take advantage of what is now a fairly favourable world market for British coal. We can argue about the price per gigajoule and all the rest, but we are close to it and better in many cases. The game will be finished before the end of the year for those 10 pits, so what is the procedure to ensure that miners and management can keep them open? The Minister must tell us exactly what the procedure is for ensuring that subsidy is paid so that they can get some of the extra market.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman's assertion that there is little difference between the production cost of some pits and the world price is probably not correct.

Mr. Skinner: Some of the pits are excellent.

Mr. Eggar: I quote from memory, because I do not have the figures exactly to hand, but I think that it is fair to say that the lowest cost deep-mined pit in the United Kingdom is the Selby complex, which is producing coal at slightly above £1 a gigajoule. Depending on the adjustment that one makes for the calorific value of our coal compared with world coal, and for such matters as chlorine and sulphur content, it is generally felt that the world price landed at ports is quite considerably less than £1 a gigajoule, although there is an argument about whether that is spot or contract prices. Transport costs must be considered as well.

A difficult and complicated assessment must be made to arrive at the world price. *[Interruption.]* This is a very difficult and important area. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) asked a perfectly reasonable question, and I am trying to answer it.

When private sector producers or British Coal have secured additional contracts or are advanced in their negotiations, they will provide the Government with the information for which we have asked—there is nothing to stop them providing it in advance—and we will consider each case on its merits. We shall bear in mind what the Select Committee said about the appropriate level of subsidy and make a decision in the light of that. We shall want to listen carefully to what British Coal and the private sector producers have to say.

Mr. Fisher *rose——*

Mr. Eggar: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman wants to make a speech, but it may help if I deal with questions in replying to the debate.

Mr. Fisher *rose——*

Mr. Eggar: If the hon. Gentleman still wants to intervene, I shall, of course, give way.

Mr. Fisher: The Minister has given us some idea of how the procedure works. Is he telling the House that it is the procedure that operated on the occasion referred to by Mr. Neil Clarke in his letter to hon. Members? He wrote:

"We made a very competitively priced offer to the generators for additioanl sales".

That offer was rejected by National Power.

Is the Minister saying that the generators came to him in the way that he has just described to the House? Has the procedure that he has described every been put into effect, and was it put into effect on that occasion?

Mr. Eggar: I thought that I had made the position clear; I apologise if I did not. British Coal has not come to us, and I think, although I am not certain—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to be helpful. I am sure that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) will make his own speech if he wishes; I shall try to pick up his points after that.

British Coal did not come to us. This is a commercial matter between British Coal and the power generators, and I understand that British Coal made an approach to the generators before the Government made clear what system they would adopt—in an answer to a parliamentary question from, I believe, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson).

Before I was interrupted, I was saying that we proposed to set the limit for expenditure on the subsidy at £120 million. Let me add, for the avoidance of doubt, that I intend to return to the House for further authorisation for funding if and when additional finance is required, because of the size of the subsidy.

As I have said, I shall seek leave of the House to answer any further points. I commend the motion to the House.

10.41 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): The constituency that I have the honour to represent is synonymous with the history of coal. Every village in that constituency started, in mediaeval times, as a small farming community,

developed a coal industry in the same period but was thoroughly exploited in the last century. Houses, roads and railways were built deliberately to provide for their lordships' coal, as it then was. Now there is only one pit left in an area that used to have more pitheads than any other English constituency, and that pit is under threat.

I do not want to repeat arguments that have already been adduced, but I feel that neither the Secretary of State nor the Minister has answered some of our questions. We have been talking specifically about the market. The Secretary of State spoke of what had happened under Labour and Conservative Governments, which was not helpful to the future of coal; if we are looking at history, we should try to draw some lessons from it. The lesson that we have drawn from the throwing away of coal is that the market does work; the Arabs cornered oil and made the price shoot up, because they controlled it. That was a world market—a market that we must guard against; but we will guard against it only through the diversity of the supplies that we produce.

As was said by the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison)—who is not known for his left-wing views—every reliable international study shows that, at the turn of the current century, the main energy source throughout the world will indeed be coal, and perish those who have not sufficient coal to deal with the markets then. It does not matter whether it has a particular subsidy; the point is, into what sort of market are we selling?

We are in danger of selling into a market that we cannot control. That is one of the problems with British Coal. We have said often enough, and, to be fair, some Conservative Members have repeated it, that the quality of British Coal's top management is not what it should be, certainly not when it comes to finding the markets they could for exports. The markets are there, but British Coal is not attempting to do anything about them, with or without a subsidy. Neil Clarke's expertise lies in spot selling worldwide. He is used to selling uranium and massive amounts of various ores. That is where his mining interest is to be found, and it is a dangerous example for the market with which we are concerned.

The motion implies that the provison of a subsidy to coal is a charity handout, but there have already been handouts. People no longer recall the dash for gas. Let us not forget that British Gas was willing to sell to the electricity supply industry at its price, what it called an economic price that was in British Gas's commercial interests. Against its judgment of the marketplace and despite what the market would take, British Gas was compelled to sell gas more cheaply, although it had a perfectly good reason for not doing so. Incidentally, there are many good reasons why it should maintain a monopoly, but that is a subject for a different debate. The argument is that, as the chairman of British Gas clearly said, one should not be compelled to sell at a price that is uncommercial.

Let us consider the strange way in which the pits were deemed to be economic and how it was decided whether they needed a subsidy. The Minister will no doubt say that Houghton Main has to be taken with Grimethorpe, but let me deal in more detail with the two pits with which I have been closely associated. John T. Boyd, a company not known for its affiliations to left-wing causes, produced a report for the Government. I could read out all the references to Grimethorpe, as they make excellent reading, but I shall mention only the salient points.

The first is that Grimethorpe already had

"a positive cash flow of £1·668 million",

which is a lot of money. The report also states:

"On an economic basis Grimethorpe has the potential to operate as a stand-alone colliery".

That is important, because the Minister has regularly talked about putting it together with Houghton. There are certainly shared facilities, but it is possible for the two collieries to operate without them with some technical alterations.

I shall wait until the Minister is ready before saying that, in agreeing to knocking out Grimethorpe straight away, the Government and British Coal showed bad faith to British Coal's customers. When one is trying to sell coal, it is bad to say that one does not care about those whom one is supplying. The first that the industrial customers —the majority of Grimethorpe's customers were industrial customers—knew about their coal supply being stopped was on the news. Only if they happened to listen to the news did they hear about it. What sort of commercial sense is that? What sort of management is that? What is more, firms previously supplied by Grimethorpe are now paying more for their fuel. That is a funny sort of marketplace and a funny sort of subsidy.

Frickley is the last remaining pit in my constituency. The Government brought in Rothschild—eminent bankers, indeed. Rothschild said that Frickley was among the most profitable pits. It recommended, "Sell it off and whizz it out for privatisation." It recommended that Frickley should be on the front shelf for everyone to shop for. However, Frickley mysteriously appears on the Government's list of 21 pits. The only reason for Frickley's inclusion is that Frickley pit was very loyal to the National Union of Mineworkers.

I have not traditionally been a believer in conspiracy theories. However, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has referred to the political dimension. That point is made in *The Times* so it must be correct. *The Times* stated:

"Clarke to undermine the miners."

Brian Crozier describes what happened. What is particularly sinister is the private army he formed prior to the 1979 election when he met the then shadow Cabinet. That was when the plotting started against the miners. That is indeed sinister. There is no justification in economic or energy terms for getting rid of Frickley.

I regret to say that, in the earlier debate, no mention was made of the package—as the Government call it—to help areas like mine. I would be only too happy if that help were given. Let us consider the RECHAR money. Contrary to what the Government say, a lot of the money being spent on the coal industry and the regeneration of coal industry areas does not come from the Government; it comes from the European Community.

Between July 1990 and December 1993, almost £12 million-worth of schemes in the Wakefield metropolitan district area were approved. They are licensed and approved and there is no nonesense about that. However, as a result of the Government's shilly-shallying, so close to December 1993, Wakefield has received only £862,043. That is a disgrace. If the Government intend to bring in emergency action, what kind of resolution does that show and what kind of signal does it send? In addition, we do not have assisted area status, when we have one of the largest concentrations of unemployment in Yorkshire.

[Mr. Derek Enright]

One hundred years ago, on 7 September, the Featherstone massacre occurred. James Gibbs and James Duggan were shot by an army sent in by a Tory Government. The Tory Government are not going to send in an army now; they are killing us bit by bit, slice by slice. It is the massacre of the innocents.

10.53 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): In the previous debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) set out his conviction and mine that the Government lack any coherent policy for the coal industry and have failed to set coal in the framework of a sensible energy policy.

I want to consider the matter from the slightly narrower perspective of my constituency where we have the only remaining pit in the Northumberland coalfield. I have seen three pit closures there in my time as a Member of Parliament and several more before that. So far as I can establish, my constituency produces more opencast coal than any other constituency in the United Kingdom and there are many more opencast coal applications hanging over my constituency.

The subsidy that we are discussing must be one of the most ingenious ever devised. I am convinced that someone in the Department of Trade and Industry must have sold it to the Treasury on the basis that the Treasury would not have to pay out very much of it and that it could be accepted on the basis that the prospect of having to pay it was pretty limited. It was a device to get the Government off a political hook, and it was based on the fiction that, somehow, the market conditions had been substantially changed by the creation of the subsidy.

The subsidy alone does not change those market conditions. Indeed, it has about it an air of impermanence which is greater than that which surrounds the other features of the market, even though there might also be some uncertainty about them. Among the other features of the market, I include the substantial investment by the regional electricity companies in gas generation and the peculiar position of the nuclear industry.

There is a stronger sense of permanence about the consequences of the investment in gas generation. Clearly, a generator which sees a profit stream coming from the generation is much less concerned about the price that it will have to pay for electricity. That situation already exists, and it will continue throughout the working life of the generating unit in which the regional electricity companies have invested. We have something which, from their point of view, looks a rather better long-term bet than the possibility that they might buy some coal at a price which was brought to the world price by a Government subsidy. Indeed, all the incentives are for them to use the generating capacity in which they have invested, even if the purchase price is higher.

The subsidy does not change that market position. It does not alter that advantage, which is protected by the monopoly power of the regional electricity companies as distributors of electricity to the households of their region. That power has been unabated by the regulator, who, in a very cavalier way, has accepted that the decisions made by the regional electricity companies to invest in that gas capacity were reasonable at the time that they were made. I do not think that that was a proper use of his powers. However, whether I like it or not, it is now a fact that the regional electricity companies' ability to use their monopoly to protect that use of gas has been effectively confirmed by the regulator. Just how far he will allow them to push up the price in response remains to be seen, but so far he has given all the indications of a toothless watchdog. That crucial part of the market is rigged against coal, even when the subsidy is applied to it.

The nuclear section of the market is protected by the non-fossil fuel obligation and by the substantial subsidy of the nuclear levy. The nuclear levy has taken a very interesting but extremely worrying turn. It was made clear in discussions in the Select Committee that that subsidy is being used to finance the expansion of nuclear generation at Sizewell.

The Secretary of State, who, unfortunately, is out of action because of his heart attack, made it clear to the House that he thought that that subsidy was entirely for the benefit of the environment, to be applied to decommissioning for purely environmental reasons. It is not. It has been seized by Nuclear Electric in order to fund its current expansion. It is being misapplied by Nuclear Electric. The argument that it used to defend that action is that it is better off doing that than putting the money into a building society. That is an extremely doubtful proposition in the case of building a nuclear power station at Sizewell. The building society, in any normal market, would have been a better bet.

Today, of course, we were reminded that there is an even more absurd element, which is that French-generated nuclear electricity, purchased and brought through the interconnector, benefits from the levy. What inquiries have the Government made into whether French electricity generators intend to use the benefit that they gain from the nuclear levy for decommissioning purposes when they commission their power stations? I do not think that there is any likelihood at all that that will be done.

The argument is blown into smithereens. It is obviously not effectively a ring-fenced sum to be used for decommissioning purposes, which in itself, incidentally, is still a very powerful subsidy to the nuclear industry. It is being used as an operating subsidy for the nuclear industry on a considerable scale. But that subsidy exists alongside a piece of market protection in the non-fossil fuel obligation. The subsidy will not change the fundamental market position.

Ellington colliery is not one of the dozen pits on the original list—it is one of the so-called core pits and is left to maintain its own market. Its market depends crucially on two things. First, it depends on electricity generation at the Blyth power station. Blyth is an old power station, but it is still working effectively. However, a threat hangs permanently over it. Secondly, the market depends on the electricity that is generated for the Alcan smelter. The coal for that smelter is supplied directly by conveyor from the Ellington colliery to the plant.

If either of those markets were to go, the future of Ellington would wholly depend on British Coal finding a further market for coal, jostling alongside all the other claims on that further market from whatever is left of the original 12 pits. Earlier, we discussed the fate of those 12 pits.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon pointed out earlier, there is not much evidence that British Coal is doing well at seeking out that market. It seems to be dominated by a mentality of retrenchment and shrinkage, not one of going out aggressively to seek the market. I make that criticism against the background that, in domestic terms, the market is rigged against the pits.

I wondered whether we would get any announcement today about the future of British Coal, but the debate was marked by the total absence of announcements from the Government about anything at all. Indeed, it was not until we started to debate this subsidy that the Minister showed

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

some signs of wishing to deal directly with questions from hon. Members and to tell us something. During the previous debate, we heard nothing from the Government that gave us increased confidence in the ability of British Coal to find a larger market for coal for any of the 12 pits or any of the pits that are not on the list but which communities feel will soon be the subject of the retrenchment approach of British Coal.

Will there be a secure future for Ellington? Will that future rest in the aluminium industry, which already has many problems? That cannot be a safe future for Ellington. We want the Alcan contract to remain at Ellington. It is an extremely efficient method of operation —the delivery of coal direct from one plant to another. In the aluminium industry, coal must compete with hydro-electric power and the arrival of aluminium from eastern Europe, where no genuine costing has taken place. The dumping of aluminium has resulted from the disruption of the situation in eastern Europe.

The market of electricity generation must be maintained if Ellington is to have a genuine future. Alongside the future of Ellington, we have a massive expansion of opencast. The impact of that on the subsidy element is not entirely clear. I have always taken the view that we must maintain enough opencast sites in our area, especially in Northumberland, to give some future to an industry that provides many jobs. However, that should not be done at the expense of massive despoliation of the environment in Northumberland or huge expansion of the areas involved. We are at that point now.

British Coal is arguing that it must have an opencast site outside the village of Ellington in which to put the waste from Ellington colliery, which it currently puts into the sea. That is a fairly unconvincing bargain to offer a community whose pit does not have a guaranteed or secure future. Indeed, there are considerable doubts in the area about whether the pit will last long enough for the restrictions on the dumping of coal in the sea ever to necessitate putting the coal in an opencast site for which permission is granted on those grounds. Therefore, those grounds will not weigh heavily. I hope that they will not weigh with the Minister when he eventually considers the application.

The future of all the coal pits—not simply the 12 pits that sparked the row—depends on a market that is rigged against the coal industry and was so rigged by the Government. They cannot escape the blame for that. They cannot refer to market conditions as though those conditions were simply handed to them. There are genuine market forces at work. However, the way in which those forces operate is predetermined to a significant extent by the decisions made by the Government when they privatised the electricity industry—the way in which they structured the regional electricity companies and protected nuclear power, and look like continuing to do so.

Nothing that the Government have said, and they have said so little, has carried the debate forward. I am extremely worried about the future of the coal industry in my constituency. I share the concern of Opposition Members who have already expressed their anger about what has happened to the pits in their constituencies.

I should mention the Minister's earlier touching reference to my party's election manifesto. He referred to one of our apparent aspirations to generate 45 per cent. of electricity from wind power. We had no such aspiration. I have looked up the text of that manifesto and we are guilty, I admit to it, of giving excessive credence to Government figures. The relevant passage notes:

"Government estimates show that up to 45 per cent. of electricity demand could be met from wind power."

I do not believe that we should ever place such confidence in Government figures and the Minister will note that we went to argue that such a target could not be met.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Why put it in the manifesto then?

Mr. Beith: We noted that we might produce 20 per cent. of our energy from all the renewable sources, including wind and wave power. *[Laughter.]* The Minister and his colleagues seem to think that that is funny, but they must consider problems such as emission targets, pollution and resource depletion and make some genuine attempt to address them.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I have a copy of "The Times Guide to the House of Commons April 1992", which contains a copy of the Liberal manifesto. Its section on energy does not bear much relation to what the right hon. Gentleman quoted; it is ambiguous, confusing and very Liberal in its approach. Under the heading, "The environmental balance sheet" and the sub-heading, "Renewable energy generation", it states:

"45 per cent. of electricity demand could be met from wind power."

Under the subsequent heading of "Positives"—whatever they are—it notes:

"Britain has a massive advantage in natural resources that give it the potential to be at the forefront of renewable energy generation. Government estimates show that up to 45 per cent. of electricity demand could be met from wind power."

That potential is referred to twice on page 345 of that guide. The right hon. Gentleman should have checked it. Admittedly, the Liberals' policies are invariably confused, but, in this case, they are not only confused but confusing to the people who read that manifesto.

Mr. Beith: That possibility may have been referred to twice in that guide, but it appeared just once in the original manifesto. It is recorded as a quotation from the Government. To place undue credence on any Government figures is never a terribly good idea and that is why we argued for no more than a 20 per cent. contribution to energy supplies from all renewables.

The Government are prepared to bolster artificially the position of nuclear power and I cannot understand how they can so readily dismiss the aspiration to increase the proportion of our energy supplies derived from renewables. If they and the Labour party think that that option is funny and the wrong way to go, they have a lot to learn about the desired energy policy.

We are discussing whether the subsidy will ensure that coal has a better and fairer opportunity to win markets in the next few years. I do not believe that the subsidy will achieve that aim.

11.7 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): It is interesting that the Minister made little attempt to claim very much for the motion, but perhaps that is scarcely surprising since the Government are throwing away billions of pounds worth of assets in coal reserves. The

money on offer is very small in comparison to them and in relation to the £1·3 billion a year that is given in subsidy to the nuclear industry.

The subsidy on offer is largely illusory, since the Minister knows that, given the present structure of the energy market, the chances of that subsidy being called upon is also non-existent. The idea is also illusory, because we have learnt from what the Minister has already said in answer to interventions that the mechanisms of the subsidy are largely illusory. Although the Minister described those mechanisms, he admitted that the one time that British Coal has attempted to negotiate with National Power, the subsidy and the mechanisms were not in operation. The Minister is offering British Coal a subsidy, but it will not know in advance what it will be worth. It will therefore be unable to offer anything of value to the person with whom it is negotiating.

The Minister probably knows that practical jokers, or confidence tricksters, perform a trick involving a pound note on a piece of elastic or string. The pound note is put in one's hand, but as one's hand closes, it is whipped away. I suspect that this subsidy is based on very much the same principle. The appearance is of a sum of money being provided, but it is very well attached to a piece of elastic, the other end of which is being held by the Minister. I doubt whether any of the money will ever be called down.

The Minister has said how small the market is and has told us that it will be impossible for British Coal to create new markets. He knows very well that if new markets are not created, this assistance will not be called upon. When the illusion—I will not call it a confidence trick—is understood by the British people, who were outraged last October by the Government's action, there will be equal anger. The Government ought to behave better towards the coal industry. The reason for people's concern last October was their recognition of the debt that the country owes to the industry. This is a strange way to repay that debt.

If the Minister had any sense of history, he would realise that the only reason for our being a manufacturing nation, the only reason for our having been a great industrial, economic and political power for the past 200 years, is that there was an industrial revolution based on coal. My city, Stoke-on-Trent, owes its very existence to the coal seam on which it is based. The Government owe the industry better treatment. In their outrage last October, the British people, even if they did not understand the full complexities of the energy market, sensed that something was wrong. Nothing in the provision with which we are dealing tonight will suggest to them that the situation is being put right. This subsidy will change nothing.

It is clear that the Government are in a very curious and confused position. During today's debate on the closure of mines, the Secretary of State and the Minister for Energy repeatedly claimed that they could not interfere with the energy market, that pure market forces would determine everything. Despite that, the Minister is offering a subsidy. He is intervening, albeit in a thoroughly small and inadequate way, by providing a sweetener for any sales that British Coal may be able to secure. This demonstrates that the Government are able to intervene in the market; indeed, it is necessary that they do so. Thus, their earlier argument—that it is impossible to intervene in the energy market, as it is a pure market—is torpedoed.

This minimal assistance for the industry does not accord with the professed concern of the Secretary of State for Employment for the coal industry and all those working in it. It may be claimed that that concern is reflected to some extent in this very small subsidy. It is certainly not reflected in the way in which British Coal is treating miners who are made redundant. The Minister will know that workers in the coal industry can qualify at the age of 55 for early retirement.

Trentham, which is in my constituency, closed on 4 June. Miners who reached early retirement age two or three weeks later have been denied early retirement procedures. That is in marked contrast to the way in which British Steel operated when it closed Shelton Bar and other works 10 years ago. However harsh the conditions of those closures were, British Steel was at least sympathetic towards people who had spent their entire working lives in the industry and were on the brink of achieving early retirement.

The Minister is raising his eyebrows in apparent surprise. Let him ask Mr. Neil Clarke about the procedures for miners who are within days or weeks of achieving early retirement. Those in my constituency are told that they will have to wait a further seven years. For the past few years, miners have based their early retirement on retiring at the age of 55. In one case, a person was denied early retirement because of a matter of only two weeks. That is a disgraceful way to treat people who have given their whole lives to the industry. If the Minister wants his view that he cares about those who work in the industry to be credible, I hope that he will take that up with Mr. Neil Clarke and see what can be done.

Similarly, I hope that the Minister will take up the question of the effect of so-called "voluntary redundancy" on miners' home security. I hope that he now understands that, because of his Department's requirement, British Coal has forced those redundancies through as voluntary redundancies, when he and the rest of the world know perfectly well that they are compulsory. Because they are nominated as voluntary redundancies, the insurance clauses in miners' mortgage agreements will not operate. All insurance clauses on mortgage policies are made null and void if somebody volunteers for redundancy.

So miners have not only lost their jobs; if they fall behind with their mortgage payments, they have no insurance protection and stand to lose their homes as well within a few weeks or months. Is that what the Minister wants for people who have given their whole lives to the industry? He could do something about the behaviour of British Coal towards early retirement and pensions, and miners' home security. I urge him to do both.

Will the Minister talk to the Department of Social Security and ensure that the Government make a ruling on how regulation 51(7) of the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987 operates? I hope that he understands that, under those regulations, if the Benefits Agency believes that somebody receiving a lump sum has deliberately reduced that lump sum with intent to claim benefit, it is entitled not to pay income support.

On being made redundant from Trentham, a single parent constituent of mine spent his redundancy money on reducing his large mortgage because the job that he managed to find was low-paid. As a responsible parent, he knew that he could not sustain the mortgage that he had undertaken when he was a miner, so he used his redundancy payment to pay off the mortgage. When he

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was made redundant a second time a few weeks later, the Benefits Agency refused to pay him income support on the basis that he had disposed of his capital. He had used his redundancy payment responsibly and found another job, as the Government wanted him to do, but when he was made redundant again it was implied that he had tried to con the system and therefore would not be allowed income support. That cannot be how those regulations are intended to be applied. In that instance, the case was overturned on appeal and the man found that he was entitled to income support.

Nevertheless, if the Minister wants to act constructively he should look at the matter and, together with the Department of Social Security, issue guidelines so that miners in such a position are not denied income support when they have acted perfectly honourably. He could and should look at those important points, as those measures would take some of the pain and anxiety away from our constituents, whom the Government have thrown into that appalling position.

The Minister has not made many claims for the subsidy, which is at least something. He should, however, look at those other points, because how the Government treat the men who have worked all their lives in that industry and the resources which they make available to them are every bit as important as subsidies to the price of coal. I hope that he will bear that in mind.

11.19 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): In his wind-up speech in the earlier debate, the Minister accused the Labour party of being the captive of history. I am not sure whether the word "captive" is correct, but we are entirely justified in paying careful attention to history. Those of us who represent mining districts have a considerable and relevant history to study.

Reference has been made to the links between some constituencies and the mining industry. The link is as deep in my constituency as in most others. Pits were closed in the 18th century and in the 19th century. Between 1814 and 1939, we lost four pits, we lost one in the early 1970s, one in the late 1970s and four in the 1980s.

At no time in the past when a colliery closed—be it long ago or more recently—has it been against such a grim, severe and declining economic background as that of Britain today. It is time that the Government understood that the fundamental cause of Britain's economic weakness is the balance of payments deficit, which is enormous and is likely to grow considerably as a result of the present decisions being made about the coal industry.

I realise that many of my hon. Friends regard the subsidy as little better than a myth, but I am more suspicious than many of my hon. Friends. I see the subsidy as part of a three-pronged approach to privatisation. It was interesting that, at one point in his speech, the Minister appeared to suggest—I hope that I am not misinterpreting his view—that, at some time, the Government could return for a little more. That suggestion aggravated my suspicions about a three-pronged approach.

We have watched the Government privatise the energy resources of Britain, and arrange various sweetners to assist in that privatisation. We have seen unnecessary increases in the price of electricity. The Government were careless about the bad effect of those increases on heavy energy users in industry. The prices were increased in advance of privatisation to make it more attractive.

Mr. Eggar *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hardy: It is no good the Minister for Energy shaking his head, as the record is clear—the electricity price rose enormously and excessively before privatisation so that the sales could proceed, and the same happened with gas. The Government did not merely sell it for less than it was worth: they sold it against a background of excessive profits—and they could not care less about the effect on manufacturing industry or the poorer domestic consumer.

I am suspicious. The Minister now has the capacity to dangle sweeteners, if they are needed, to assist the Government's friends. They are not our friends—the Conservative party, not the Labour party, will receive the little donations in gratitude.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Some of them are not so little.

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend is right. I do not think that the Conservative party will receive the same sums for the purchase of a pit as it does from overseas residents seeking to encourage the Government to maintain tax breaks. The subsidy provision exists to encourage privatisation.

The second prong of the Government's approach to privatisation involves pension prospects. The Government do not seem to understand that pensions are part of a worker's reward. I do not know how anyone can find the moral justification to grab workers' earnings in the form of pension funds. I think that the Government may find themselves in deep water over that issue.

The third prong, to which the Minister referred in passing, concerns me deeply. On 29 March I intervened in a speech of the Secretary of State and was pleased with his answer, because it was unequivocal. He said that nothing would be done

"to prejudice safety standards in the mines."—[*Official Report*, 29 March 1993; Vol. 222, c. 31.]

Since that debate in March, which does not seem long ago, British Coal can claim that productivity has increased by 22 per cent. If that astonishing improvement, which has not been matched in any other industry at any time since the second world war, can be achieved in the coal industry, why do the Government wish to make the dramatic changes in safety regulation?

Again, I am suspicious. The Secretary of State gave the House an unequivocal assurance, as he described it—but shortly afterwards, the Health and Safety Executive took to the Department of Employment its proposals for dramatic changes in the mining industry's safety regime. I can think of no other reason for that, other than for it to join the subsidy and the attraction to the pension funds of the greedy eyes of those the Government would like to see own the coal industry rather than the community.

I said that the subsidy was a myth. I am extremely sensitive to electricity prices. We have in my constituency perhaps the finest engineering steel industry in Europe, and certainly in Britain. My hon. Friends who represent the Rotherham area are well aware of its enormous achievements and of the records that it holds and repeatedly breaks. They know also of the problems that

confront that industry because electricity prices are far higher than they need be—and would be, were coal to account for a larger share of the generation market.

If there are to be any subsidies, they should subsidise the privatisation of the coal industry but the maintenance of adequate levels of industrial activity in this country.

I do believe that this is not a myth, but something more perverted—part of a three-pronged preparation for privatisation. It is part of the record and prospectus of a Government who have created the decline in our recovery that made our nation plunge down into the poverty league, so that, before long, Spain, Portugal and Greece will pass us in the EC's economic league, in the same way that Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg have done in the last 10 years. For as long as such policies are pursued, that decline will be unavoidable.

That decline is due to the short-sighted calculations of a Government who do not seem interested in the welfare of the economy—and because of that, I do not believe that the Government are sufficiently interested either in the safety of people who work below ground.

If the Minister has time to reply, I hope that he will tell the House where we stand in relation to pit safety. Is safety to be no greater a reality than the subsidy? May we expect that the promise given to the House by the Secretary of State—who, unfortunately, cannot be with us today—on 29 March will be kept? Are we to see the disappearance of the role of the colliery deputy, who will no longer have a statutory power to secure safety in the mine? Will we once again see the Government sacrificing the interests of the nation and of the individual to the rather sordid sort of people with whom the Government seemed to have been concerned over the past 10 years?

11.27 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) referred to redundancy payments made to miners and to others that ran foul of social security laws in respect of mortgage repayments, and so on. I hope that the Minister will pass on that information. The Department in question ought to make a statement, to ensure that people do not have to appeal because of variations throughout the country.

Some local Department of Social Security offices are saying one thing, and some are saying another. A fortnight ago, I obtained about £1,200 in back money for one of my constituents—a miner who was made redundant. If that is happening on a wide and varied scale throughout the country, it is time that the regulations were made firm, to end the situation whereby people in certain parts of Derbyshire will be paid, whereas people in certain parts of Staffordshire and Yorkshire will not. I hope that that will be dealt with.

The debate is about the subsidy and about the Government buying time after their announcement to save 12 pits. We knew that that was a confidence trick and, as many of us also knew at the time, the subsidy would not add up to a row of beans. It was a Portillo subsidy, and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury was quite happy about it. When it was discussed with the Secretary of State, it was probably said, "Look here, we will tell the House in this great White Paper debate that there will be a subsidy, but don't bother about it a great deal. You will be quite happy with it, Mr. Portillo, because at the end of the day not a great deal of money will be spent, if any at all."

We thought that that would happen. The Tories were bought off, but more importantly, the people outside were disgusted at this confidence trick carried through by the Government. This short debate about the subsidy will put on record over and over again that we do not expect a great deal to be paid. It is a pity that the Minister did not quite finish what he was telling me about how the mechanism would work. I was becoming intrigued, but then he recovered himself and said something about it being a commercial matter between British Coal and somebody else. For a time, I thought that he would reveal a little more.

I would like a subsidy for mining similar to the set-aside scheme for farmers. Coal is a great national asset. It would be sensible to say that, as great tracts of land are set aside at £100 an acre—I think that the royal family made about £250,000 out of the scheme—such a scheme should operate for mining. It is said that farming is beset by the problems and elements of mother nature and cannot compete in the same way as someone working in a factory or a shed. Therefore, the argument goes, a subsidy must be paid because bad weather could result in crops not growing.

Does not the same argument apply to the pits? Miners have to deal with mother nature underground, so there should be a set-aside subsidy for mining. That would mean that, when a colliery struck a bad seam, the miners could be told, "Set it aside. We will set aside money so that the pit can ignore the bad seam." The Minister spoke about some of the 12 pits and said that they are not making money. No pit in Britain makes money in the first half of the financial year, because that is when nearly all the holidays are taken. But the second half of the financial year, when there is only one holiday, Christmas, often makes up for the massive loss in the first six months.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The hon. Gentleman makes a great deal of the comparison between pits and agriculture. We are being ripped off by the European Community because the Germans are being allowed to set aside 19 per cent. of their land, whereas we are allowed to set aside only 12 per cent. In 1991, the Germans paid £9 billion to their miners but, according to the Minister, we paid only £180 million. I accept that there is a nuclear levy, but irrespective of that, our mining industry is being ripped off.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that we are being ripped off right across the system, because Britain is being sold down the line in respect of agriculture, the single market and the coal industry. I want the European Community to work, but not on the terms being described at the moment.

Mr. Skinner: For a short period, I thought that the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) and I were on the same playing field. However, he then said that he wanted the European Community to work. I do not. I think that it has been an unmitigated disaster, and I want it to fail. However, I have always accepted that it is not as easy to grow food in a country such as Britain as it is to grow food in the Mediterranean countries and in California. Therefore, I have always accepted the idea of having subsidies or, better still, deficiency payments, so that we do not have to import too much food.

My worry is that the money has gone into the wrong pockets. I would sooner see the money in the farmworkers' pockets than in the pockets of the rich business farmers. I

[Mr. Skinner]

accept the point made by the hon. Member for Stafford about £20 for every family going into the common agricultural policy. I have no doubt that thousands of miners are saying, "If there can be that kind of subsidy for the CAP, we should have some sort of subsidy for the coal industry, because it also has to battle against the elements."

Let us not kid ourselves. "Subsidy" is not a dirty word. We have to have subsidies to run a highly technological society. One cannot run a school without subsidies, although I know that the Government are trying. However, subsidies are paid even to opted-out schools, so that they have more money than schools that are still under local education authorities. That is true of almost all aspects of our lives. There could not be a royal family without subsidy. I am in favour of the demise of the royal family, but I understand how they manage to live in the lap of luxury.

We are always hearing about Nissan coming to Britain. Of course Nissan came to Britain. The Government said, "Here is £300 million to come to build a factory in Sunderland." They said to Toyota, "You can have a bit more if you come to Derby." Every local authority in the area said, "We will give you some more advantages as well." That is a subsidy. There are subsidies for most things in life.

We have always argued that there is a way in which to deal with the coal industry. It should not be dealt with on the basis of a phoney subsidy to buy time to con the British people. The subsidy should be based on a pit's work from year to year or over a five-year period. The period must be five years to deal with cycles within a pit, as it goes through bad work and good work. Proper payments are needed. We have always argued that we need a big coal industry, so that the strong can help the weak and vice versa, in good times and bad.

The only thing that made me smile was the French interconnector subsidy. That subsidy goes from the Government, through the nuclear levy, and we then pay the French to send us electricity that competes with our electricity. The French get a big sum out of us. It is a joke that the French are able to send us electricity for which we have paid a massive price in the process.

I am still trying to find out whether there is anything in the following idea. As the Government work on the principle that they help people who help the Tory party with donations, especially foreigners, I wonder whether any of the French subsidy money has an Asil Nadir lurking among it. That has not been discovered yet. I just throw the idea in. Is there somebody who has sent the Government some money?

The French people say, "We have a really good score going here with the British Government. They are a bit thick and they are run by a wimp, but we are actually selling them electricity and they are paying us to send it." There is bound to be a hidden agenda, with somebody saying, "We must slip them a few quid," or, to use the parlance of Terry Venables, "bung them a bit." It is odd that we are getting electricity while the French are laughing.

I suggest to the hon. Member for Stafford, who follows these matters very carefully, "Check that out." He is a man for detail on French subsidies. It is just possible that he might discover something much more serious.

I have seen figures of £1·2 billion and £1·3 billion for the subsidy to the nuclear power industry. That subsidy enables it to capture 22 or 23 per cent. of the market. It is a subsidy. The Government can argue that the money is to do with decommissioning, but anyone who knows anything about the industry knows that it is a subsidy. The only difference between the subsidies to which I have just referred and the one that we are discussing tonight is that the one that we are discussing tonight is a fairy-tale subsidy—it is about fantasy land—whereas the others are real.

Mr. Beith: Cash in hand.

Mr. Skinner: Cash in hand, as the right hon. Gentleman says.

The sad thing is that a great national asset is going down the pan. We are not talking about rebuilding a factory, which can be done in a short space of time. As you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will know, having been born and bred in a mining community—like many hon. Members present tonight—when pits have gone, they have gone. Once the ground is made unstable by opencasting, there is nothing that can be done.

Suppose that, in 25 years' time, an enlightened Government come along and say, "All the gas has gone and all the oil has gone. We ought to get back to coal, because we don't have enough windmills." Suppose that they have made an effort but there are still not enough —that they have not got up to 5 per cent., never mind 45 per cent., even though the commitment has appeared in 15 manifestos. They will have to turn back to coal. The trouble is that, once opencasting has taken place, they will not be able to do that.

My guess is that that is part of the conspiracy referred to earlier in the debate. British Coal has got off pretty lightly in this argument. I am not averse to attacking the Government every day of the week——

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): You do.

Mr. Skinner: And I do. But British Coal is part of the conspiracy. It wants a small privatised industry; make no mistake about it. It is in this business; it wants pits such as that referred to by the hon. Member for Stafford—and all the others to which my hon. Friends, referred—shut. It wants a tiny little group of pits so that it can get the 30 million tonnes at the power stations next year. It does not want much else and, what is more, it does not want any competition.

The best way of achieving that end is to ensure that, before the year is out, the pits are closed. British Coal will then have a dozen or 15—the figure could even be as high as 20, although it will probably diminish if the Government stay in power much longer—of the best pits left. It will have a captive market, just like the gas market.

It will make a bomb and Neil Clarke will be running it. That is why I challenged him in July 1992 when I went to Hobart house with my hon. Friends from the mining group. I asked every member of the board, "Will you have anything to do with privatisation?" Ken Moses jumped up and said, "Don't try and talk to me, Skinner. I won't touch it with a bargepole." Neil Clarke said, "Don't anyone else

answer that question," and took his members—the board—out of the room. He did not want to let the cat out of the bag.

British Coal wants that small industry so that it can make profits——

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. gentleman accept that rumours are circulating round the coal industry at the moment to the effect that, in respect of the prospectus—bearing in mind that the applications for licences have to be submitted by 16 July—there are two sets of figures? The amount of money that is expected to be forthcoming for the top end—for management—is one figure, but there is also a real figure at the bottom line, which they will accept.

In other words, there is a serious question mark over the figures. The Minister has an obligation to tell us whether there are two sets of figures for those who want to acquire those mines. If the mines are to be privatised, some people could get in on the inside track, and it could be the management of the coal industry.

Mr. Skinner: That is another question that the Minister must answer. I hope that the Minister has heard quite clearly that there is a Cash rumour going round that there are two sets of figures. Let me buy that theory for a moment or two, and ask the Minister to reply.

The other sad thing is that we are talking about men's and women's lives. We are talking about communities that have been smashed asunder. There have been closures throughout my time as a Member of Parliament, and there were closures while I worked in the pits. I saw the pit close in which my father worked and in which I worked. I saw all that, so I do not want to hear, "You closed more than we did." In my view, hardly any of the pits should have closed anyway. Parkhouse colliery, where I worked, was shut and there was a lot of coal left. It was opencasted later, which proved the point.

We are talking about miners who will not get any jobs—no voluntary redundancy. Everybody in Lancashire has been told that there are three jobs at Point of Ayr. Everyone in Yorkshire and in the constituency of the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) who says, "I do not want to leave the industry," is told that there are three jobs at Point of Ayr. It is like the subsidy—a confidence trick from beginning to end, because not everybody can take those three jobs at Point of Ayr in the north Wales coalfield.

There will be a lot more casualties. The Government might be able to whisk them away on some other scheme, so that they do not show up as unemployed. They will use all the techniques of statistics to say they have not been added to the dole queue, but each hon. Member who represents a mining area knows that we can count them, because we know almost everybody who lives on every street.

The sad thing is that, if we think about it, we come back to another subsidy, because, if 100,000 people lose their jobs in Britain today, it costs £900 million per annum. We are talking about a public sector borrowing requirement of £50 billion. At end end of the day, it is not about us, but about people out there in the communities; that is why the Minister has an obligation to answer all the questions and to tell us precisely how the subsidy will be paid.

He was on the track once: he was going to tell us. My guess is that, by the end of the financial year, hardly any, if any, of it will be paid. I know that one thing is certain: any more of this and a lot more people will be on the dole queue.

11.46 pm

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): The Minister mentioned the subsidies. As other hon. Members have said, the subsidies are bogus; they are not going to happen. Who has had any money? How many extra bags of coal have the Government lifted a finger to try to sell? Not one. Who will qualify for any of the subsidy? My view is that nobody will qualify because they were never intended to qualify for it.

Let me put my cards on the table. I was born and bred in a mining community and I still live in the heart of a mining community. Only the other week, the Minister and I had a debate on the Adjournment about the closure of Thorpe Marsh power station. He knows only too well my concern for the two pits in my constituency that will be affected. I should like to see some subsidy going to those two pits because they have lost a third of their market due to the closure of Thorpe Marsh power station and they are both under market testing. I should like to know, and I have never had a proper answer yet, where on earth those two collieries are to get a third of the market and stay in operation under this so-called market testing?

We are debating a very serious issue. Unfortunately, some Conservative Members seem to think that it is funny and that it is an opportunity to score cheap party political points. It is not. It is a very serious issue. This afternoon, in my opinion, which I know is shared by some Labour Members, the Secretary of State for Employment, who led for the Government, made a disgraceful speech.

Mr. Burns: Rubbish.

Mr. Hughes: It is not rubbish. The Secretary of State spoke rubbish for almost an hour. He tried to make cheap political points for television sound bites. I tell the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) that this is a very serious issue. Hundreds of thousands of people will lose their jobs because of his Government's lack of an energy policy. Pits will be closed, power stations are now closing, railway jobs, engineering jobs and steel workers' jobs will be lost. There is no end to the knock-on effect of closing a pit.

My constituency has an unemployment rate of 14 per cent., which is not funny. Two more pits are likely to close; Thorpe Marsh power station will close. Some Conservative Member should tell those people in Doncaster where they are to find jobs. There simply are not any around, and communities are being torn apart.

I have watched the hon. Member for Chelmsford all day. He has sat there smirking and pulling stupid faces. He should be out of a job, trying to live on the current rate of unemployment benefit: that would wipe the stupid smirk off his face.

Doncaster has been promised development area status and an enterprise zone. The Minister and I have discussed the matter on many occasions; as he knows, I would like him to tell the people of Doncaster what their position is likely to be—and, more important, when the Government will put some money back into the community that they have systematically raped since 1979.

I have been passed a note asking me to end my speech, so I will end it shortly. As the Minister knows, Doncaster

[Mr. Hughes]

borough council has worked very well with local industry in trying to regenerate Doncaster; it has worked closely with the people there. It is doing all that it can to regenerate Doncaster and put some new jobs into it, but it cannot do that alone. It needs the subsidies, it needs the enterprise zone and it needs development area status.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At least three Opposition Members have spoken. I voted against the Government on this issue twice——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Opposition Members have spoken because I have called them; most had been sitting in the Chamber all day. With great respect, the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) arrived late for the debate, and his interventions have been too long.

11.51 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): In his introduction—if it can be called an introduction—the Minister made it clear that, following a recommendation from the Select Committee on 26 January and a White Paper on 25 March, the Government are still no nearer determining what they mean by "subsidies". They can give us no clear indication of the amount involved; it could be anything between £10 million and £120 million. The Minister could come back and ask for more if necessary. Some hon. Members have said that it will not be necessary, because there will be no market; I am not so pessimistic, which is partly why I do not wish to oppose the motion.

I think that British Coal will eventually want to take advantage of the position, and that there will be sales later in the year. I do not think that the sales will be significant, or that they will keep many people in employment; but I think that there will be some sales, and I hope that the subsidy will be there to be taken advantage of.

Our present difficulty is that we have a British Coal management led by one of the most supine chief executives most of us have ever encountered. He does not seem interested in driving any of his senior management to look for new markets; the organisation has never had to sell any of its output before, because there has been a guaranteed market for it. For a number of reasons, that market no longer remains in its previous form.

One of the tragedies of the Clarke regime in British Coal is that the chairman has not been capable of devising a strategy to enable the organisation to seek new markets and develop products that those new markets could require, either here or elsewhere on the continent. I have sympathy with the suggestion that the regime is not interested in expanding the market because it envisages a Rothschild-type model which will be in the order of 12 to 14 collieries, capable of being privatised in a neat little package. We shall just have to wait and see; I am not sure whether it will happen but, like other hon. Members, I suspect that it will.

It is clear that the Government will have to do a great deal more homework in the next two or three weeks if they are to be able to tell us the sums that will be made available and the nature of the subsidy. They have had the statistics for some considerable time. Information given to the Select Committee by the National Union of Mineworkers could act as an outline, and information about the price per gigajoule of colliery output would be a starting point. The calorific content of the coal is another variable, but such matters are not great mysteries. The statistics are available to British Coal, and the energy section of the Department of Trade and Industry should have them.

I suspect that one of the major problems is that the dilatory, indifferent, dithering approach which has characterised the regime at the DTI in the 14 months since the general election, still prevails in the important sphere of the Government's so-called energy strategy. After all these months, the Government are still not able to tell us what the sum should be—how much there will be for each power station and what it should be across the board. Until they are able to tell us, we shall be entitled to take the view that the subidy is a mirage. Until we have specific figures, we shall unfortunately have to accept the motion on the nod. If we did not, we should be frightened that the subsidy would be needed in the summer and the House would not be sitting to sanction it.

11.56 pm

Mr. Eggar: With the leave of the House, may I point out gently to Labour Members that in the previous debate we heard various accusations about the market being rigged against coal. The gist of their comments today has been, "We want a subsidy, we want it big and we want it clear." There seems to be a slight inconsistency—I put it no stronger than that—in those two positions. I set out the procedures in response to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) on 16 June, and hon. Members will no doubt benefit from reading it.

In the time available, I shall try to pick up some of the issues that have been raised. The hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) mentioned specifically Grimethorpe and Houghton Main. I have taken careful note of what he said and, as a number of the issues involve British Coal, I shall ensure that British Coal also studies his remarks. I noted his comments about RECHAR. Of course, more than £200 million extra is going to the coalfields as a result of the decision in October, and we need to consider carefully how the hon. Gentleman's council and local community can access some of the funds.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend the Minister give way?

Mr. Eggar: I shall deal with my hon. Friend in a moment. I hope that he will forgive me for not giving way, but I am under a considerable time restraint.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) advocated renewables; in fact, he did not advocate them but tried to explain why the Liberal manifesto contained a reference to windmills—he had not meant it but it was intended only for those windmill nuts who happened to read it. It is unfortunate that my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson) is not here, because he described windmills as great lavatory brushes in the sky and he would no doubt have had something to say about Liberal party policy. There is also an inconsistency in the right hon. Gentleman's remarks because he is against subsidies for the nuclear industry but in favour of large subsidies for the renewables industry.

The hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) made some specific points, and I undertake to ensure that my colleagues in the Department of Social Security examine them. For a moment there was an interplay between my hon. Friend

the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) and the hon. Member for Bolsover. Images crossed my mind of the hon. Member for Bolsover as a Minister, accompanied by his private secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford, whose love of detail the hon. Gentleman recognises. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford would go along with the hon. Member for Bolsover. I have an interesting letter from the hon. Member for Bolsover. It is written on behalf——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded forthwith to put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business).*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House authorises the Secretary of State to pay, or undertake to pay, by way of financial assistance under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, sums exceeding £10 million in total but not exceeding £120 million in total to support sales of coal produced from underground mines in the United Kingdom.

Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants)

11.59 pm

The Minister for Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): I beg to move,

That the draft Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 24th June, be approved.

The order has two purposes. First, it specifies the types of restructuring expenditure for which grant may be paid in the present financial year. These include costs of redundancy and early retirement, transfer allowances and retraining. They also include costs incurred by British Coal Enterprise Ltd., the subsidiary of British Coal which promotes new job opportunities in areas affected by pit closures. Secondly, the order sets at 90 per cent., as last year, the maximum percentage of restructuring costs which can be met by grant in the current financial year.

Restructuring grant has proved to be an essential part of the Government's assistance to British Coal. The grant helps the industry to adapt to changing circumstances. The payments support generous redundancy terms for miners and staff losing jobs as a result of closures and efficiency improvements. They have also helped British Coal Enterprise Ltd. to create nearly 90,000 job opportunities and resettle and retrain some 32,000 people since 1984.

I commend the order to the House.

12 midnight

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The Minister sought in his previous speech to make light of the fact that there are those who are profoundly concerned about the way in which this matter has been handled since last October. He made some trite and rather irrelevant comments about whether I might or might not be the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

If the Minister really wants to be the butt end of the coal industry, he should make irrelevant remarks of that kind. They were trivial, pathetic and irrelevant. The Minister should understand the extent to which people in the coal industry and in my constituency are deeply concerned about what is happening.

I hope that the Minister will take this on board because his trivial and pathetic comments do not merit the kind of absurd——

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton):—language that my hon. Friend is using.

Mr. Cash: I am glad that the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) butts in to say that that is irrelevant. We have a serious problem in relation to the extent and range of problems facing the coal industry.

We have a massive problem in terms of Government public expenditure. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury recognises that. I am not sure whether the Minister for Energy, or whatever he is called at the moment, really understands the nature of the problem, given that we are offering minimal support to people in my constituency, in contrast to the cost to central Government of £85 million in the first year of the closure of the Trentham pit and prospectively the closure of the Silverdale pit. That is offset by the Government's minimal response to the amount of money that those pits require to remain open.

[Mr. Cash]

I recall very well the Minister's response at a private meeting that we had last October, when he was incapable of answering the questions that we put to him, and the extremely insipid response that we have had since—*[Interruption.]* The Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), has used language that must be completely and utterly out of order in the House.

The coal industry faces a serious problem and that has been completely overlooked in the response of the Minister and the Secretary of State today. We are facing a critical problem in relation to the energy policy of this country. *[Interruption.]* I am not interested in the rather trivial comments made by a Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Chelmsford, in this context. The reality is that we are faced with a serious problem in respect of the communities in the coalfields. They are people who have worked hard in those pits over a long period. We are offering them a minimal response against the background of the Coal Board itself offering them redundancy payments under duress. We are offering them a minimal response when there is no justification either for the closure of the Trentham pit or for the prospective closure of the Silverdale pit.

I am very interested that the Minister should think that this matter is so funny, judging by the expression on his face. I cannot understand why we are so pathetic in our response to the arguments that have been put forward not by the Opposition but by reference to our own principles. Why is it that we do not give people access to the core contract? Why is it that we perpetuate a monopoly in the United Kingdom in respect of domestic coal policy?

Why is it that, in respect of European Community interstate trade, we are prepared to allow the Germans to get £9 billion of subsidy for their coal industry when we are given, even excluding the nuclear subsidy, a mere £180 million, bearing in mind the effect that that has on our coal industry and the people who work in it, not to mention the knock-on effect? I am glad that we are giving some money, but my concern is simply that we are giving a minimal amount; we are not enabling those people to get off the ground again following the closure of the pits.

Those of us who believe in Conservative policies are anti-monopoly, and we want a level playing field in the European Community. We do not want our coal miners to suffer and our pits to be closed down when the Trentham pit has 300 million tonnes of British coal. Will the Minister explain why we are closing down those pits and the Silverdale pit, if that is what will happen, when we have hundreds of years' worth of assets in hand? Why is that happening?

I am interested that the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton should be so concerned to support the Government on this issue, when he knows that there is a serious problem in his area as well as in mine. I am very much in favour of the Government's policy with regard to a fair and reasonable energy policy in the European Community. What I am concerned about is that we have rolled over—we have accepted that the pits are to close, when elsewhere, in Germany and in France, pits are kept open.

I see the Parliamentary Private Secretary shaking his head again. He knows perfectly well that that is going on. The statistics exist. There is no way of getting away from that.

I do not understand, and I should be grateful if the Minister would explain, why our pits are closing when there is a £9 billion subsidy paid and authorised by the European Commission to the German coal industry, so that our energy users are at a disadvantage compared with those elsewhere in the European Community. This is Conservative policy—this is Government policy—to make sure that we have a fair and level playing field in the European Community. Shutting our coal pits and ensuring that we do not have a reasonable opportunity to compete on a level playing field is a travesty of our policies. Will the Minister please reply to me tonight?

12.8 am

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I want to speak about the redundancies that have taken place since October. I draw the attention of the Minister to the way in which workers at the collieries have been blackmailed into accepting redundancies, usually at short notice. It is not that they want to accept the specific amounts of money, but they have no option. They are faced with the loss of thousands of pounds and have no option but to accept the terms of the redundancies.

Since 1983, every redundancy scheme introduced by British Coal was time limited. As we approached the end of that time limit, British Coal threatened workers at collieries due to close with the loss of top-up payments or redundancy payments if they did not agree to the closure. There was always the promise of an extra premium payment.

A slightly different tactic has been used since October. Under the present scheme, British Coal offers all the workers at a specific colliery the same weekly wage on which their redundancy payment is based. In other words, all the workers are offered the same maximum £300, regardless of their weekly wage while they were working at the colliery. In that way, the redundancy payment is enhanced and is offered to the miners, who have no option but to accept it as the colliery has no future.

The men who worked at the collieries that have closed are frightened and concerned about their future employment. In October, the decision to close the 31 pits was followed by the White Paper. The pits that were supposedly given a reprieve have been closed. There is so much uncertainty about the collieries that will be left open by British Coal that miners do not have any view of their future employment.

There is no certainty about which collieries will remain open. We heard warnings tonight that we could be heading for the Rothschild report scenario, which means that only 14 collieries will be left open in a few years. Some 18 months ago, the British Association of Colliery Management forecast that the industry could be supported by only four collieries. That is a much worse scenario than the Rothschild report.

Many of the miners who have been placed on the scrap heap as a result of the redundancies in the coal industry are in their early 30s. We are not talking about men who have worked in the industry most of their lives and who are now approaching an age at which they can make good use of redundancy payments in early retirement—we are talking

about young men aged 30, 31 and 32. I met one recently who was only 26 years old. Those men now face a future of no further employment. Many of them will never work again, because the work is simply not there.

In my area, where the Grimethorpe and Houghton Main collieries have closed, the unemployment rate is 17 per cent. overall. There are certain wards with an unemployment rate of more than 20 per cent. and in some cases it is approaching 30 per cent. Male unemployment is especially bad. There are no job prospects in these areas. There is no prospect of quick inward investment to replace the jobs that are being lost, so we face all manner of problems in these areas as a result of the pit closures.

Earlier, the Minister talked about British Coal Enterprise. Part of the order deals with grants to that organisation. He also talked about 85,000 job opportunities. That is all they were—job opportunities. They were not real jobs. In no way has British Coal Enterprise provided 85,000 miners with jobs. Job opportunities and actual jobs are two different things. We have repeatedly asked British Coal Enterprise, the Government and British Coal to tell us how many jobs have been created by British Coal Enterprise. The figure has never been made available to us. All the comments about British Coal Enterprise are a load of rubbish. No jobs—or very few, if any—have been created.

When workshops were being closed, British Coal Enterprise paid the workers to form their own company. British Coal contracted out the work that they were doing as British Coal employees to a private company set up by the lads who accepted redundancy. That meant that employees at other British Coal workshops were competing with their former colleagues who had been encouraged to set up their own company and contract to British Coal. Obviously, because the contract was cheaper, since British Coal did not have to pay national insurance contributions and so on, the new company got all the work.

The redundancies that have been made at collieries in the past year have been compulsory. There was no voluntary element. Transfer to other collieries is no longer an option because the distance between them is too great. In any case, other collieries have no jobs to offer redundant miners. Those men are offered no choice, no transfer, no future, no alternative.

British Coal workshops have also been subject to closure, in particular Ashington and Shafton. The employees at the other workshops, Bestwood and Tursdale, are mainly members of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers and—surprise, surprise—they have been provided with work at the expense of the employees at the other workshops. The work force at those UDM workshops were recently cock-a-hoop about contracts that they were set to win through a company called Vista UDM. Some of the collieries in Nottinghamshire are to be turned into recycling plants and those workshops are to have the contracts for their refurbishment and maintenance. Again, that will be done at the expense of the other workshops at Shafton and Ashington.

Since November, the work done at Shafton, and presumably at Ashington, has been run down. Men have gone to work every day to find none available. Those workshops are starved of work and are obviously making a loss, so it was easy for the management to decide last week that they should be shut. The work force were given just a couple of days to decide whether they should accept redundancy and closure, or fight the decision.

Those workers were not offered the same redundancy payments on a maximum of £300 a week as those offered to the employees at the collieries. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will know as well as anyone that surface workers earn less than face workers. At the collieries, however, surface workers were given redundancy payments based on a weekly maximum wage of £300—the same as that available to face workers. The work force of the workshops, however, who are on an equivalent grade to that of surface workers, have been denied equal redundancy payments. They have had to settle for lower payments.

The employees at the workshops are being made compulsorily redundant. The only transfer made was that of a team from the Shafton workshop, working on electrical equipment, who went to Bestwood. They set up their own company and were allowed to contract to British Coal, which is now buying from a private company the same work that it bought a few days earlier from its own work force at Shafton. Problems have arisen because the lads now see their former colleagues being kept in work at other workshops and encouraged to form private companies.

The men are offered no choice of transferring because of the distances involved between Shafton, Bestwood and Ashington and because no jobs are available at those workshops.

Shafton also has a problem because its apprentices—there are about nine of them—either have to maintain their apprenticeships by travelling 50 miles to work in Nottinghamshire, or give up their indentures and pack in. That is a difficult choice. Why can they not be found work at other collieries instead of being forced to transfer to another workshop to continue their training?

The Government's decision to close the industry is dictated by pure recklessness and arrogance. I agree with the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). The abuse to which he was subjected from fellow Conservative Back Benchers, when he was only making honest comments and sticking up for his constituents, was disgraceful. The Government pay no regard to miners, their families or their communities. They are to be destroyed by an arrogant Government in revenge for what happened in 1974. Everything can be traced back to the Heath Government, which the National Union of Mineworkers was blamed for bringing down in 1974.

I should like to refer briefly to the mineworkers' pension scheme. There is much anger at the way in which British Coal has taken pension holidays. It is feared that the Government, as in the case of other pension schemes, will take this one over and seize its assets, which are worth about £14 billion, for the purpose of helping to deal with the public sector borrowing requirement, and will then pay pensions as they fall due. There is also a great deal of anger with regard to the managers' superannuation scheme. About £400 million is earmarked to pay for redundancies. People in management grades have come to my surgeries to say how incensed they are, not only at being made redundant but at the fact that their pension fund is to be used to provide the funds. Those people are worried about pension provision. The Government ought to reconsider their position. Pension schemes should be untouched, and redundancies paid for by other means.

12.21 am

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): In the case of Markham pit, which has just been closed, some workers were told that they could have jobs in the north-east of England, provided that they were prepared to go without transfer arrangements or any financial provision, and either find accommodation or travel daily from Derbyshire. That was an impossible situation, yet the redundancy was interpreted as being voluntary rather than compulsory.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) revealed that he had worked in the Parkhouse pit at Clay Cross, which was closed in 1962. Since that time, there has not been an operational pit in the immediate vicinity of Clay Cross, but many local people work in surrounding pits, which have become known as cosmopolitan pits. People travel to Bolsover, Shirebrook and Markham. Now that those collieries have been hit, there is a problem.

I should like to quote from a report issued by social services officers in Derbyshire. Referring to the situation in Danesmoor—an area of Clay Cross not far from the home of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover—the report quotes a shopkeeper and comments:

"'We sell disposable nappies in ones, as we do eggs. We also sell coal in bags. It is an expensive way of shopping but people cannot afford to buy in bulk.' This reveals the nonsense of unsold coal stocks whose sale could be subsidised to meet people's needs.

The shopkeeper goes on to say: 'the only fresh meat we sell is sausages.

Children often shop for their parents when they come home from school. Their meals appear to consist of potatoes, baked beans and eggs.'

Concluding, he said: 'I like the people around here. They are friendly, honest and straight. Most of them are struggling against poverty.'".

What we are talking about is the removal of jobs and opportunities and the consequent increase in deprivation. There is such deprivation throughout my constituency and the constituency of Bolsover, and nothing is being done to deal with it. Certainly British Coal Enterprise, which talks about job opportunities but not about jobs, is doing nothing. We cannot find out what jobs are supposed to be being provided in Derbyshire, North-East, in Chesterfield, in Bolsover or in any other constituency affected by the current closure programme.

12.24 am

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): In some respects, this debate is more specific than the previous one, as it deals with various expenditure covered by the order and covers redundancy and early retirement. Several hon. Members have already spoken of the problems of poverty and uncertainty, which are the hallmark of this post-industrial society.

Many people receive money that they think that they can use for specific purposes like paying off their mortgage, but they find that the social security regulations prevent them from doing so. Others find that, before they even reach that position, they must choose to end their employment if they are to get a reasonable sum in the form of a redundancy payment.

The first point that I wish to make relates not to the social security regulations, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred in the previous debate, but to the redundancy payment scheme. It would appear that a number of collieries may run into difficulties of some kind. Whenever there is a problem in a coalfield, we come across what has become known as the "moveable fault syndrome". A fault appears out of nowhere and is of such complexity that the colliery manager cannot guarantee that the workers will be able to go through that fault quickly. He therefore suggests that, for geological reasons, the colliery must close. No sooner does it close than a similar fault emerges in a neighbouring colliery and similar problems then arise.

I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know from your experience in the coal industry that it creates considerable cynicism within the work force in the area when, conveniently, another geological problem appears just when British Coal no longer requires the services of a particular coalfield or colliery, for whatever reason.

If we are to remove the gun of redundancy payments from miners' heads, and if they are to be allowed an opportunity to work through the geological faults that can arise, it would seem reasonable that the 31 December deadline for the expiry of the enhanced redundancy scheme be extended well into next year. If we are serious about the future of the 12 collieries, it is only reasonable that the men who work in them be granted an extension of the redundancy payment scheme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Deryshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) has already discussed the problem of changes of work and place of employment. We have all heard stories about miners' difficulties with payment of money that would enable them to move from one colliery to another. If the Minister cannot answer this point tonight, it would be helpful if he could write to us. We realise that he is concerned with a number of matters, but when we discuss such matters of detail it is distressing that he often seems to be unaware of issues that are significant to those most directly affected by the Government's policies.

Assistance for removal expenses was one of the hallmarks of redundancies in the 1960s and 1970s. The fact that money was available for such purposes at that time is one of the reasons why the transfer of labour in the coal industry was achieved comparatively painlessly. It is not available now and, in some respects, the need is even more desperate than it was then.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): In my constituency, staff of the Royal Ordnance factory who took redundancy have now waited more than six months to receive unemployment benefit. Some of the miners were forced into taking redundancy payment. It is often months before some of the folk receive the unemployment benefit to which they are entitled.

Mr. O'Neill: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. The only difficulty is that the Minister will immediately try to side step the issue on the ground that it is not his Department's concern. However, his Department is responsible for the fact that if, when people go for unemployment benefit or income support, the officials at the local office refuse to grant it, considerable time elapses before the appeals procedures are set in motion. In that time, considerable suffering and difficulty arise.

One issue which has already been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) merits closer consideration, and this is the appropriate debate in which to discuss it—I refer to early retirement and the handling of British Coal's staff superannuation

scheme. The subject is causing considerable disquiet to people who work in the coal industry and to beneficiaries of the scheme.

At present, there is a dispute involving £481 million, a debt owed to the scheme which is regarded in the scheme's books as an asset. At least 90 per cent. of the money should have been repaid by the government through social cost grants such as we are discussing. If the grant had been paid, the staff's superannuation fund would have been that much higher.

As I understand it, under Government pressure, British Coal is seeking to offset the £481 million against its share of the £1 billion surplus provided under the scheme's rules. British Coal is currently enjoying a normal contributions holiday to its staff fund until April 1997. It no longer pays normal contributions to the scheme. Despite that, British Coal has the ultimate power to decide the rules on how the scheme's surpluses are to be distributed. That raises the question of who should control the pension fund assets and who should have the power to decide how the surpluses are used.

Following the scheme's draft actuarial valuation, the trustees proposed that British Coal should run down its share of the surplus by extending its normal contributions holiday after 1997. However, British Coal would prefer to use its share of the surplus by withholding its stage payments to the scheme for early pensions—effectively enjoying a holiday from additional contributions. Not content with an extended holiday from normal contributions, British Coal is seeking a quicker method of benefiting from the surplus.

The trustees argue that British Coal's proposals would be in breach of the scheme's rules. While they do not question British Coal's right to a share of the surplus, they dispute the way in which British Coal may use its share of the surplus. They claim that while British Coal is allowed to realise its share of the surplus through a holiday, from either normal or deficiency contributions, it is not allowed to take it in the form of a holiday from additional contributions, which should be regarded as a debt owed to the scheme and, therefore, scheme assets. The trustees and British Coal have sought joint clarification in the High Court on the legality of British Coal's proposals. The trustees are unanimous in their opposition to British Coal's proposals to cancel their debt to the fund and in their support for legal action.

I made that point in detail because it is important—two factors have emerged. Almost uniquely, British Coal is successfully uniting all the pension fund trustees in opposing its move to use the funds in a way that the trustees consider inappropriate. The trustees believe that the practical effect would be to disadvantage scheme members by realising British Coal's share of the pension fund surplus sooner rather than later. British Coal's proposal would be detrimental to the staff fund in cash flow terms. The Government are in effect trying to pay for past redundancies at the expense of British Coal pensioners. Pension fund assets should not be used to meet a social cost.

In addition, it might be more prudent of British Coal to wait before realising its share of the surplus. If the value of investment falls, pension fund surpluses can quickly turn into deficits. Moreover, British Coal's pension scheme is characterised by a shrinking work force and an increasing number of beneficiaries. It is important for that point to be on the record. There has been a lot of talk and many questions on the subject, but this is the first opportunity to raise it properly. The fact that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have not interrupted me suggests that it is also in order to discuss that matter.

Many hon. Members have elderly constituents who are extremely worried about their pension arrangements and their poll tax and council tax bills. The active and alert elderly in particular seek clarification. They are extremely annoyed at what they see as a Government-inspired attempt to take prematurely from the pension fund something to which the Government are not entitled at this stage.

In discussions about retraining and re-employment, reference has been made to British Coal Enterprises, which has made a number of extravagant claims that do not bear close scrutiny. A report published jointly by the Coalfield Communities Campaign and Wakefield and Barnsley councils of miners examined a BCE claim that, in the year ended 31 March 1992, 67,347 opportunities were created; business funding was provided for 3,300 projects, with the expectation that they would create 39,000 jobs; 11,200 jobs were created through managed work spaces; and the employment advisory service created opportunities for 25,000 people.

Much of that work was not the sole responsibility of British Coal Enterprises. In a number of instances, money was made available and BCE merely provided top-up funding. Some businesses relocated in areas in which British Coal Enterprises was operating, and in effect moved in jobs from elsewhere. One characteristic of small businesses is that they have a higher failure rate than larger businesses and the employment that they offer can be regarded as non-permanent. Some 90 per cent. of the jobs available are in that category.

As to placements, in a study of 284 people, 52 were in continuous employment for 18 months, whereas 232 were out of work for an average of 18 months. Ten per cent. of those who got work had a fall in take-home pay of between £70 and £100 a week. Only those who returned to the coal industry to be employed by contractors carrying out additional work received higher pay than previously.

I am trying to qualify the praise for British Coal Enterprise. Some of us have in our constituencies projects that have benefited from the largesse and support of British Coal Enterprise. However, we are not blind to the fact that some of the funded schemes have considerable limitations. Not all the jobs go to people who have worked in the coal industry, because some of those who are employed are in business in coal mining areas. The Opposition are prepared to give a fair wind to the grants, but we have some reservations about the way in which money has been spent.

In a contracting industry that is under considerable strain, we must look at one other issue—the position of the social welfare organisation that will also be funded under these arrangements. The Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation has a budget of more than £2 million and consists of a plethora of organisations. There is much nervousness throughout CISWO about the prospect of coal privatisation. It is feared that the trusts could be severely threatened by some kind of catch-all legislation.

This may be the last coal debate before the presentation of privatisation measures. Whether they will be passed is open to question, but there is no questioning the fact that there is considerable anxiety within CISWO about the Government's intentions towards the organisation's

[Mr. O'Neill]

unique place in the industry. I say unique, because CISWO continues to enjoy the unalloyed support of British Coal management, and probably no other part of the industry enjoys such strong backing. A clearer indication of the Government's support for that important organisation would be helpful. I appreciate that the hour is late and that the Minister may not have the necessary information to hand. If he cannot reply to that in the debate, perhaps he will write to me.

The Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation is not a peripheral body. We have heard much in the debate, not least from the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), about the importance of retaining and sustaining coalfield communities. There are in those communities many elderly people and others who suffer from serious illness as a consequence of service to the coal industry. Those people depend in a variety of ways on the activities of CISWO, and I shall give a few examples. Some 1,280 seriously disabled mineworkers are assisted with holidays, 218 seriously disabled people are provided with specific household items to improve the quality of life, and 2,333 seriously disabled people are provided with assistance for days out and the like.

Facilities are made available to such people under grants through measures such as those that we are considering. It is important to hear about the Government's intentions for that organisation. I hope that at some stage the Government will tell us about the other issues that have been raised in the debate, such as redundancy and early retirement, changes of work and places of employment, retraining and new employment. If we receive assurances on those matters, we will not object to the order.

12.44 am

Mr. Eggar: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has left us, because I had intended to draw attention—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) can pretend that he is the hon. Member for Bolsover, although he does not look exactly the same. The trousers of the hon. Member for Bolsover stay up rather more easily than his. I had intended to draw the attention of the House to a rather curious fact.

The hon. Member for Bolsover is well known as an opponent of the European Community, so I was surprised to receive in my post the other day a letter from him that covered a letter from Mr. Arthur Scargill of the National Union of Mineworkers. The House may be interested to know that the hon. Member for Bolsover has apparently thrown aside all his views on the EC. He asked me, on behalf of the Government, to ensure that the NUM got funding from the European Community as part of the attempt to introduce redundancy payments because of the contraction of the NUM. It seems that that was a classic clash of the hon. Gentleman's principles. On the one hand, there is his allegiance to the union, about which we all know, and, on the other, there is his concern about the EC.

If I had got to that point, I might have been able to prevent the slight lapse of humour of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). If my hon. Friend re-reads his speech tomorrow morning, or the day after, he may reflect on whether using the tone and language that he chose to use this evening was really the best way in which to persuade his colleagues in the Government to see his point of view.

Perhaps I was too generous to my hon. Friend in accepting the praise heaped on him by the hon. Member for Bolsover, who claimed that my hon. Friend had a grasp of detail. I do not think that my hon. Friend's contribution tonight could entirely be said to portray accurately his grasp of detail. Indeed, some might say that the speech was somewhat incoherent, somewhat contradictory and somewhat ill-informed. Some might even say that his speech betrayed ignorance of what had been going on at the Trentham pit, whose interests he claims to have furthered in recent weeks.

My hon. Friend appears to be unaware of the fact that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry met other hon. Members who have interests in the Trentham pit and that, subsequent to that meeting, they accepted that my right hon. Friend had made a number of important announcements that benefited the area, such as the announcement of £7 million for English Estates, £7 million via Staffordshire training and enterprise council for a package of employment-related measures and £800,000 from the coalfield area fund. Hon. Members representing Stoke-on-Trent and elsewhere accepted that the Government had responded. I am sorry that my hon. Friend did not feel able to be as generous as other hon. Members.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Eggar: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I shall get on. With regard to the points made by the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and, indeed, supported——

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Eggar: With great respect to my hon. Friend, I do not think that he was in the House during the debate. Let me deal with the points that have been raised during the debate.

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend has said that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) wrote and asked him whether he could have EC funding to help the administration of the NUM. If my hon. Friend raises such questions, he should tell us what he said. Did he say yes or no? That is a simple question.

Mr. Eggar: I have already said in answer to a similar letter from Mr. Arthur Scargill that the Government cannot respond positively to the request from the NUM. I am not sure that I have replied to the hon. Member for Bolsover yet, but I have certainly replied in terms to other hon. Members.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Tell us, then.

Mr. Eggar: Of course. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has been able to draw that information out of me. I had not realised that he was so interested in the answer.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central raised the question of British Coal Enterprise. If I may say so, I think that the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) raised it in a rather more balanced way. I must say to the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central that, if British Coal

Enterprise did not exist, he and others would be clamouring for the existence of such an organisation. BCE has made an important contribution to the coalfield areas.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) made a number of points. I will, as suggested, study the record and ensure that my hon. Friends study what has been said and respond to him. I will also pick up other points in writing.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan spoke about the Coal Industry Socal Welfare Organisation, which is being considered in the context of the privatisation Bill. The hon. Gentleman also raised matters relating to the staff superannuation scheme—typically, in a rather more balanced way than the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) did at Easter, when he caused a great deal of unnecessary concern among pensioners.

The application of British Coal's share of the surplus in the staff superannuation scheme is a matter for the corporation. British Coal is right to consider the position of the taxpayer, who is making large contributions to a fund that is heavily in surplus. The corporation will not, of course, proceed further before it has the decision of the High Court. I again repeat that there is no question of the Government taking money from the staff scheme—or, indeed, from any other British Coal pension fund. Staff scheme pensions are not at risk; on the contrary, the beneficiaries' share of the surplus will be used to fund improvements to members' benefits. I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be particularly interested in that assurance.

This useful debate has enabled us to air a number of concerns. I repeat that I shall respond in due course to any points that I have missed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 24th June, be approved.

European Community Documents

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to European Community documents.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees).

FOODSTUFFS (COLOURING)

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 4116/92 and 6227/93, relating to colouring in foodstuffs; and supports the Government's intention of negotiating provisions which ensure the safe use of colours in food whilst permitting the continued availability of United Kingdom products in the form in which United Kingdom consumers wish to buy them.

STRUCTURAL FUNDS

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. COM(92) 84, 9973/92, 5456/93 and 6006/93, relating to Structural Funds; and endorses the Government's approach towards the negotiations on the review of Structural Funds regulations.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Question agreed to.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

CHANNEL TUNNEL

That the draft Channel Tunnel (International Arrangements) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 24th May, be approved.

CIVIL DEFENCE (SCOTLAND)

That the draft Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) (Scotland) Regulations 1993, which were laid before this House on 20th May, be approved.

DRUG TRAFFICKING PROCEEDS (SCOTLAND)

That the draft Confiscation of the Proceeds of Drug Trafficking (Designated Countries and Territories) (Scotland) Amendment Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 27th May, be approved.

OVERSEAS FORFEITURE ORDERS (SCOTLAND)

That the draft Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990 (Enforcement of Overseas Forfeiture Orders) (Scotland) Amendment Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 27th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Question agreed to.

AGRICULTURE

Ordered,

That Mrs. Angela Browning be discharged from the Agriculture Committee and Mr. Andrew Hunter be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

EDUCATION

Ordered,

That Mrs. Angela Knight be discharged from the Education Committee and Mr. David Lidington be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

HEALTH

Ordered,

That Mr. Michael Trend be discharged from the Health Committee and Mr. John Whittingdale be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fegrus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

TRANSPORT

Ordered,

That Mr. Nigel Evans be discharged from the Transport Committee and Mr. Peter Luff be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Castle Point Borough Council (Capping)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

12.53 am

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): I am pleased to have the opportunity tonight to explain the capping of Castle Point borough council. I read in my local paper, the *Yellow Advertiser,* last week that a Conservative councillor is angry because I have not felt able to back the council "to the hilt" on its past financial management. But like my predecessor, Lord Braine of Wheatley, I will always put my constituents' interests and simple justice first and foremost, rather than blindly supporting a council or any other body.

I understand the councillor's frustration, but I am more concerned about the sense of frustration of all my constituents, especially those who find it difficult to meet a high council tax bill and those who previously relied on or benefited from non-statutory services. That frustration is exacerbated by the fact that the council had built itself a reputation for providing high-quality services at a low cost to the local community.

Hon. Members will note that Castle Point is not a profligate council. Councillors have not wilfully overspent, disregarded Government policy or flagrantly embraced hare-brained spending schemes. The problem arose from previous years' errors in budgeting and accounting irregularities, which led to an extraordinary deficit of £2·3 million and which must be corrected in the current year. That is the reason for the council's high budget this year and for the Government capping it.

I should like to set out the facts in three broad sections, because my constituents have a right to know the facts: first, exactly how the deficit arose and what happened to the £2·3 million; secondly, what action the council and the Government have taken to alleviate the problems caused by the deficit; and thirdly, what action the council is now taking to ensure that such a problem cannot recur.

I must set the record straight, since politically active groups and individuals in my constituency have been misrepresenting the situation and scaremongering among vulnerable people, who are rightly concerned. The £2·3 million deficit arises largely from incorrect budgeting for interest payable and receivable. The sums amounted to £793,000 in 1991-92 and £980,000 in 1992-93. In addition, other errors in budgeting and in controlling budgets occurred. The main items were an income shortfall of £260,000 for planning and land charges, a £140,000 shortfall on housing account advances and £90,000 depletion of capital plan—the inability to capitalise salaries.

Those sums and a multiplicity of lesser variations make up the total deficit of £2·3 million. The money has not been stolen; it has not gone missing, or even been lost. It was spent on services in Castle Point—services to the people and the community of Castle Point. It was money spent over and above the amount that was collected by the council.

So who is responsible for this problem? To make errors in budgeting is not, to coin a phrase, a hanging offence. It is usual for budgets to show variances in outturns. Budgets are simply financial plans and need to be managed like any other plans. I do not unduly blame the former finance director for those errors, but he must carry some blame for his failure to manage the budget variances and for failing to report them to senior colleagues or to councillors.

He must, however, carry the whole blame for hiding those deficits by using irregular and improper accounting practices over a long period. The council's auditors, Ernst and Young, and the independent financial consultants, Binder Hamlyn, concluded that there were accounting irregularities. On 5 November 1992, external auditors informed the chief executive of the council that an illegal transfer of funds between accounts had taken place and that this was the responsibility of the former finance director, who as late as last October had still failed fully to advise the council of its financial position.

A chronological report giving the precise timings of the various events was provided and published in full by the chief executive at the council meeting of 14 June, so I shall not trawl through those facts now.

Councillors are fully accountable, but they did not know of the deficit in time to act to prevent it from accruing. All fair-minded people will acknowledge that councillors could hardly act to resolve the situation when they simply could not have been aware of it, since they were misled by the information given by the former finance director, which they accepted in good faith and had no reason to disbelieve—until of course, the auditor drew attention to the problems.

Nevertheless, councils must and do fully accept their accountability. The former finance director was retired on health grounds at the end of last year. I regret that: I believe that he should have been suspended, and subsequently forced to explain his actions following the final investigations of the auditors and accountants.

It is not my job to defend the council; my responsibility is to defend my constituents, and in particular to ensure that they have an accurate account of what has happened. I therefore called on the council to publish the definitive Binder Hamlyn report. I am pleased to say that the report was indeed published, in full. I welcome the spirit of openness adopted by the council.

On 9 June, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) said that the capping of Castle Point council was

"the fault of the treasurer."

Like me, he said that we should have a full disclosure.

"if something is wrong at Castle Point".—[*Official Report,* 9 June 1993; Vol. 226, c. 397.]

I trust that Castle Point's openness, and my statement tonight, will help to bring about a full and frank disclosure.

The hon. Member for Thurrock went on to say that he looked forward to hearing from me on the subject; but, curiously, he prevented me from explaining by using up much of the time available in the capping debate. I am sure that you recall the incident, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is why I am here tonight: I thank you for the opportunity.

I note that the hon. Member for Thurrock has not cared to join us tonight. That is a great shame, because he has not been able to listen to my account. Such curiously paradoxical behaviour is not at all unusual in the hon. Gentleman. For instance, he aspires to be the sole socialist spokesman for all Essex, yet he has not seen fit to move his family home there. Is Essex not good enough for the hon. Gentleman? Does he not like Thurrock? Does he expect his tenure to be very temporary? I guess so—but I digress.

What has the council done to resolve the £2·3 million deficit, as it must in this year's budget? It made difficult decisions to raise more income: for instance, it doubled some car parking charges. It has also dramatically reduced costs and spending—for example, by imposing a moratorium on some discretionary expenditure, such as support for the welfare minibus scheme. The scheme, however, was eventually saved, and is still running.

The maintenance of public toilets was cut, as was the senior citizens' concession. Indeed, it could be said that the council cut everything except the grass. I am pleased to report, however, that so fierce was the public outcry in Castle Point that the council has now resumed a limited grass-cutting programme. My constituents are grateful for that.

The council also reduced staff numbers, and cut salaries across the board—from cleaner to chief executive—by 6 per cent. The councillors reduced their statutory attendance allowances by 6 per cent. Those decisions were made more difficult because Castle Point council, unlike more profligate and unwise councils, has always run a tight ship. There were no easy schemes to be cut, as there were at Harlow, for instance; there were no pots of unused reserves on which to fall back.

The councillors were not at all happy to make such decisions, but in truth they had little choice. They worked hard to alleviate the problem: for instance, on the welfare minibus, individual councillors gave tens and even hundreds of pounds of their own money, and with the help of the whole community they kept the service running.

I am heartened by the magnificent community spirit that has surfaced. Churches, charities and many local organisations responded to my call to help to support the welfare minibuses until normality returns next year. No one has done more than the previous and present mayors of Castle Point, Councillors Bill Dick and Betty Wood, who have led the way and, like many of their fellow councillors, have shown great honour, caring and dignity in a difficult time.

After the first programme of action, the council was able to set a budget of £8,470,300. The Government imposed a spending limit of £7,970,000, so the council had to look again in order to close the gap of £500,300 which was effectively imposed by the capping. I said at the time that the adjustment could be achieved without further major cuts in staff or services, and that the Government had got it about right. Events have shown that to be the case. Indeed, as I said earlier, the grass-cutting programme increased by about £10,000 after the capping.

The £500,000 capping reduction, the £60,000 cost of re-billing, and various other adjustments, have all been met by the council, and the new budget falls some £12,400 below the Government's capping level. Meeting the cap has been achieved by three key actions on the council's part. First, the Minister allowed the council to capitalise previous years' redundancy costs from this year's assets disposal which, in all, will save abut £250,000 in the current year.

Secondly, the council's bankers have rescheduled the councils finances, which will save about £185,000 in the current year. Thirdly, the balance of funds needed was found from many budget income and expenditure adjustments. For example, there is a saving on the homelessness budget as the number of bed-and-breakfast families in Castle Point has fallen from 36 at the turn of the year, which was unacceptable, to zero today.

That is a welcome and worthy achievement by the councillors and the council's officers. In particular, it is the result of the personal drive and dedication of Councillor Malcolm Hume, the chairman of the housing committee. Today, we have a balanced budget. That is why I supported, and was right to support, the Government's capping order.

On behalf of the council's chief executive, Mr. Barry Rollinson, I must pay tribute to Department of the Environment Ministers and officers, who have been tough but fair. They have listened carefully, and been as helpful as they possibly could. They helped by fixing the standard spending assessment in the first place, by giving directions and relaxations when they could, and in the careful setting of the capping level, which, as has been proved, was correct.

I deal now with the action being taken by the council to prevent such a problem from recurring. I assure the House that the council has implemented, and is implementing, every recommendation in the auditors' report. That includes the commissioning of the independent financial consultants Binder Hamlyn, who specialise in local government finance.

The council has rigorously followed the Binder Hamlyn recommendations. New procedures, structures and new and clearer routes of accountability are being implemented and, invigorated by the success of its fundamental short-term review, the council is embarking on a fundamental longer-term review, a further efficiency programme.

That review will consider the large-scale voluntary transfer of council housing to a housing association which will have a great tenant-friendly credentials. I welcome that move very warmly, as it will be of great benefit to the tenants in my constituency. It will give them greater protection and greater control of their situations. I believe that it will also bring lower rents in the longer term.

That review will also consider the contracting out of some financial and accounting functions to a specialised organisation. You will understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I say that I welcome that initiative. The review will also involve a more purposeful market testing of all the council's services, and improved utilisation of all the council's facilities, buildings and assets.

That said, there are still problems to be resolved. I have particularly stressed to the council the need for a more reasonable budgeted collection rate. The council should achieve 97 per cent.—as most will. However, a rate of only 90 per cent. has been set. That has put bills up and rendered transitional relief less effective, and has denied my constituents some of the protections that they should have enjoyed against the increased tax demand. That will result in an over-collection on budget and a surplus in the collection fund. However, that surplus cannot be legally used in the current year.

The surplus does not, and never will, belong to the council. It belongs to my constituents, and it must be returned to them in the following year, by holding their next year's council tax bill even lower than it otherwise would be. The money must not be spent on services or salaries or put into reserves.

Hon. Members will already have calculated that, without the extraordinary deficit of £2·3 million, the council's spending this year would not be the Government-set level of £7·9 million; it would have been only £5·6 million. The calculation is easy: £7·9 million less the £2·3

[Dr. Robert Spink]

million deficit that must be met this year leaves £5·6 million only that is being spent on services. I want that low level of spending on services projected into coming years. That extremely low level applied five years ago, and it is a starting point for next year's council tax.

I want to see the greater part of the savings from next year's low spending level passed on to the council taxpayer in lower bills. There should be no general reinstatements of this year's efficiency savings. We have gained them and we must keep those gains. The minor increases necessary in next year's budget that are needed to remove the moratorium on small discretionary items such as the £19 pensioner concessions must come from the longer-term further efficiency programme that I outlined a moment ago.

My hon. Friend the Minister is aware that the process has been difficult for all involved, and especially for my constituents in Castle Point. However, Castle Point council can, and I trust will, emerge more professional and stronger in future years. If it does that, Castle Point will become an excellent model of an enabling authority, providing a high quality and high level of services, at low cost to the council taxpayers. In any event, I should like to express my deep concern about what has happened. I fully understand and share my constituents' sense of frustration.

However, before I finish, I must warn each council taxpayer to continue to pay their current bills in full. New bills will be sent to them with the lower charges following the capping; they will receive them in August or September. Anyone who attempts to delay payment by waiting for those later bills will be under the most severe risk of legal action, with all the additional costs that that legal action will bring on them. I will have no means to protect them from that. I regret having to give that rather negative message, but it is my responsibility to defend my constituents in every possible way.

1.14 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) on having set out the issues so clearly. I thank him for the positive and constructive way in which he has approached the issue. It is always difficult to have a local authority in one's own constituency capped. It understandably raises a large number of concerns, and my hon. Friend has dealt with them admirably.

The House will be aware of the process of local government finance—I will not take the House through it, given the time available. However, the House will recognise that, given the proportion of public spending which local government spending represents, local government cannot expect to be exempt from the need for spending restraint in the interests of our wider economic strategy. That is why we have had for some time the powers to enable us to cap local authorities that do not budget sensibly.

Authorities therefore set their budgets in the light of our announced intentions. On 1 April, after authorities had set their budgets, my right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State took his capping decisions, taking account of all relevant considerations. His decisions gave broad effect to the provisional criteria. It is an indication of the success of the implementation of the council tax and the new realism that exists generally in local government that this year it was necessary to cap only three out of the 419 local authorities.

Alas, one of those three was Castle Point. The proposed cap required a reduction of only £500,000, rather than the full reduction of £1·3 million.

Subsequently, when Castle Point challenged our proposed cap, it became clear to us that the cap that we proposed would be tight. Castle Point had incurred significant redundancy costs in 1991-92 and 1992-93. We had issued a direction allowing those costs to be charged to capital account for 1992-93. However, the authority was unable to generate sufficient capital receipts in that year to provide cover for the full extent of its liability, and therefore only a portion of the cost could be capitalised. A significant amount—some £500,000—remained to be accommodated in the 1993-94 budget, so all of this was difficult.

During the process of challenging the proposed cap, the authority told us that it was planning to generate substantial capital receipts during 1993-94. Were the authority to be able to use some of those receipts to meet intended redundancy costs, those costs would then not fall to be charged against its 1993-94 budget.

We therefore concluded that it would be right to issue a direction to allow the authority to charge an amount of revenue spending to its capital account equal to the outstanding redundancy costs. On that basis, we also concluded that a cap at the level originally proposed would be right for Castle Point.

Castle Point has provided us with the necessary information, and the appropriate direction has been issued. We are satisfied that the cap proposed is reasonable, achievable and appropriate in all the circumstances of Castle Point. I thank my hon. Friend for his comments about it being tough and fair. After consideration, discussion and consultation, we have arrived at a cap that is tough and fair with regard both to Castle Point and to taxpayers generally.

It is for the authority to decide how to live within its cap, but we are satisfied that, as with each of the capped authorities, Castle Point will be able to provide an appropriate level of service if it chooses to do so. I think that my hon. Friend's estimate of the collection rate still needs to be a little more realistic. In fact, I hope that Castle Point will aim to collect 98 per cent. of its council tax. That is the target that we have set for other authorities.

Ideally, no authority would be capped, but we should not let the fact that we had to cap three authorities detract from the achievement of local government this year of successfully introducing the council tax at affordable levels up and down the country. It is encouraging that most local authorities have accepted their responsibility for spending restraint.

I hope that the spirit of co-operation demonstrated with the introduction of the council tax and the realism shown by most authorities will continue. Clearly, councillors and my hon. Friend have worked hard in Castle Point to sort out matters that are not of their own making——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-two minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 6 July 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HARRIS TWEED BILL *[Lords]*

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

London Implementation Group

1. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the proposed programme for the Government's response to the report of the London implementation group.

5. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to conclude the reorganisation of hospital provision in London.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): "Making London Better" sets out the timetable for improving London's health service, including our £170 million programme for strengthening primary care in the capital. The need for change is most urgent in inner London, where a number of hospital site option appraisals are already under way. Another key element will be the recommendations of the recently published independent specialty review reports. The main proposals for the future configuration of services in inner London will come forward in the autumn. Any major proposals to change services will, of course, be subject to full public consultation.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I recognise my right hon. Friend's problems and motives in rationalising health care in London. In the present economic climate, and with particular reference to Bart's, about which there has been so much public concern, can she give the House an absolute assurance that adequate funds will be available for the movement of units from Bart's to the Royal London hospital? If she is unable to give the House that assurance, will she say that the units, which have been recognised as centres of excellence in the specialty reviews and generally, will be allowed to operate on two sites so that nothing of value is destroyed?

Mrs. Bottomley: I give my hon. Friend a clear assurance that the intention of "Making London Better" is to improve and strengthen the specialist services. Independent commentator after independent commentator has reinforced the point that the London specialty services are fragmented, duplicate each other and will not be national, let alone international, centres of excellence unless change is embraced. My hon. Friend is right; we need to take great care and show consideration for preserving excellence, but I commend to him the words of Professor Besser when he said:

> "Bart's would not have survived 870 years if it had not been flexible."

I welcome the discussions that are under way between Bart's and the Royal London hospital and I am sure that strengthened services and the safeguarding of excellence will emerge out of them.

Mr. Banks: What does the right hon. Lady have to say to the statement made by Mr. Sandy Macara, the new chairman of the British Medical Association, who said that the national health service would be dead inside seven years unless the rot was stopped now and that it was underfunded by £6 billion?

What does the right hon. Lady have to say to Professor Jarman, who published an article a couple of weeks ago in the *British Medical Journal* that proved conclusively that London was not overstocked with hospital beds? When she answers, will she please not read out a list of misleading statistics produced by Conservative central office—as she normally does—because the more she does that, the more she sounds like a Dalek in a nurse's uniform?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members should read the edition of the *British Medical Journal* from the week after the specialty reviews were reported, which said:

> "The specialty reviews show clearly that some clinical services in London are not as good as they should be . . . Those who ultimately make the decisions on London should not lose sight this summer of the fact that their aim is to improve services for Londoners and the people of the Thames regions . . . it is not to protect institutions."

It is well understand that primary care is not up to a sufficient standard in London. I commend to the hon. Gentleman some of the developments in his area, such as the increase in the number of community psychiatric nurses and district nurses and the investment in primary care, as well as the £11 million development at Homerton hospital.

Mr. Congdon: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the need to implement the changes to health care in London at a sensible rate, in line with the changes in demand? Will she ensure that the changes in the number of acute beds are in line both with changes in demand and with improvements in primary health care?

Mrs. Bottomley: I give my hon. Friend that clear assurance. We said that we would not make progress in London until we had invested in primary care. This year, £43·5 million is going into primary care, in 78 different capital schemes. Tomorrow, I shall open the South Westminster health centre, a £1·7 million investment in family doctor and community services. There is an urgent need to take our proposals forward because, all over the south-east, district health authorities are changing their patterns of referral. The London specialty services treat, on average, about half the number of cancer patients that are treated in other parts of the country, so it is extremely urgent, if their excellence and their reputations are to be protected, that we take change forward.

Ms Primarolo: Does the Secretary of State agree that the way in which she has handled the Tomlinson report and the specialty reviews has blighted the whole of London's health service and that she is responsible for the low morale of staff, for undermining patients' confidence, for talking down the national health service and for causing chaos, because she does not have a clue what to do now that the reforms have failed? Are not the reforms that she said would save the national health service destroying it like a creeping cancer?

Mrs. Bottomley: Again, I urge the hon. Lady to do her homework. I commend the words of Christopher Ward, a consultant at Charing Cross hospital, who said:

"Too many specialist services are supplied to the dwindling population of London. These vary from the excellent to the inadequate".

I commend also the words of Paddy Ross, of the Joint Consultants Committee, who said:

"Ministers should be congratulated on the way they have responded to the Tomlinson Report. As a result of meaningful consultations they have produced a Government response the broad thrust of which is supported by the medical profession at national level".

There is great agreement that changes need to come. We shall move as swiftly as we reasonably can. With such serious decisions to be made, it is right to take properly into account the independent specialty reviews and the reviews of the special health authority research which will be published shortly.

Mr. Couchman: As my right hon. Friend takes the momentous decisions that she has to take to strengthen primary health care in London, will she bear in mind the fact that the destruction of a world-famous centre such as the Royal Marsden hospital would need justification stronger than that thus far offered by the differing opinions of Tomlinson and of the review group? Furthermore, will she also take into account the facts that London's gain over many years has been the loss of areas such as mine and that she will have to bear a great burden in deciding where to direct the resources that she takes from London and redistributes to the provinces?

Mrs. Bottomley: I certainly respond to the second part of my hon. Friend's remarks, because London has been spending 20 per cent. of the money on 15 per cent. of the people. There have been improvements, but there has been a distortion in the balance of provision in London because of the numerous duplicated speciality services and the great number of sites and institutions that have not changed at the same pace as the delivery of health care and the great investment outside London.

In reply to what my hon. Friend said about the Royal Marsden, I want to do nothing more than to protect and enhance London's national and international reputation for clinical services, research and education. My hon. Friend and other hon. Members would be hard pressed to find any authentic representatives of the academic or the medical profession who do not agree that services in London are duplicated and too small and that they need reintegration and rationalisation to become stronger.

Health Authority Mergers

2. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations she has received on the subject of health authority mergers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I have received a number of representations on that subject, including one from the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). Most recently, I had a meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton).

Mr. Pike: As we move towards the merger of the two health authorities in north-east Lancashire, can the Minister give the assurance that when the consultation takes place it will be genuine, and not a total sham, as was the consultation before we moved to trust status? Will he also guarantee that, as a result of the merger, there will not be a rationalisation that will provide less effective local services to the people of north-east Lancashire?

Mr. Sackville: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first point is that I can give him that assurance. Those to be consulted will include local Members of Parliament, any districts or family health services authorities that are affected, local community health councils, interested local authorities, trusts, universities and professional and representative organisations.

On the second point, there is every reason to suppose that the new purchasing arrangements will be of great benefit to patients in the hon. Gentleman's area.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My hon. Friend is well aware that Macclesfield borough council, Crewe and Nantwich borough council, Macclesfield community health council, myself, my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) and the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) are strongly opposed to the proposed merger of Crewe and Macclesfield health authorities.

Does my hon. Friend agree that those bodies and individuals are more representative of the people of that area than anyone else? Will he take their representations seriously into account? Does he accept that it would be better for the Government to halt the merger of districts until they have considered the merger of regions, and perhaps put the Mersey and North Western regions together, enabling Macclesfield to have a more natural partner to the north rather than Crewe to the south?

Mr. Sackville: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's views. He has failed to mention all the bodies and organisations that are in favour of the merger. I must remind my hon. Friend, however, that if he wants the best for the patients in his constituency, he will want a stronger purchaser with a larger number of residents, so that the purchaser has more influence with providers. That is the whole point of the purchaser-provider split.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Minister aware that that was the greatest load of claptrap that even he has ever uttered? There is no reasonable argument—medical, political or economic—for jamming together those two health authorities, which do not have common services and do not want the amalgamation. Will the Minister admit that he has no more intention of taking any notice of local people or local Members of Parliament than he has of learning to fly around the Chamber without a kite?

Mr. Sackville: The hon. Lady must realise that common services are not the main point. The main point is that a strong purchaser representing her constituents will be better able to assess the health needs of the whole area.

Mental Health Act 1983

3. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the working of section 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): Section 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983 provides for a patient suffering from mental disorder to be compulsorily admitted to hospital for assessment for a maximum of 28 days. We have been reviewing the general adequacy of the Act's provisions in relation to vulnerable or potentially dangerous psychiatric patients and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce her conclusions on this shortly.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I have given previous notice of three cases to my hon. Friend. The first involved a patient who was detained on inconclusive evidence, with subsequent devasting damage to the patient's family. The second case involved a patient whom two doctors had certified should be detained. The social worker refused to detain the patient, who then went outside and bopped the social worker on the head. The patient had to be brought inside and detained. In the third case, the patient could not get any evidence——

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is trying the patience of the House. Will he come to his question to the Minister?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful for your advice, Madam Speaker. In view of the abuses of the current system, will my hon. Friend consider reviewing the system whereby a mental health tribunal takes 21 days to settle such cases? Will my hon. Friend set up a quicker conciliation procedure?

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me notes of the cases to which he referred. As he said, some of the cases were referred too quickly and others were not referred quickly enough. I am seeking comments from the authorities involved about the cases raised. Section 2 requires a tribunal to act within seven days, not 21. Under the 1983 Act, the Mental Health Act Commission acts on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in keeping the working of the Act under review. That can include any aspect of the Act.

Ms Lynne: Can the Minister explain how it can be right that people detained under section 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983 have no statutory right to after-care under section 117? Will he ask the Secretary of State for Health to use her powers to direct health authorities, local authorities and NHS trusts to have some minimum standard of after-care, thus preventing mental health patients or ex-patients who recognise that they need treatment going for help and being turned away?

Mr. Bowis: It is our wish that everyone who needs treatment and after-care should receive it. That is why we have put in place the care programme approach, which ensures that everyone who leaves institutional care has a programme of treatment and social welfare and a key worker to assist. The mental health task force under David King is travelling around the country ensuring that social services departments are better able to receive such people and, indeed, to look after them while they are in the community.

Mrs. Browning: Is my hon. Friend aware that, for example, in rural communities, schizophrenic patients who from time to time have to be sectioned find that when housing is found for them they are housed in a large urban conurbation? That exacerbates their problem because they are away from the area where they are known by the local community and the area with which they are familiar. Will my hon. Friend examine that issue? It is a particular problem in rural constituencies such as mine.

Mr. Bowis: I accept entirely that the point that my hon. Friend raises is important. The programme for housing between the health authority and the relevant local authority social services department should be put in place before the patient is returned to the community. Certainly, the wishes and needs of the patient as well as of the patient's carers will be taken into account. I am sure that needs will be met in the way that my hon. Friend wishes.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is the Minister aware of the widespread concern that the Government's only apparent response to the increasing lack of public confidence in community care is to amend the mental health legislation and strengthen its provisions? Is not it astonishing that the Government admitted in the last oral Health questions, that they did not have the least idea where thousands of psychiatric patients who had been discharged while the Government have been in power had gone?

When will the Government start on the basics of community care: guaranteed after-care and support, proper accommodation, and care plans that are agreed when patients leave hospital and regularly reviewed when they are in the community? When will the Government realise that community care must be much more than simply closing hospitals and saving public expenditure?

Mr. Bowis: I wonder whether it is not time that the hon. Gentleman understood that it is our policy that everyone who has a mental health problem should be considered carefully and have his or her interests taken into account. It is not the case that beds are closed and people are thrown out into the community; bed closures must be set against a much wider range of provision in the community for former long-stay patients.

If the hon. Gentleman wishes to exchange facts, why does not he explain the real fact about funding mental health provision in Britain at the rate of £2 billion every year; the real fact about trebling the number of community psychiatric nurses; the real fact about trebling independent sector residential places; the real fact that funding for local authority services for the mentally ill has been increased by 86 per cent. in real terms; and the fact that mental health specific grant has increased this year by £13 million to £34·4 million, including £250,000 to the hon. Gentleman's borough?

Cardiac Unit, Plymouth

4. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made regarding plans for a specialist cardiac unit at Plymouth.

Mr. Sackville: I understand that South Western regional health authority has asked local health districts to prepare a business case for the development of a cardiac surgery unit at Derriford hospital in Plymouth.

Mr. Streeter: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that it is simply not acceptable for people living in Plymouth, which is the 14th largest city in the country, to have to travel 120 miles to Bristol or 240 miles to London for cardiac treatment? Does that not further show the urgent need to reallocate the surplus capacity in London's specialty services to ensure that those vital facilities are available for the regions where they are badly needed and would be warmly welcomed?

Mr. Sackville: I have visited my hon. Friend's constituency and talked to some of the patients at Derriford hospital who have had to travel large distances and I am aware of the problem. However, my hon. Friend should be aware that a decision on a cardiac unit is not taken lightly: the unit must be of a certain size. He will be aware also that, of those patients currently treated at Bristol, some will continue to be referred to Bristol and others may well continue to be referred to Oxford or London. Before any such decision can be taken, it has to be proved that there will be a sufficient number of referrals to a new cardiac unit.

Mr. Jamieson: Is the Minister aware that the incidence of heart disease in the Plymouth health authority area is among the highest in the country, yet that is one of the few areas of England without a dedicated unit to carry out angioplasty and bypass operations? As hundreds of people are travelling from Devon and Cornwall each year for cardiac treatment in London and Bristol, will the hon. Gentleman now give urgent consideration to providing funds so that such a unit can be set up in Plymouth without further delay?

Mr. Sackville: The hon. Gentleman should not pretend that it has been a matter of resources. It has been a matter of the need to refer to a suitable centre. He will know, perhaps, that the region is intending to cater for 316 coronary artery bypass grafts per million population. That is above the national average of 300. That increase may justify a new centre.

Mr. Harris: Does my hon. Friend appreciate the fact that a cardiac unit in Plymouth would serve not only Plymouth and that part of Devon but Cornwall? It is a long day's march from Cornwall to London, as I and other hon. Members from Cornwall know. It is also a long distance from my constituency to Bristol. Will my hon. Friend examine that matter with urgency and sympathy?

Mr. Sackville: The long distances are a major factor. It would appear that, if there is to be a second centre, the most suitable location would be Plymouth.

Trent Regional Health Authority

6. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about the management of Trent regional health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Trent regional health authority has an excellent record in the delivery of health services. In the past four years, for example, it has seen a 75 per cent. increase in the use of day surgery, releasing resources to treat more patients. Long waiting times, in particular, have fallen dramatically. Almost a third of the region's population now benefit from having a GP fund holder, which is well ahead of the national average. We expect that, from next year, all but four of the region's units will have been strengthened by NHS trust status.

Mr. Hughes: The Secretary of State is one of the few people left with confidence in Trent regional health authority. Is she aware of the catalogue of disasters going uninvestigated in that authority: Beverley Allitt; brain damaged babies at Doncaster royal infirmary; Neil Silvester, the psychiatrist who released one of his patients, who, two days later, stabbed to death an innocent 12-year-old girl in Doncaster; and, recently, an unfortunate stabbing in Doncaster royal infirmary?

Public inquiries have been called for in all those cases. All were refused. When will we have a public inquiry into that catalogue of disasters? If the Secretary of State refuses, may we have a public inquiry into the management of Trent regional health authority?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman cites a number of cases, all of which are complex and, as he rightly says, deeply concerning. I commend an article from the *Solicitors' Journal* that identifies the cases in which a public inquiry is the best approach as distinct from an investigative inquiry where the results are revealed. It states that the format of the public inquiry is quite unsuited to the delicate and sensitive issues of health and child care matters, and that

> "The only criteria to be satisfied in the Allitt case are that:
> the inquiry team are competent and independent
> that they have access to the information
> that witnesses are confident to come forward and give their evidence
> that the report is published in full".

It goes on to say that clearly the decision of a private inquiry

> "will satisfy the overriding concern of the parents, the medical profession and the public that the truth be known".

That is important advice.

All the cases that the hon. Gentleman cited from his constituency have been investigated. The health advisory service is currently considering the care of the mentally ill in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. At the same time, in his constituency as elsewhere, there have been great improvements in care. No one in Doncaster generally has to wait more than 18 months, 12 months for a cataract operation or nine months for hip and knee operations.

Mr. Blunkett: Will the Secretary of State tell the House why she is refusing to meet the parents of Beverley Allitt's victims unless they agree not to discuss the proceedings of the Clothier committee, and why she is refusing a public inquiry on a day when the Clinical Standards Advisory Group has declared the devastating and indicting state of neonatal intensive care facilities in Britain? Does the right hon. Lady agree with the advisory group that the market in health has failed, that there is a need for proper health planning and that, unless that takes place, people throughout Britain can have no faith in the national health service under the right hon. Lady's tutelage?

Mrs. Bottomley: That is another typical example of the way in which the hon. Gentleman fails to understand the changes that have been taking place in the health service. The Clinical Standards Advisory Group was set up by the Government precisely to advise on specialist services. It certainly does not say that they are in any way jeopardised

by the changes that have taken place. Its advice must be considered by purchasers in securing ever-increasing standards of care for their local health authorities.

I have made it clear that I am happy to meet the parents of Beverley Allitt's victims and I have met a number of them informally. At the moment, judicial matters are under way. In particular, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the comments of the South Lincolnshire community health council. My wishes are those of the parents and staff—to get to the bottom of the case, to reveal all the facts, to publish the report and to ensure that the lessons are learnt. There has already been a lengthy criminal trial and an independent management investigation. The community health council stated:

"The nature of a public inquiry with its adversarial atmosphere and the length of time that such proceedings demand may not necessarily establish the truth nor at the end of the day throw a lot of light on what actually happened."

It is the opinion of Sir Cecil Clothier, a distinguished, eminent and independent Queen's counsel, that that is not the way to get to the truth.

"The Health of the Nation"

7. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the implementation of "The Health of the Nation".

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The White Paper, "The Health of the Nation", which was published a year ago, has been widely welcomed both within the NHS and further afield, not least by the World Health Organisation which described it as a model for others to follow. Progress towards meeting the targets set out in the White Paper is generally good. A wide range of activities is under way to ensure that we secure the improvements in health which are the overall aim of our policy. Much of the work is being reflected this week in a range of publications and events to mark the first anniversary of the White Paper.

Mr. Callaghan: I thank the Secretary of State for that rosy report on the state of the nation's health, but can she justify to the House her proposals to close so many of the nation's hospitals, including five in north Manchester alone? Is she aware that there is such a wave of anger that this weekend 500 people took to the streets of north Manchester opposing the closure of the Booth Hall children's hospital? In the light of that, will she reconsider her decision to close that hospital?

Mrs. Bottomley: As the hon. Gentleman knows, no decision has been taken on that matter, but the health of the nation cannot be measured in institutions which were built for generations past. Investment in health is important in primary care, family doctors and community nurses, emphasising prevention as well as cure. In the hon. Gentleman's health authority since 1979 there has been an increase of half as much again in the number of day cases, a two thirds fall in the one-year waiters, a 59 per cent. —nearly a 60 per cent.—increase in the number of general practitioners and a 67 per cent. increase in the number of dentists. That is a clear investment in health. Health is not only about institutions—in this country or anywhere else in the world.

Mrs. Roe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that "The Health of the Nation" White Paper has taken the health service a giant step forward towards its original goal of securing improvements in the overall state of health? Does she also agree that the Labour party is constantly displaying its lack of vision by continuing to focus on input measures, such as the number of beds, when the health service is changing and the emphasis should be on improving health?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is exactly right. The health service should not be measured by the number of beds. It is not a furniture warehouse. We should measure the health service in terms of the number of patients treated. That is why the extra 400,000 patients treated in the past year represented such a great achievement for the staff involved.

The key element of the NHS, which we have at last been able to set in place so long after its establishment, is that it is a health service, not an illness service. It is about health, not health institutions. It is about prevention as well as cure. "The Health of the Nation" strategy, following the improvements in the family doctor services, "Working for Patients" and the establishment of trusts, is the third leg of the stool that will lead to a health service that will continue to be the envy of the world into the next century.

Mr. Blunkett: Given the Secretary of State's special understanding of the feelings and emotions of unmarried mothers, will she denounce as insensitive and hypocritical the comments made at the weekend by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), who speaks for a Government who have cut family planning resources, who have reduced the school health service, who have failed to tackle teenage pregnancies and whose policies are designed to undermine and destroy rather than build up and secure responsibility and commitment to the family?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am a little surprised by the hon. Gentleman's approach. Be that as it may, however, I believe strongly that children need families. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State was pointing out that rabid ideas of feminism are not the best approach to bringing up children and that children need mothers as well as fathers. I believe that my hon. Friend is exactly right and I also congratulate him on his work in talking about the importance of sex education in schools, where he has been taking a clear line that children need to be prepared for the world in which they are to live.

Family planning services have changed dramatically over the years. Now, 98 per cent. of GPs provide family planning services. That is why we have had a review to ensure that the clinics are focused on the needs of today and tomorrow and especially on the needs of the young.

Mr. Sims: One of the key aims of "The Health of the Nation" is a reduction in the incidence of coronary heart disease, in which two contributory factors are smoking and diet. I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the Government on their success before the European Court on the question of health warnings on cigarette packets, but can she tell us what steps she proposes to take to reduce smoking among 11 to 15-year-olds in the light of the chief medical officer's concern that targets may not be reached? Can she also tell us what success the nutritional task force, which she appointed in December, has had in persuading us all to follow healthier diets?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) has long been a champion in the fight against smoking. He will know that we have had greater success than almost any other European country in reducing smoking. Only the Netherlands has a better record than ours. The Netherlands shares our approach to the voluntary agreement on tobacco advertising, but also our policy of taking vigorous and determined action to ensure that we get the message home to young people as well as their parents. Children of parents who strongly disapprove of smoking are seven times less likely to smoke than other children.

Our success at the European Court is an example of our firm intent. The health warnings on our cigarette packets are 50 per cent. bigger than in any other country and we have chosen to use the most direct messages on those packages. We shall continue to strengthen the campaign because we intend to meet the target by the end of the century. In particular, as my hon. Friend rightly suggests, we need to renew the campaign against young people smoking.

The nutrition task force produced its new programme this morning. I hope that all hon. Members will study the programme carefully and let us have any further advice that can change the dietary habits of us all.

Royal Free Hospital

8. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the future of the Royal Free hospital in the pattern of London's health care following the Tomlinson review.

The Minister for Health (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): The Royal Free hospital will continue in its role as an important and well-managed provider of services to local patients.

Ms Jackson: Does that mean that the recommendations of the London implementation group specialty reviews will not be implemented? Under those recommendations, the Royal Free would lose cancer treatment, neurosurgery, paediatrics and a world-renowned renal transplant unit. Are not the review boards, brought into being by the Department of Health, yet another smokescreen put up by the Government in an attempt to conceal the basic fault in their policy, which is that a market economy cannot provide the health service that the country demands and should receive?

Dr. Mawhinney: Of course they are not. As the hon. Lady knows, the specialty review reports represent independent advice to Ministers and they will not determine—by themselves, certainly—the future pattern of services. The recommendations as they affect the Royal Free will no doubt be a subject for discussion with the region, with local hospitals and with the implementation group, to ensure that all points are properly satisfied. That is what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the hon. Lady on 23 June and I confirm it.

Mr. Tracey: Does my hon. Friend agree that we can all go on about our own local hospitals and that I could make a strong case for more resources for Kingston hospital, but that our policy is about universal health care across the whole of London and our first priority must be primary care across London?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is, of course, absolutely right. When I visited the Royal Free on Friday, I found it adopting a more positive attitude towards its future than the hon. Member in whose constituency it lies ever adopts in the House.

Free Dental Treatment

9. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the future of the rules governing free dental treatment.

12. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the future of the rules governing free dental treatment.

Dr. Mawhinney: Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's review of the remuneration of general dental practitioners set out a number of options for changing the way in which we deliver general dental services. We have consulted widely on his report and will announce our proposals in due course.

Mr. Gunnell: Does the Minister agree that prevention is both wise and, in the longer term, economic? Is he not willing to implement the Select Committee's recommendation that a core service of diagnostic and preventive care should be available to all patients free of charge?

Dr. Mawhinney: Prevention is, of course, an important aspect of health care; the hon. Gentleman is right on that point. We have read the Select Committee report with great interest—and great care—and will reflect on it seriously before making a judgment. I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. I remind him that paragraph 151 of the report says:

"There was, however . . . much more consensus amongst witnesses concerning the problems than concerning the solutions."

It is right that we should take time in order to get a proper solution.

Ms Eagle: Will the Minister give an assurance that the Government have no intention whatever of removing from pregnant women and nursing mothers the current entitlement to free dental health care?

Dr. Mawhinney: What I will do is take the hon. Lady's views into consideration, even though the consultation period has concluded. I will do that against the background of my knowledge that at no time did the Labour party offer any considered view as part of the public consultation on the way in which dentistry should develop in this country. I have taken note of that. I have also taken note of the fact that the Liberal Democrats do not have a considered view for the future either.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 6 July.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is attending the G7 economic summit in Tokyo.

Mr. Dykes: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that Her Majesty's Government and our leading partners will exert maximum pressure on the Japanese to open their markets to imports of all kinds and to the sort of free trade that is now developing rapidly in the European single market?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to emphasise that. One of the key aims of the G7 summit will be to agree on measures that can help to further the recovery of the world economy, including the maintenance and sustenance of free and competitive trade. My right hon. Friend's aim will include very much ensuring that sufficient progress is made on the market access and services package to permit early resumption of the multilateral negotiations in Geneva and bring a successful conclusion to the Uruguay round.

Mrs. Beckett: Is the Lord President aware that, last night in another place, his ministerial colleagues said that the defeat that the Government suffered on the Railways Bill struck at the heart of that legislation? Does he agree?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has made it clear that the Government have set out and seen accepted in this place their arguments on this matter and he will take a lot of persuading to believe that the policy should be changed. Nevertheless, the other place has asked for reconsideration and, of course, we will carefully consider the points that have been made.

Mrs. Beckett: Is it not crazy that the French, the Germans or the Italians will be able to run trains on British railways and the only people who will not are British Rail? Why do the Government not show some common sense and simply admit that they have got it wrong?

Mr. Newton: The right hon. Lady and her right hon. and hon. Friends have fought every privatisation for 12 or 14 years. As one by one the privatisations have proved successful, they have been forced to abandon most of that. The people who need to learn the lessons are Her Majesty's Opposition.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders has published figures today showing an 11 per cent. increase in new care sales over June 1992? Is that not further evidence that the recovery is being sustained?

Mr. Newton: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend has described exactly the figures published this morning by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. What is more, the SMMT goes on to say that recovery in the new car market in all but three of the past 15 months is now clearly established. That comes alongside all the other evidence that we have seen—manufacturing output up, car output up, exports up and unemployment down.

Q2. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 6 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bradley: Does the Leader of the House recall that on 29 October 1987, less than six years ago, as the then Minister for Health, he proudly came to my constituency to open the Duchess of York children's hospital? Is he aware that, last week, South Manchester health authority confirmed its plan to close that purpose-built children's hospital despite overwhelming opposition?

Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether he supports the all-party campaign, which has overwhelming public support, to keep open our children's hospital, or will he accept the invitation which is on the way to him, to return to Manchester, to close that hospital on behalf of the Government?

Mr. Newton: I well remember the occasion to which the hon. Gentleman refers, although I have to say that the hospital was not opened by me but by the Duchess of York. I am aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is considering the proposal, but the hon. Gentleman knows that it will be subject to full public consultation. My right hon. Friend will make her decision in due course.

Q3. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 6 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Spink: Does my right hon. Friend agree that political parties should not sell the right to choose their leaders or decide their policies? Can he confirm that the Conservative party remains committed to one man, one vote?

Mr. Newton *rose*——*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The activities of political parties are not a subject for Prime Minister's Question Time. The hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) must question the Government about their policies. It is Government policy in which we are interested.

Mr. Newton *rose*——

Hon. Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Order. The Leader of the House has been with us a long time and he is a respected man in this place. I am sure that he has an appropriate reply.

Mr. Newton: I was going to say that I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) was asking about the Government's attitude to such matters. *[Interruption.]* I think that that question is entirely right. I have read with great interest the press reports of recent days, starting with that about the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who said that he was going to have a confrontation with the unions, and followed by the comments of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who said that she was looking for compromise. I just wonder when we shall have the climbdown and capitulation.

Q4. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 6 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Heppell: Is the Leader of the House aware that 405 former council properties are empty in the city of

Nottingham and that 80 of them have already been vandalised, when 350 households have been designated as statutorily homeless and another 104 families live in conditions that are statutorily overcrowded? Does the Leader of the House not believe that it is time that the Government took a compassionate and humanitarian view and allowed the city council to spend some of the £53 million that it has amassed from the sale of council houses to put roofs over those people's heads?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will know that, at this period of time, Nottingham city council—in common with others—has full freedom to spend capital receipts. It can also take advantage—*[Interruption.]* It may spend capital receipts generated at this time. It also has access to the full range of measures that my right hon. and hon. Friends have introduced to assist the housing market.

Mr. John Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Viscount Runciman and his colleagues on the report of the Royal Commission on criminal justice, which has been published today? Although many of its recommendations will require a great deal of thought and consideration, does my right hon. Friend agree that some improvements in our criminal justice system are desirable not just to protect the innocent but to ensure that the guilty are properly convicted?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Newton: It is obvious from the response of my right hon. and hon. Friends—and, I suspect, a good deal of sympathy from the Opposition—that there is a wide welcome for the report that has been published today by the Royal Commission on criminal justice. There will no doubt be differences of opinion about some of the report's conclusions, but the importance of that matter is undoubted. The contribution that the royal commission has made to the debate on those matters is undoubted and the Government will give its recommendations the most careful consideration and then come to conclusions about what to do.

Q5. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 6 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Tyler: Is the Lord President aware that the Prime Minister visited north Cornwall exactly five months ago today and promised my constituents that he was taking action on excessive water and sewerage charges? Will he confirm whether it is the Government's policy to renege on existing environmental obligations or does he intend to break that promise?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to my right hon. Friend's visit to the south-west and to his recognition of the concern felt in the south-west, and much expressed by my hon. Friends, about the level of water charges. My right hon. Friends have been actively examining the options for reducing the increase in charges and, particularly, phasing in the burdens of the waste water directive in a way that would help. That consideration is going on at the moment.

Q6. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 6 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Clark: Does my right hon. Friend agree with Senator Campos, who is currently leading a Brazilian Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation to Westminster, when he said last night that Brazil is not just a country of the future, nor Britain just a country of the past, but that both are countries for today? Is that not best illustrated by the figures for Jaguar cars, which show that output has gone up 46 per cent., exports to Germany and the United States by 20 per cent., and that confidence in that company is greater than for many years.

Mr. Newton: I acknowledge my hon. Friend's interest in Brazil and echo the welcome that he has given to the visitors who are here from that country. I join him also in hoping that they may boost Jaguar car sales still further by taking some back with them. Meanwhile, I endorse my hon. Friend's pleasure at the British motor industry in accelerating away from its European competitors and links with the figures from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders that we were discussing earlier.

Ms Abbott: If the Government are really concerned about single mothers on benefit, when will they bring forward a strategy for child care? Is the Minister aware that most women on benefit would dearly like to go out to work and be independent but that their main problem is child care? When will the Government understand that investment in child care would be an investment in growth in general, and the surest and most humane way to get women off social security?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady will be familiar with the increase in pre-school provision of all kinds in recent years. She will also be well aware that at least as important a part of a policy in the area with which she is concerned are those policies for the improved collection and enforcement of child maintenance represented by the Child Support Agency, now getting successfully under way.

Q7. **Mr. Haselhurst:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 6 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Haselhurst: Is it correct to say that my right hon. Friend's colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry have secured a further £2 billion of help from European Community structural funds to help two of the most disadvantaged areas of the United Kingdom? If so, is that not proof of the merits of working vigorously and whole-heartedly within the Community, rather than constantly fretting about our relationship with it?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Indeed, the whole House will wish to pay tribute to the Minister for Industry on his negotiating success in the Community at the end of last week. He succeeded in reaching an agreement which will extend objective 1 status under the structural fund to Merseyside and to the Highlands and Islands enterprise area, and to the areas Argyll, Bute and West Moray which were not proposed by the Commission. That agreement is likely to bring about

£2·25 billion to the United Kingdom over the next six years, to all its objective 1 areas, including Northern Ireland.

Mr. Bryan Davies: With regard to political contributions, why is it all one way? What incentives do the Government give to rich Britons to make political contributions to right-wing regimes abroad, or does the whole idea stink?

Mr. Newton: As I may possibly have said on some previous occasion, I will listen to lectures from such as the hon. Gentleman on that matter when we stop facing the prospect of a position in the Labour party where it will be one man, 2 million votes.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will recall that a few weeks ago, the new Minister of State for the Armed Forces, to whom I have given notice of my intention to raise this point, proclaimed at the Dispatch Box his concern for the welfare of the serving men and women of this country. As a result, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence about my constituent, Brian Marshall, from south Kirby, who is suffering from what is known as desert fever. That gentleman has lost two stone in weight and is having difficulty climbing stairs——

Madam Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Member come to the point of order for me?

Mr. Enright: Having written to the right hon. Gentleman about the matter, I was astonished last evening to hear the Minister of State declare on television that he had received no representations about people suffering from desert fever. I suggest that that is unacceptable behaviour——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Member appreciates that I shall not allow a debate on the matter. It is not an issue for me. He must take it up with the Minister concerned. I cannot adjudicate on the accuracy of what is said in the course of television programmes——

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Jeremy Hanley) *rose*——

Madam Speaker: —and that is the end of that.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The House will know that there has been a serious incursion into the precincts of Buckingham palace and an evident lack of security, with no fewer than 17 people within the curtilage. The Home Secretary is at present the police authority for London, and is responsible for the protection of Her Majesty.

I am wondering, Madam Speaker, whether you have received a request for a statement to be made about the matter to the House and, if not, whether the Home Secretary, having heard this exchange, will lose no opportunity to come forward and explain what steps have been taken.

Madam Speaker: I have not received a communication from a Minister seeking to make a statement. The occupants of the Treasury Bench will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Hanley *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Do I understand that the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) is rising?

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Yes, on a point of order, Madam Speaker. You correctly pointed out to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) that he was out of order. May I ask you to point out to him also that we in the Labour party refer to one member, one vote, and not one man, one vote?

Madam Speaker: I understand the point that the hon. Lady is putting to me. When I was a Back Bencher, I used to get very annoyed when speakers referred all the time to "hon. Gentlemen".

Mr. Hanley *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I have dealt with the point of order about which I think the Minister is seeking to rise. I must deal with Ministers and Back Benchers in exactly the same way. Having dealt with the point of order, it is now a question between the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) and the Minister. They must resolve it between them. It is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Reverting to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), when Princess Anne was apprehended by a madman in Pall Mall, the Home Secretary gave a statement that very day. I am sure that the House would wish to know precisely what has happened at Buckingham Palace today.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that those on the Government Front Bench have noted the wishes of the House.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I hope that you, Madam Speaker, will allow me to make my point, and forgive me if it appears to return to a previous point. As the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) did not begin with a proper point of order, how can it be fair for the Minister to be prevented from giving an answer?

Madam Speaker: I have to deal with so many bogus points of order in this place—I have hardly heard a genuine point of order in the past six months.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): How long should it take for an answer to be given in *Hansard* after a question is posed? On 3 December, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) asked for information to be provided from the Northern Ireland Office about people who had been killed due to paramilitary violence, and the sites of the killings. I asked a similar but wider question of the Prime Minister on 7 June and requested information about those killed by paramilitary violence in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The information forthcoming in both instances was, "This material will be supplied in the Library in due course." The "due course" seems to be a tremendous amount of time. It might be appropriate for us to follow up those questions today, the day on which John Matthews has been released. He had faced a false charge involving the London taxi bombs. The City of Derry is celebrating the fact that today that false accusation has not been carried through. We need information about who has been correctly convicted.

Madam Speaker: It is a matter for the Minister, and I suggest that, if the hon. Gentleman tables a further question, he might be able to obtain the information that he now seeks.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I apologise for raising this point, Madam Speaker, but you have always been terribly fair. When someone has raised a bogus point of order or tried to score a point at another hon. Member's expense, you have always been fair and allowed the subject

of the point of order to respond, if only briefly. I wonder whether you might consider allowing my hon. Friend the Minister to do that.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has not been following my habits in the past year. Once I have dealt with a point of order, even if it is a bogus one, that is the end of it. I will not allow exchanges on bogus points of order to continue across the Chamber.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

TERRORISM

That the draft Suppression of Terrorism Act 1978 (Application of Provisions) (India) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 99(2) (Matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland).

STATUTORY RULES

That the Thirty-Fourth Report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules, being a Matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, be referred to the Northern Ireland Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

Births and Deaths Registration (Amendment)

3.37 pm

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 in relation to the place of registration of deaths in England and Wales.

The Bill would amend the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 to enable deaths to be registered in any district in England and Wales, not simply, as at present, in the district where the death occurred.

One might have thought that a death could be registered with any recognised registrar, but that is not so, as I discovered from an elderly constituent of mine, a lady in her 70s, living in Chester, whose 95-year-old mother died in a nursing home in Kent. To register the death, my constituent, the only surviving relative, was obliged to travel hundreds of miles, at considerable expense and inconvenience, at a time of great personal sadness, to complete a bureaucratic formality, which could equally well have been undertaken in Chester.

The lady's case may be unusual, but is by no means unique. The National Consumer Council has alerted me to a comparable case in which a daughter had to register her mother's death in Ely, because the nursing home in which the lady's mother died fell within the Ely district, although the nursing home was closer to Cambridge, where the funeral was to take place, while the bereaved daughter lived in Worcester.

The registrar would not have welcomed registration of the death either by the proprietor of the nursing home or by the undertaker, so one afternoon the daughter travelled from Worcester to Ely for that purpose, only to discover, when she got there, that the registrar's office was open for business from 9 am until noon only, and on just three days a week.

While it is obviously gratifying for the good people of East Anglia to feel that the rate of mortality in Ely is such that it justifies a week of only nine hours on the part of the registrar, it is clearly absurd, and in truth unnecessary, for people already having to cope with the trauma of bereavement, perhaps involved in the making of funeral arrangements, and possibly elderly themselves, to have this additional administrative burden thrust upon them.

In the age of the telephone and the fax, it must make sense to introduce a system whereby a death can be registered in any district in any part of the country, thus relieving bereaved people of the difficulty and the expense of travelling to the district where the death occurred. It must make sense.

Indeed, as we can see, it does make sense, which is why a benevolent Government made such a proposal in the White Paper on registration back in January 1990, with a promise of legislation at "an early opportunity". Three and a half years later, that early opportunity has still failed to present itself, which is where I and my Bill step in.

Having been a Member of the House for only about 15 months, I pride myself on still being loosely in touch with reality. Unjust as it may seem to Members of Parliament, there are in the real world some who look on our proceedings with a mixture of scorn and incredulity.

They partially understand our role in the constituency as that odd amalgam of citizens advice bureau, untrained Relate counsellor, housing officer, doormat, punchbag

[Mr. Gyles Brandreth]

and inveterate function attender with an insatiable appetite for finger food and raffle tickets. But to many of them our purpose at Westminster is less clear. This weekend, one of my constituents said to me, "What do you MPs do?" Before I had a chance to offer a dignified reply, he went on, "Whatever it is, I wish you would do less of it."

I believe in less legislation, less regulation and less bureaucracy, and in the validity of William Blake's dictum that he who would do good must do it by minute particulars. My Bill is a very modest measure. It is not significant. It is not spectacular. It is not even controversial. It will not make a noise, but to a few people it might make a difference. That is why I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Gyles Brandreth, Mr. Joseph Ashton, Mr. Peter Butler, Mr. Sebastian Coe, Mrs. Teresa Gorman, Ms Glenda Jackson, Mrs. Angela Knight and Mr. John Sykes.

BIRTHS AND DEATHS REGISTRATION (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Gyles Brandreth accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 in relation to the place of registration of deaths in England and Wales: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 16 July, and to be printed. [Bill 233.]

Orders of the Day

European Parliamentary Elections Bill

Considered in Committee.

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

INCREASE IN NUMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

3.44 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 10, leave out '71' and insert '70'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): With this it will be convenient also to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 1, line 10, after '"71"' insert—

'(ba) in paragraph (b) (Scotland) for "8" there shall be substituted "9".'.

No. 9, in page 1, line 10, at end insert—

'(bb) in paragraph (b) (Scotland) for "8" there shall be substituted "9"; and '.

No. 3, in page 1, line 16, leave out '"71"' and insert '"70".'.

No. 4, in page 1, line 16, after '"71"' insert—

'(ba) in paragraph (b) (Scotland) for "8" there shall be substituted "9".'.

No. 12, in page 1, line 16, at end insert—

'(bb) in paragraph (b) (Scotland) for "8" there shall be substituted "9".'.

No. 5, in clause 2, page 1, line 20, after 'England', insert 'Scotland'.

No. 6, in clause 2, page 2, line 1, after 'England' insert 'Scotland'.

Mrs. Ewing: It is strange that my amendment should be the lead amendment in this group. I am grateful to the members of other parties who have associated themselves with my amendment. I had thought that I might speak from the Opposition Dispatch Box, but Labour Members might not have found my company especially agreeable. From time to time we do not find each other's company agreeable, but today we are agreed on the serious principle of Scotland's representation within the European Community.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): In the spirit adopted by the hon. Lady, we congratulate her on doing such a fine job of hijacking the Opposition's amendment by tabling her amendment before we managed to table ours.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman should congratulate my research officer, who did a great deal of work on the issue, although I recognise that other hon. Members have been working along the same lines. Within the procedures of the House, the way the cookie crumbles very much dictates who has the key amendment.

We are having difficulties with the allocation of the additional seats in the European Parliament. The principle of increased membership was agreed at the Edinburgh

summit last December, yet it is not until the hot, sticky days of July that we are considering the implications and knock-on effects of that decision.

There were earlier opportunities to consider the matter and to have discussions between the various parties in the House. Instead, we are considering the issue in an air of panic, because the Government have introduced the Bill without giving the House a full opportunity to explore all its aspects.

The Government should not always base their arguments on the niceties of numbers. Last week, we all received from the Home Secretary various details about the number of and comparisons between the seats in Scotland, Wales and England. Northern Ireland is exempt, because it has proportional representation.

The niceties of numbers are not in the spirit of the Community. The Home Secretary's comments during our debate last Wednesday—in particular, those reported in column 984 of *Hansard*—show that he was using a British state argument rather than looking at the Community as a whole. If we are to enter into the spirit of the Community, any additional representation should not be seen as just a numerical gain: it should properly reflect the various peoples of the Community.

Those on the Treasury Bench suffer from the delusion that Britain is a nation. It is not; it is a state that combines three natural nation communities—Scotland, England and Wales. Underpinning the philosophy of the European Community is the idea that the smaller nations should not be penalised because of size, and that they should be recognised as equal partners. My contention today is that Scotland should be recognised as an equal partner, and that it should have additional seats.

I have long pursued that argument with various Government representatives. I wrote to the Foreign Secretary on 14 January, subsequent to the Edinburgh summit, asking how decisions would be made on the allocation of the six additional seats. He responded:

"We are now looking at how to allocate the six new seats as between the different parts of the United Kingdom. This distribution will eventually have to be enacted in legislation. The Scots, but also others, will be watching carefully to see that this is fairly done."

We are seeking a very careful distribution of these seats.

I go back to the idea that there should be equality within the communities. I have brought with me a copy of the autobiography of Garret Fitzgerald, who was, at the time of the original direct elections to the European Parliament, the Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland. He talks in this book, "All in a Life", about Ireland's role within the European Community and the negotiations on the initial allocation of seats for direct election to the European Parliament.

I want to read this paragraph into the record of the House of Commons, because I believe that we should all be aware of the arguments that were used by the then Government. I do not think that it will be enough for the Minister to respond by saying that it was then a Labour Government. The principles that underpin these comments should be looked at:

"Callaghan and Crosland came to us to say that they were going to propose 82 seats for the larger countries, which would enable them to give an extra seat to Northern Ireland as well as an extra seat to Scotland and Wales, bringing these to 10 and five seats respectively. We told them we would go along with this. In the end, at Giscard d'Estaing's urging in a top-of-the-table huddle, Callaghan said he would settle for 81 seats by dropping an extra seat claimed for England.

So it was agreed, but in the event, interestingly enough, Scotland and Wales never got their extra seats. Although the need to make greater provision for Scotland and Wales had been the basis of the British argument for more seats, it was to England that the additional seats were allocated. Scotland's proposed 10 was reduced to eight and Wales's five became four, whilst England got 66 instead of the 63 implicit in what Callaghan and Crosland had said to us."

That is the record of the initial arguments about the allocation of directly elected seats to the European Parliament. I could argue, of course, that Scotland, being comparable to Denmark, with roughly the same population, should automatically have 16 seats. I recognise that that can be achieved only when Scotland is an independent nation—when we, too, will be allowed to participate in the Council of Ministers, to have our opportunity, not to be the tartan waitress at a European summit in Edinburgh, but to be the host country and to have, in our own right, the position of chief in the commission.

The argument for Scotland to have an additional seat is increasingly important. The Community is changing very rapidly. It has already been said quite clearly that, with the accession of additional members, the Community institutions will have to change. The Maastricht treaty makes it quite clear that the Parliament will acquire additional powers, and I for one welcome that.

I have no particular neurosis about this place being the mother of Parliaments and the seat of all democracy. I believe that the future for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England lies within the European Community. I want to move towards consensus politics within the Community.

Because the institutions are going to change, the influence of each voice will be particularly important. I know that the Minister, along with colleagues in the Cabinet, is very aware of the importance that has recently been attached to the argument for structural funds. Indeed, the Leader of the House referred to this in his capacity as substitute for the Prime Minister during Prime Minister's questions today.

The Parliament in Europe had a great deal of influence in persuading the Commission that the whole of the Highlands and Islands enterprise unit should be included within objective 1. A great deal of work was undertaken by the member of the European Parliament for the Highlands and Islands—and I must declare an interest because of the family relationship.

That Parliament voted by 277 votes to 27 in favour of the whole of the Highlands and Islands enterprise area being included within objective 1 status. If one MEP, exerting that influence, can achieve that result, surely Scotland should be entitled to additional representation. I notice that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) is laughing. He should recognise that part of the victory was achieved because his party did not care to send a Scottish Office representative to the negotiations. Perhaps we should learn from that. Perhaps, when the Department of Trade and Industry represents Scotland's interests, we achieve the results that we want.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Let me endorse what the hon. Lady has said about the role of her mother-in-law, the MEP for Highlands and Islands, who fought very hard on this issue. I am sure that the hon. Lady will also recognise the role of my colleagues Hugh MacMahon, MEP for Strathclyde, West,and Henry McCubbin, MEP for North-East Scotland, and also that

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

of the socialist group, which gave its backing to the same proposals. If ever there was a team effort on behalf of a Scottish interest, that was surely it. I am sure that Liberal MEPs were also involved.

Mrs. Ewing: I am not trying to claim all the credit for the MEP for Highlands and Islands. There was a great deal of cross-party co-operation, and Labour and Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament have joined me in various representations. There was also the influence of Highland regional council, the various local enterprise companies and the district councils, all of which were very much involved.

My point is that there was an opportunity, through the influence of an MEP, to persuade the Commission to recognise that its original idea that there should be exclusions from objective 1 status in the highlands and islands area was an example of how political life can operate within the European Community. We want that spirit of community to be pursued, and we want additional representation for Scotland in that regard.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I readily accept the argument that this is a Parliament within a multinational state. The hon. Lady is referring to the European Parliament, which again is a Parliament in a multinational state. She has referred to the powers given to the European Parliament by article 189b of the Maastricht treaty; would she like the powers of that Parliament to be extended to enable it, say, to initiate European Community-wide legislation?

Mrs. Ewing: I certainly believe that the European Parliament has a major role to play in the development of economic and social policy. Progress must be made slowly and on the basis of consensus. That is why I am keen for Scotland to be an equal partner in this development.

I think that hon. Members from all parties will agree that we want to avoid the imposition of an ideology by one or two countries of the Community. We should reach a consensus through mutual discussion and agreement in terms of initiating programmes, but the initiation process, in many ways, should now be transferred from this place to the European Parliament. I believe that the development of the Community is of critical importance, not just to Scotland and the other constituent parts of the United Kingdom, but to the international community as a whole. I look forward to these developments.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her concise answer. An expansion of the legislative powers of the European Parliament must surely lead to a diminution of the powers of the national legislatures. What does she feel about that shift in the distribution of legislative powers between the European Parliament and the national Parliament?

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman and I both sit on the Select Committee on European Legislation. I would not describe this as a national Parliament; I would describe it as a multinational state Parliament. I would like Scotland to have a national Parliament, and then, according to the Helsinki agreement definition of sovereignty, we will have to decide how much of our national power we wish to pool for the greater good of the Community. That is how I envisage the Community developing. I am sure that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) also noticed, during our various visits to European Community countries, that the vast majority of the politicians we met showed the same flexibility of approach. The pooling of sovereignty is the key to the Community's development.

On the subject of the additional seat, it was argued last week on Second Reading that I advised the Government that the size of the Highlands and Islands constituency should be taken into account, and that an additional seat for Scotland would have an impact upon the Highlands and Islands. I was not arguing that case. I was arguing that, when the Boundary Commission considers the distribution of seats, it should take into account the geography of the constituent parts of the United Kingdom. I believe that the Highlands and Islands constituency would wish to remain very much as it is, and I would bear no grudges if an additional seat were granted elsewhere in Scotland.

4 pm

I was arguing very clearly, with the support of other hon. Members, that the Highlands and Islands constituency has the land mass of Belgium, stretching for about 350 miles from north to south, and that representing it is a major task. The Member of the European Parliament for the Highlands and Islands willingly accepts the present situation, as I am sure would any subsequent Members, although I do not anticipate a change for a considerable number of years.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving way, and I endorse much that she says about the highlands and islands. Does she also accept that, if the Bill is passed in the form that the Government wish, giving five seats to England, three seats in Scotland will have higher electorates than the average English electorate; North-East Scotland, with an electorate of 576,776; Mid-Scotland and Fife, with an electorate of 544,649; and Lothian, with an electorate of 522,020? Therefore, three of Scotland's eight seats will have larger electorates than the average now given to England by the Government.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman has a valid argument, which reaffirms those made last week on Second Reading: that numbers cannot be the sole criterion on which we base the allocation of seats. Full account must be taken of geography, but we must also take into account the valuable arguments of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace).

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): They were not valuable arguments at all. They were absolute nonsense, statistically speaking. If some seats in Scotland have more constituents than the average in England, some seats in England will also have more than the average number of constituents for England.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman misses the point about the principles of the Community. He is quite willing to be seen as a European sceptic who does not believe in the Community. We have argued that Scotland should be compared with Denmark, which has 16 seats in the European Parliament; that Wales should be compared with Eire, which has 15 seats; and that England could be

compared with whichever country it wishes to be compared with, and have seats in its own right in the European Parliament.

That is a Community issue. It is not an argument about the debates between internal political parties in the House of Commons or in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, but what about my constituents? What about the people of Northamptonshire, which does not even have a whole European seat and yet has a bigger population than Luxembourg, which has six Members of the European Parliament? Where is the justice in that?

Mrs. Ewing: Edinburgh, which has roughly the same population as Luxembourg, does not have an MEP either. If the hon. Gentleman would only enter into the spirit of the European Community, he would recognise that, if England were an independent nation within the Community, it might be entitled to additional representation.

It is not a question of Scotland playing England off against Scotland or Wales. This is an argument about the spirit of the Community, and about ensuring that we all enter it with a rational approach and share the ideal of making the Community work as effectively as possible.

Last week, the Home Secretary was gratuitously rude to me in some of his responses. It is not my intention to be rude in responding to him, but I believe that there is a valid argument for Scotland to have an additional seat in the European Parliament.

After all, Scotland is the main oil producer for the European Community; we are the most energy-rich nation. We have the major fishing grounds, yet our fishing grounds are being invaded by other members of the Community, who do not seem to be affected in the same way as our fishermen—by the application of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992, for example. All that makes us a most valuable member of the Community.

I believe that Scotland deserves more than eight representatives in the European Parliament, especially in view of the way in which that Parliament will develop as a result of the changes introduced in the Maastricht treaty.

During the debate last week, the Home Secretary said that only the Conservative party was prepared to fight for England. I do not believe that. I want England to be an equal partner with Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and all the other Community nations. The Home Secretary's remark was stupid, and it has caused much offence not only in the United Kingdom but in other parts of the Community, where there are different attitudes and responses, and where we work towards the idea of consensus rather than confrontation in our politics.

The Secretary of State for Scotland laid great emphasis on the fact that the Community held its summit in Edinburgh. As the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said last week, in November 1992, the Secretary of State made a speech entitled "Taking Scotland to the Heart of Europe", in which he argued forcibly:

"If we are to take Scotland to the heart of Europe, we must be Communautaire"——

that is the spirit to which I referred—

"but we must also have clout in the Community."

To have clout in the community, we must have the representation that our country merits.

In the same speech, the Secretary of State said:

"it is necessary to build Scotland's own links, both commercial and cultural, with other parts of the Community."

The most effective achievement of that aim must surely come through representation within the Community institutions.

The fact that Scotland is being denied an additional seat in the European Parliament reminds us only too well that the Government regarded Scotland as the tartan waitress at the summit. They are happy to serve haggis, and to sell our smoked salmon, our whisky and a variety of the other marvellous products of Scotland, but at the same time they deny us the full and equal representation that we so obviously merit.

In refusing to allocate Scotland an additional seat, the Government are reneging on the principles of European co-operation, reneging on what the Secretary of State said in Scotland about the future of Scotland within Europe, and reneging on the people of Scotland themselves.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I am happy to agree with the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). At the beginning, she spoke, if I may say so, with an uncharacteristic immodesty perhaps more typical of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) than of herself. But I am sure that she does not mind joining me, and joining my right hon. and hon. Friends, in whose names the amendment was tabled.

Understandably, the hon. Lady crowed about the role of her distinguished mother-in-law, but I am sure that even Mrs. Winnie Ewing would agree that objective 1 status was the result of a concerted effort by many people, including many Scottish Labour MEPs and other colleagues in the socialist group. To them, as well as to Mrs. Winnie Ewing, we owe a great deal of gratitude. That gratitude is widespread, because an enormous amount of effort went into that achievement. I hope that none of that sounds churlish, because I agree with the hon. Lady and with the opinions of my right hon. Friends, as expressed in the amendment. But there is, of course, a strong case for an additional seat, and particularly an additional seat in Scotland.

The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) failed to take it on board that geography comes into those matters. Perhaps one ought not to be surprised at that, if one heard the hon. Gentleman's contribution to the debate the other day. However, geography comes into such matters, and was embraced by one of the earlier Acts that dealt with boundary distribution. The Government have given little thought to the importance of geography and to Scotland's special needs and rights.

For example, it is a simple fact that the average size of European parliamentary seat in Scotland is about 3,000 square miles, compared with a mere 700 square miles for England. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) is leaving the Chamber. No one wishes to deny any country in the United Kingdom the representation that it feels is appropriate to its needs.

If it had been suggested at the Edinburgh summit that Scotland would not get the extra seat, people in Scotland would have been amazed. As with so many promises that we have had in Scotland, including promises about Rosyth and Ravenscraig, people expected that the Secretary of State meant what he said when he implied strongly that he would give his support to Scotland getting the extra seat. He also implied that, in a sense, the seat was in the bag.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Peter Lloyd): The hon. Gentleman made the same point on Second Reading. I said then that I had not read my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland's speech. I have now read it. If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the same speech, my right hon. Friend made no reference to the European Parliament. He was talking about the Committee of the Regions.

I could find no trace of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State saying that he was expecting, pushing for or otherwise considering an extra seat in the European Parliament for Scotland. He concentrated strongly on the opportunities that the Committee of the Regions would provide for Scotland.

Mr. Clarke: If the hon. Gentleman re-reads the Secretary of State's St. Andrews speech, he will see that, although his right hon. Friend dealt at length with the Committee of the Regions, the main thrust of the speech was that the Secretary of State was fighting for Scotland's influence in Europe to be increased and for stronger representation.

I refer the Minister to what the Government claim to be one of most important documents to have been presented to the people of Scotland, entitled "Taking Stock". That document arose from the commitment of the Prime Minister, no less, during the election campaign to take stock of the thoughts of the people of Scotland. In the document, the Secretary of State said that the Government would

"take steps to complement and add to Scotland's strong representation in Europe."

I assume that, if the Minister has done his homework, he will have read that introduction. I would like to discover how the terminology can be converted—even in this place—to mean that no extra seat means an extension or an addition.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I wish that the hon. Gentleman would provide a chapter and verse reference, rather than a generality. He has given no direct quote from the Secretary of State which refers to the European Parliament. The hon. Gentleman quotes only my right hon. Friend's references to representation.

I have read my right hon. Friend's Edinburgh speech. He referred to the Committee of the Regions, to various offices and to the ways Scotland could have its interests conveyed and supported within the EC. The speech made no reference to the European Parliament. If the hon. Gentleman can find such a reference, I should be glad if he would underline it and pass it across the Dispatch Box to me. I have not yet seen it.

Mr. Clarke: The Government usually manage to turn words on their head, but this is rum. If the Government have redeemed any of their promises by failing to add to Scotland's representation in the European Parliament, I should like the Minister to tell me how they have been responsible for any addition to Scotland's representation. If we do not have increased Scottish representation in the only democratically elected body in Europe, where else are we to have it?

Are we to believe in the placepersons whom the Government appoint to various quangos in Europe, as they propose to do in Scottish local government and as they have already done in the health service? The Government are dodging the issue of direct representation based on the electorate of Scotland deciding what is best for them.

4.15 pm

Mrs. Ewing: I am sure that, like me, the hon. Gentleman recalls that, in his St. Andrews speech, the Secretary of State said that he welcomed the Maastricht treaty for two particular reasons. The first reason he outlined was the strengthening of the role of the European Parliament. As the Secretary of State for Scotland argued for the strengthening of the role of the European Parliament and its links with Scotland, one assumed that he was arguing for additional representation.

Mr. Clarke: In the St. Andrews speech to which the Minister referred, the Secretary of State said:

"It can only be good news for Scotland to have her own representation within Europe increased in this way".

He was certainly referring to the Committee of the Regions. He said:

"I can assure you that I am bidding high".

One assumed that the Secretary of State was bidding high, not merely for representation on the Committee of the Regions but for an additional European parliamentary seat.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): How does the hon. Gentleman make that out?

Mr. Clarke: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the numerous newspaper clippings which he undoubtedly has in his office. If he does not have them there, I am sure that they are available in New St. Andrew's house. If they are not available there, I am sure that they are available in the well staffed Conservative offices in Edinburgh.

Time after time, acolytes of the Secretary of State for Scotland claimed in those cuttings that he had gained the extra seat. Not once, even on the Floor of the House, did the Secretary of State admit that he had failed, failed and failed again. We did not find out until the Bill was published. No denials were issued when staff of the Secretary of State at St. Andrew's house claimed that Scotland had gained the extra seat.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman has talked for the past five minutes about speeches and articles which claim what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland said. Could he put on record a quotation?

Mr. Clarke: You would rightly rebuke me for being repetitive if I did so, Mr. Morris. I have already placed on record that dull, uninteresting introduction to the document "Taking Stock", in which a clear commitment was given—and again, not honoured.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South tells me and tells the House that we in Scotland should be happy with a couple of extra meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee and the doubtful pleasure of Lord Fraser coming to tell us about the health service, but that we shall not have the right democratically to elect an extra representative to Europe. I must inform him that the Scottish people regard that as democracy turned on its head.

There is every reason why the Secretary of State and his acolytes should have honoured the commitment which Scotland understood him to give to obtain an extra seat. When the Bill was published, it was clear that our

Secretary of State had been defeated once again. Our Secretary of State had been beaten. Our Secretary of State had failed.

There was a time when Secretaries of State regarded such failures as a matter for resignation, but we know that, time after time, Tory Secretaries of State for Scotland have their noses rubbed in the dirt and simply accept it. They did so on Ravenscraig and Rosyth, and now they are doing so on representation in Europe. The House will not accept that.

I am not surprised that Labour Members and Members from other parties in Scotland are aghast that this is the Government's offering, after the lengthy period from February to June in which the Government have time to consider the proposals. That is a long time, notwithstanding the rushed nature of the legislation.

We heard the feeble excuse the other day—I think that it was from the Minister—that we had to deal with Maastricht, and that the House was preoccupied. However, that did not prevent the Government from introducing other measures that were particularly unhelpful to the people of Scotland. Therefore, there is no excuse for the Government taking as long as they did, and in the event getting the wrong answer for Scotland.

I can understand why some hon. Members, who have since left the Chamber, made their silly points. I do not quite understand why the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South seems so enthusiastic about dismissing the fact that even Europe accepts that Scotland is a nation. It should not be dismissed simply as a region.

We are a nation, with a great history and with cultural links with the rest of Europe and the world. The geographical points that have been made suggest that we will be under-represented when compared with other nations, not just within the United Kingdom but elsewhere. I do not see how that can be justified.

The Government's proposals utterly fail to take on board the distinctiveness of Scotland as an individual nation within the United Kingdom and Europe. They fail to take on board the sparsity of population in certain areas. The Highlands and Islands seat makes that point. It is larger, as we have argued, than some countries within the Community.

The fact that those geographical issues have to be taken on board means that there is a distinct danger that the needs of the rest of Scotland, particularly those parts where there is considerable deprivation and where there is what some people describe, although I do not like the word, as an underclass, will not be established and dealt with in Europe. We should be looking for a response within Europe.

The same applies to rural areas. For example, I have not yet had an answer to the fact that the average Scottish seat covers an area of 3,000 square miles, compared with an average area of 700 square miles in England. The Government seem to think that we should accept that and go home feeling happy.

The Government have failed to take those arguments on board. They have failed to consider Scotland's remoteness from the United Kingdom and EC centres of power. I find it odd that, if indeed the Secretary of State for Scotland is as committed to Scotland's interests as he claimed in his St. Andrews speech and his introduction to the stocktaking exercise, he has not once appeared at any of these debates, and nor has any other Minister from the Scottish Office.

Scotland deserves far more than that. An English Tory Member of Parliament who happens to be the Scottish Whip is no substitute for Scottish representation. I hope that we shall see some modesty there that has otherwise been missing.

In the past few rushed weeks, we have considered a Bill about British representation in Europe, which should have meant that we would seize on the opportunity to ensure that Britain's—and that includes Scotland's—voice is heard.

If the Bill is approved and the amendments before the Committee are not accepted, Scotland's share of British seats will fall from 9·9 per cent. to 9·2 per cent. It is not a matter of the Secretary of State failing to honour the pledge that Scotland's representation would be increased. In the Bill, to which the Secretary of State has given his support, we see a decrease in Scottish representation, and that is entirely unacceptable.

If we disregard for the moment representation from the highlands and islands, lowland Scotland is less well represented than even Wales. I welcome the extra seat for Wales—and not just because my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) has been kind enough to join us on the Front Bench, in contrast to the apathy of Scottish Tory Ministers.

If the amendments are accepted, the average representation for Scotland outwith the highlands and islands will be about the same as for Wales. I am sure that our Welsh colleagues, who are generous and in no sense inward-looking on these matters, will agree that that is perfectly reasonable.

The people of Scotland look forward, as they did even before the Edinburgh summit, to improving and increasing our links with Europe. We were proud of the appointment of Bruce Millan as a Commissioner, and we thank him for the contribution that he has made. But there is no substitute, and there can be no substitute—I disagree strongly with the Minister if he is telling us that the Secretary of State for Scotland is merely arguing for a stronger Scottish voice in Europe, but not one that has been approved by the electorate—for democratic representation as expressed at the ballot box, and it is for that that we are pleading today.

Apart from Tory Ministers and those who support the Tory arguments in Committee today, Scotland is completely united on the issue. We have the support of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Constitutional Convention—*[Laughter.]*—and even, as I understand it—before the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South laughs again—of the Scottish CBI. Apart from the Scottish Tory party—we are not even sure about that—virtually no one in Scotland gives succour to the Government's position on the matter.

If we have—as we were told when the Prime Minister came to Scotland at the election and said that he would involve himself in listening and stocktaking—a Government who, despite all their history, are prepared to do that, the arguments presented today by the hon. Member for Moray and, I am sue, in due course, by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), and by the Labour party are unanswerable.

We are facing in the Bill a mean-minded Government, who did not have the guile to see the damage that they were doing to the United Kingdom to which they say that they are committed, who did not have the judgment to see that Scotland should have that improved representation,

[Mr. Clarke]

and who, in view of the fact that they seem to stir up political marks night after night as they are doing with Scottish local government reform, were not magnanimous enough to accept that the Scottish people have a contribution to make.

If the Government go ahead with this proposal, they are selling Scotland, Britain and Europe short, and, in time, all that will be reversed.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): It may seem peculiar that a Member from the other extremity of the United Kingdom should rise on what seems to be, and has been argued as, an entirely parochial matter of Scottish propaganda versus the Government.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman must accept that the word "parochial" refers to a parish. We have been debating a nation. Will he please withdraw that comment?

Mr. Rathbone: Of course I withdraw it if it hurts the legal refinements of argument with which the hon. Gentleman likes to demean himself. I used the word "parochial" to embrace all of Scotland, and it was in no way meant to be demeaning.

We are here talking about the representation of various parts of the British Isles in the European Parliament, and that is an important question for anyone who is committed, as I believe all hon. Members are, to the proper operation of parliamentary democracy.

I happen to agree with the thrust of the arguments of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reconsider his opinion on the allocation of an additional seat in Scotland. That is correct not only from an idealistic standpoint but from a position of political wisdom, because it is only through the allocation of another European constituency to Scotland that we shall increase the possibility of representation for the large minorities there.

In that caregory, I fear, I must count my own party. I should like to see Conservative representation of the many Conservative interests in that part of the United Kingdom, as I would hope to see all parties representing their own political interests elsewhere in the country.

It is dangerous to concoct—this has to be a concoction —a system of representation with constituency boundaries that tend against giving broad-brush representation of political minorities in any part of the United Kingdom.

4.30 pm

The allocation of another seat to Scotland would also be a practical step. There is room for improvement in our electoral system as it applies to the European Parliament. We shall return to that point under the proposed new part III of the schedule.

Whether that improvement comes within this Bill, or at some point in the future, with the adoption of a pan-European system of elections that would apply to the United Kingdom as well as to other countries, the allocation of an additional MEP to Scotland would be part of it. We must get that right to achieve the correct basis for that system, whenever it may come.

However, without the adoption of a new method of elections, which would enable those minorities in Scotland or any other part of the United Kingdom to be represented —as part III of the schedule would provide—I suppose that the Minister will argue on a largely numerical basis.

On that basis, the argument of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) did not cast any doubt on the Government's plans. Averages are averages: they are made up of figures above and below. I am not sure that even the enormous area represented by the relative of the hon. Member for Moray in the European Parliament constitutes an argument against the Government's position. I am quite aware of the difficulty in getting round a large constituency as compared with a small one, but with modern forms of communication, especially telephone and mail links, it is possible to represent a considerably larger number of constituents than any one of us currently represents.

I realise that some European Members of Parliament find some difficulty in keeping in touch with their constituents because of the large numbers involved.

Mrs. Ewing: I fully accept the hon. Gentleman's point about improved communications by telephone and, in particular, by fax. That development has been most important in the highlands and islands, not only because it has improved communication between MEPs or MPs and their constituents but because it has helped to provide employment opportunities.

Does the hon. Gentleman accept, however, that Scotland has only 171 people per square mile, whereas England has 955 people per square mile, and that it is important that personal contact should be maintained between an elected representative and his or her constituents?

Mr. Rathbone: I fully accept that fact, but I do not think that it should weigh in the balance in the drawing of constituency lines. It should, however, be taken into account in allocating travel funds, to allow the representative of a large constituency to travel by hedge-hopper plane or helicopter—or, in the case of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), a huge motor cruiser, perhaps.

Dr. Godman: Just before the hon. Gentleman gave way to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), he referred to the need for MEPs to keep in touch with their constituents. Does he agree that MEPs also need to keep in touch with the European Parliament? Absenteeism is far worse in the European Parliament than in this place—indeed, I am told that more than 150 MEPs rarely if ever turn up in Strasbourg.

Mr. Rathbone: I have long believed that people in glass houses should not throw stones, so I do not propose to enter into argument with the hon. Gentleman on that subject.

Mr. Wallace: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I promise him that I will not make a specious lawyer's point. I should like him to return to the theme to which he seemed to be warming—ensuring that Members of the European Parliament can get around large constituencies. Perhaps he would like that to be extended to this place, as some of us have more spread-out parliamentary constituencies than others.

The hon. Gentleman has already said that he favours some other form of election, but what the Government propose in the Bill is a first-past-the-post system. Does the

hon. Gentleman agree that one of the great so-called strengths of that system is the identification and sense of community of a single-Member constituency? What sense of community can there possibly be in a constituency the size of the south of Scotland, which stretches from East Lothian down to Stranraer and Galloway, up to Cunninghame, South and across to the border with England in Coldstream. How can a single Member succeeding in a first-past-the-post system identify with such a disparate community

Mr. Rathbone: I will not be tempted into discussing methods of elections, to which I think we come later in the Bill. I am glad to see that you, Mr. Morris, are indicating your assent for my analysis.

The Chairman: I would not wish the hon. Gentleman to misinterpret the movements of my eyes or head. I was merely indicating that the hon. Gentleman should stay firmly on the group of amendments before the Committee and not anticipate anything at all.

Mr. Rathbone: I was correctly analysing the movement of your head, eyes and any other part of your anatomy that may have been indicating agreement, Mr. Morris.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland sells himself short. On my frequent and extremely happy visits to Scotland, I have found that there is a much greater sense of community over a much larger area in Scotland than in most parts of the United Kingdom, and certainly in most parts of England. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman finds that degree of cohesion in his constituency, and that MEPs find coalescence of opinion in theirs.

We should not be tied in these matters to numerical definitions or to local argument on a statistical or quasi-statistical basis about what is fair. We must make political judgments.

In that respect, I suggest to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that they may have made the incorrect political judgment in not allocating an additional European parliamentary constituency to Scotland—even though that could detract from the additional representation that could be given to England, which, as we know, has been under-represented vis-a-vis Scotland in this House for years and years.

Mr. Wallace: I certainly endorse the conclusions of the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone). There is a strong political argument for Scotland to have additional representation, even at the expense of their being one fewer seat for England. What the hon. Gentleman said, and the political judgment that lies behind it—he is a strong supporter of the European Community—is one that I am sure he identifies in the Community.

Population is often of secondary importance to the identification of communities and nation states within communities. Luxembourg, whose population is much the same size as that of Edinburgh, has six Members of the European Parliament, whereas Edinburgh has one Member for the whole of Lothian. No one in the Community perceives that as inimical to the whole balance of the Community and the loading of numbers. Indeed, it is part and parcel of the make-up of the Community. That is why the hon. Gentleman presents an important case for Scotland having an extra seat. I hope to give that case some additional support through the use of some statistics.

The hon. Gentleman is perhaps optimistic. I understand that the amendment relating to part III of the schedule has not been selected on the provisional list of amendments. Admittedly, it is provisional list at this stage. As the day goes on, we hope that wiser counsels will prevail and we shall be able to have a proper discussion on how the additional Members of the European Parliament will be elected.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on moving the amendment. She paid tribute to a research assistant who had done a considerable amount of work. I sat down to do the same exercise and go through the Bill. It is a question not simply of deleting one seat from England and adding one to Scotland—there are consequential parts to it. I was about halfway through the exercise when I realised that the research assistant had done the same thing, so there was little point in doing it again. That is why I was only too pleased to add my name to her amendment.

I make the same observation as that of the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke)—no Scottish Office Minister is present for this debate. At the conclusion of the debate on Wednesday, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland slipped on to the Government Front Bench. As no Scottish Office Ministers are present when we are debating an amendment that focuses on Scotland's representation in the European Parliament, it raises the question: what are they doing? Perhaps some of us have a shrewd idea of what they may be doing. It may be part and parcel of what is involved in this amendment.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that Scottish Office Ministers may well be preparing some answers for Scottish questions tomorrow? It would be a unique situation if we actually received answers to our questions. Alternatively, they may be looking at the changes to the local government boundaries.

Mr. Wallace: I suspect that it may be a combination of a number of things. My point—this relates to what the hon. Lady said about local government boundaries—is that we have similar sides of the same coin. The Conservative party had a lack of success in Scotland and the Liberal Democrats were even less successful. We both ended up with no seats in the European Parliament. *[Interruption.]* We were both equally unsuccessful. The Greens beat us. It is true that it would not happen today. Under the first-past-the-post system, what does it matter whether one knocks up second place, fifth place, third place or fourth place? That is the problem with that system.

The Conservative party was unsuccessful. Therefore, one can understand why it is reluctant to allow another seat in Scotland. It probably realised that in the present climate—after Rosyth and Ravenscraig and all the Government's false and broken promises—there was little chance that the Conservative party would win that seat.

The Government's lack of electoral success in European elections has led them not to allow Scotland an extra seat. Later this week, they will probably propose local government boundaries that will be gerrymandered to try to ensure Conservative councils. The remarks in *The Scotsman* clearly show that. It seems that the Boundary Commission has come under some influence with some of its proposals for parliamentary seats.

Dr. Godman: With regard to the protection and promotion of the needs of Scotland, does the hon. Gentleman agree that, over the next few years, the role played by Scotland's MEPs will be more decisive and important than the role performed by the Scottish members of the Committee of the Regions?

4.45 pm

Mr. Wallace: That is true. I shall illustrate that point in a moment by quoting a speech of the Secretary of State for Scotland, who has identified the growing importance of the European Parliament. The identification of that importance seems to be at odds with doing absolutely nothing to enhance the role of Scotland in the European Parliament. It has been noted that the Secretary of State for Scotland is one of the names on this Bill. I shall certainly return to that, because the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) makes an important point.

My point is that the Conservative party, having reached an impasse or rock bottom in terms of its electoral success in Scotland, must now resort to electoral fixes to get some representation. Of course, that cannot be in the democratic interests of Scotland as a whole.

I return to the point made by the hon. Member for Lewes. I recall the St. Andrews speech of the Secretary of State, which has been referred to on a number of occasions in this debate. The passage I remember the most is the part where he talked about Scottish Office Ministers being in the boiler room of the European debate. It conjured up a wonderful picture of the Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State for Scotland, the hon. Members for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) and for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), in their boiler suits, stoking the furnace and, as usual, coming forward with little results.

On objective 1 status, success was won by the Minister for Industry when no Scottish Minister could attend such an important European Council meeting where Scotland's vital interests were at stake.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: It worked out okay.

Mr. Wallace: I accept that it worked out okay.

Mr. Robertson: It is a United Kingdom formula.

Mr. Wallace: It is the United Kingdom and I have no objections to what the Minister for Industry achieved, but it is significant that the Scottish Office could not send anyone to the meeting to enhance Scotland's case on an important issue for Scotland. It may be a matter for some debate, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will rule me out of order if I go down that line to say that the Minister for Industry succeeded in spite of rather than because of the absence of Scottish Office Ministers.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I think that it was "because of".

Mr. Wallace: That may be an interesting debate, but I am sure that I will not be allowed to pursue it at any great length.

I turn to the St. Andrews speech of the Secretary of State, which the hon. Member for Moray quoted. When the Home Office Minister asked for chapter and verse, it was clear that he had not paid any attention to the passage quoted by the hon. Member for Moray. For his benefit, I quote it again:

"In this connection, I welcome the Maastricht Treaty for two reasons in particular. Firstly, because it strengthens the role of the European Parliament, where Scotland is directly represented. Scotland has 8 MEPs and while I may have my political differences with them, I am anxious to work in partnership with them to further Scotland's interests in Europe. As a consequence of the Maastricht Treaty, the elected European Parliament"——

this is the point referred to by the hon. Members for Greenock and Port Glasgow and for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), although I am not sure that he was so strong on it——

"will have more financial control over the unelected Commission, thus improving significantly the accountability of that key EC institution. This dramatic departure from past practice was the result of British ideas being taken on board by our European partners. That shows that Britain does have clout in the Community. It shows how that clout works for Scotland. And it also illustrates our desire to make the Community as a whole more accountable."

Many of us support the enhanced importance of the role of the European Parliament. That role has been enhanced by the Maastricht treaty and many of us would like to see it enhanced even more by necessary democratic input to European affairs and the Community. At present, decisions affecting more aspects of our lives are made by the Council of Minister in secret meetings. We would like to see a much greater role for the European Parliament and, of course, we want the voice of Scotland to be more powerful in that Parliament.

The Secretary of State for Scotland may have identified the strength and role of the European Parliament, but one assumes that if he were doing his job for Scotland, he would try to increase Scotland's representation in that Parliament when that possibility was on offer. Far from doing that, however, the right hon Gentleman is a sponsor of a Bill that will not increase Scotland's representation and role in that Parliament.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I, too, had noted that paragraph from my right hon. Friend's speech for use in my own speech. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for putting it on the record, because it answers the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), who sought to convey to the House the idea that, in that speech, the Secretary of State had pledged himself to effecting an increase in Scottish representation.

As that paragraph makes absolutely clear, however, my right hon. Friend pledged himself to work closely with Scotland's eight MEPs, even if he disagreed with them politically, for the benefit of Scotland. That was the undertaking that he sought to make and that is the undertaking that, uncharacteristically cunningly, the hon. Member for Monklands, West tried to convert into a promise to increase the representation of Scotland in the European Parliament.

That was plainly not what my right hon. Friend said, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) for putting my right hon. Friend's actual promise on the record.

Mr. Wallace: I remember when I used to appear before the second division of the Court of Session presided over by Lord Wheatley. Every time I made a point similar to that made by the Minister, Lord Wheatley would lean over, look over his glasses and say, "Is that your best point?" I must ask the Minister the same question, because his intervention did not amount to very much.

The Secretary of State for Scotland made his speech on 23 November 1992, some three weeks before the Edinburgh summit at which it was agreed to increase the number of seats at the European Parliament. It is not surprising that the right hon. Gentleman referred to the eight Scottish MEPs. For the Minister to seize on that and argue that that meant his right hon. Friend gave a commitment that Scotland should have only eight MEPs is disingenuous. I learnt that good word from the Social Democratic party.

In that speech, the right hon. Gentleman identified the importance of the European Parliament. He also said that it was important that Scotland was directly represented at it. When there was an opportunity to increase Scotland's representation, however, he did nothing. At least to the outside world, he did nothing; he may have fought his battle in Cabinet and lost. There would be nothing unusual about that, because that seems to be his track record. The fact that the right hon. Gentleman is a signatory to the Bill does not help Scotland's case, which was well put, for political reasons, by the hon. Member for Lewes. I accept that the Secretary of State has acknowledged the importance of the European Parliament.

The hon. Member for Moray also stressed the important role that that Parliament played in achieving objective 1 status for the highlands and islands and, in particular, extending that to Moray and Argyll and Bute. I pay tribute to the work of the MEP for the Highlands and Islands, but I am sure that the hon. Member for Moray would accept that that success was gained through cross-party support. When the votes were stacking up, the support offered by the Liberal Democrat group within the European Parliament was important.

The fishing industry, agriculture, the manufacturing industry and the need for further investment and research are important issues to Scotland. Nowadays, those issues also have an important European dimension. Scotland should have a stronger voice to argue for those interests.

I should like to give the Minister another quote from the famous Government document—it has probably been consigned to most shelves—entitled "Scotland in the Union. A Partnership for Good." Chapter 5, under the heading, "Scotland in Europe," contained the following conclusion in paragraph 5.9, on page 22:

> "The European Community is involved in almost every aspect of Scottish life. It is vital that Scotland's voice should be heard in Europe and under the existing arrangements Scotland is strongly represented in Brussels. The Government have taken steps to complement and add to that strong representation to ensure that there is a multi-pronged approach for promoting Scotland's interests in Europe."

The Government may have done that and tried to get some representation on the Committee of the Regions, but what steps have they taken to add to Scotland's representation in the European Parliament? That paragraph concluded:

> "As Europe continues to develop, the Government will keep under review Scotland's profile in Europe to ensure that it matches Scotland's needs."

One can only ask what kind of view the Secretary of State has of Scotland's needs.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: On a point of Order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman and Labour Members to criticise the Government for the fact that no member of the Scottish Office is on the Front Bench, when no representative of the Opposition Scottish Office team is present?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I was listening to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), and he seemed to be making an adequate speech.

Mr. Wallace: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My speech is founded on a good Scottish base.

"Scotland in the Union—A Partnership for Good" is a recent publication from the Scottish Office and refers to the need to promote Scotland's profile. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The hon. Member for Monklands, West has just re-entered the Chamber and perhaps I should explain to him why he has been greeted with cheers of support. Apart from being a recognition of the hon. Gentleman's natural demeanour and good humour, those cheers are in response to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South, who, just a moment ago, raised a point of order about what had happened to the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South will now be able to sit at ease, perhaps until the call of nature——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's speech is now beginning to wander a little. Perhaps he could get back to the amendment.

Mr. Wallace: I will wander no more. I am sure that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South will not wander for a while either.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The last time I recall getting a cheer like that was when the House debated a firm called Silent Night and reference was made to a millionaire, Mr. Tom Clarke, with whom I have no links.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) will be aware that much is set to happen tomorrow about local government and he will appreciate that, like himself, I have to reply to a long list of telephone calls from people who have told me what the Government will not tell hon. Members.

Mr. Wallace: In case there is any misunderstanding, I will not say anything further except to assure the hon. Member for Monklands, West that I had made no criticism of his absence. I fully understand the problems that he faces.

Dr. Godman: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that, in the next few years, the European Parliament and its Scottish representatives and other Members will play an increasingly important role in the development of the regional management of the fisheries? Does he agree that the growing hostility among many Norwegian fishing communities towards membership of the European Community is precisely due to the failure of the European Commission and the Council of Ministers to initiate and establish a fair and reasonable common fisheries policy?

Mr. Wallace: I will answer that question with care, so that I do not get distracted into a debate on the common fisheries policy. We should have time in the House, however, to debate it at some length.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow is right that fisheries is an important industry for Scotland. It has undoubtedly been subject to considerable upheaval recently. I sometimes fear that the cause of that can be laid at the doors of the Westminster Government rather than at those of the European institutions. As any fisherman will tell hon. Members, many of the edicts and regulations from the Commission or the Council of Ministers have a direct bearing on the future of the industry.

[Mr. Wallace]

I understand the concerns expressed by the Norwegians. The common fisheries policy is an obvious issue which a Scottish MEP or, for that matter, a representative from Cornwall, Devon, Wales or from the south coast of England—the hon. Member for Lewes has strong fishing interests represented at Newhaven and I am sure that his fishermen are interested in that policy—could raise in the European Parliament.

Fisheries is an important issue in the European Parliament and, given the proportional importance of that industry to Scotland, it is another good argument in favour of increasing Scotland's representation at that Parliament. In that way, Scotland's views could be heard. That does not mean that that need detract, however, from the work currently done by Scottish MEPs on behalf of our fishing interests.

We should consider some of the population and electorate figures, because they are part of the argument against giving Scotland an additional seat at the European Parliament. I have managed to get some statistical information, for which I thank the Library. At present, England has an electorate of 36,411,280 and has 66 MEPs; Wales has an electorate of 2,222,624 and has four MEPs; Scotland has an electorate of 3,931,429 and has eight MEPs; and Northern Ireland, which elects Members by proportional representation, has an electorate of 1,141,466 with three MEPs.

5 pm

The average electorate in England is 551,686; in Wales, 555,656; in Scotland, 491,429; and in Northern Ireland 380,489. To shorten my speech, I shall take it as read that no one disputes that Northern Ireland should have an additional MEP—although, if a Northern Ireland Member were to arrive and engage in this debate, his contribution would be most welcome.

I shall simply consider the position of England, Wales and Scotland. It is proposed that England should have an additional five MEPs and Wales an additional one MEP. England's average electorate is 512,835; Wales's average electorate is 444,525; and Scotland's average electorate is 491,429—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) has a piece of paper that gives different figures, but he will see that it says that option No. 1 is "England plus six". I have done my own arithmetical calculation for England plus five and Wales plus one. I hope that my arithmetic is correct, but I shall stand corrected by any other hon. Member who can correct me during my speech—I have some time to go yet.

I welcome the fact that Wales will get an additional seat, but if the amendment were accepted it would create a more even distribution of seats, giving England an additional four rather than five, Wales an additional one, and Scotland an additional one. If I get the calculation wrong, it is no fault of the Library, as these are my calculations. England would have an average electorate of 520,161; Wales would have an average electorate of 444,525; and Scotland would have 436,825. That brings Scotland and Wales in line with each other, with a difference of less than 8,000. With such vast electorates, that is very little, so I hope that the argument for putting Scotland and Wales on a comparable basis will weigh with the Minister.

When considering population, even on that basis, it is important to examine what happens in some other European countries. We would then find that Scotland and Wales are disproportionately under-represented. The Library's research paper No. 93/70 gives the population per MEP. One assumes, therefore, that the electorate per MEP is less because the population includes people who are not electors because they are either too young, insane, Members of the House of Lords or in gaol—or all four. They could not be all four, because Members of the House of Lords could not be too young to vote, but they could be a combination of three of the four.

After the new MEPs have been added, Belgium will have a population of 400,000 per MEP, which would still be less than Scotland, even if Scotland were allocated another seat. Denmark would have 318,750 people per MEP, which would be considerably less than the average in Scotland. I could continue to quote such figures, but one could not argue that, on a population basis, Scotland would be over-represented by having an additional MEP.

Mrs. Ewing: This matter is of paramount importance. Has the hon. Gentleman noticed that Luxembourg, for instance, which has roughly the same population as Edinburgh, has six MEPs and an average electorate of only some 66,000? That amplifies the argument that the hon. Gentleman is so ably making.

Mr. Wallace: I was going to stop quoting such figures, but the hon. Lady has given me the encouragement to continue. For instance, Ireland has a population of 240,000 per MEP; Greece has 400,000; and Portugal has 408,000. Again, they would all have less than Scotland even if Scotland had an extra seat. Further examples include the Netherlands, with 474,194 per MEP. As those figures refer to population, as opposed to electorate, they tend to understate my case. So the Government cannot come to the House and argue that, on the ground of population, Scotland is over-represented, when it is clear that, compared to other EC countries, that is far from the case.

The question of geography—the land mass covered—is also important. The area of England is 13,043,865 hectares; Wales is 2,076,833 hectares; Scotland is 7,879,340 hectares; and Northern Ireland is 1,412,182 hectares. I do not wish to eleborate on the case of Northern Ireland, as I do not wish to take issue with hon. Members representing Northern Ireland who may join the debate later. The average size of electorate in England is 197,634 hectares; in Wales it is 519,208 hectares; and in Scotland it is a staggering 984,918 hectares.

I can go through that in much more detail, although I must unfortunately switch to square miles unless another hon. Member can translate square miles into hectares. The North East Scotland constituency covers an area of 4,873 square miles; Mid-Scotland and Fife covers 2,140 square miles; Lothian covers 407 square miles; Strathclyde East covers 500 square miles; Strathclyde West covers 794 square miles; Glasgow a meagre 74 square miles; South of Scotland covers 5,979 square miles; and the Highlands and Islands covers 15,661 square miles.

Dr. Godman: The hon. Gentleman's statistics are baffling me. In his otherwise fine speech, he has made little or no mention of the role and functions of MEPs. As the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) said, if the Maastricht treaty is ratified, the MEP will perforce come

into greater contact with his or her constituents in terms of complaints that are taken to the European Parliament's ombudsman. A case can therefore be made for manageably sized constituencies because of the greater role put on MEPs by Maastricht. Amid the plethora of statistics that the hon. Gentleman has given, he has not mentioned MEPs' enhanced roles.

Mr. Wallace: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman if I overlooked that matter. I referred to the importance of the European Parliament and, by definition, the importance of the MEP's role, though I am happy to elaborate on that.

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point in regard to the increasing workload that will fall on MEPs. European legislation and the arms of the European Community are stretching into ever more aspects of our lives, and hon. Members need no reminding of the number of inquiries that we now receive relating to European issues. Populations have a great bearing on that. The greater the electorate, the greater the potential burden on the parliamentary representative, be it in relation to the European ombudsman or other issues.

Dr. Godman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that—because of the massive European constituencies—if Maastricht is ratified and there are many complaints about maladministration and so on, we may have to act as referral agents for local MEPs?

Mr. Wallace: That is possible, and to some extent it already happens. I am happy to say that I have formed a good working relationship with the MEP who covers my constituency, and we have a mutual referral system. She often receives details and refers them to me or the local authority, and I receive details of European issues which I refer to her. I anticipate that happening increasingly. The burden will remain, even with a smaller electorate, although a smaller electorate might make matters more manageable.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, while the enhanced facilities that now exist for communicating between the House of Commons and the European Parliament and between both of those and the Council and the Commission—directly by telephone and by faxing—make a great difference, there will have to be additional liaison between MEPs and MPs because of the increased interest that people have in the affairs of the European Parliament?

At least two major Scottish newspapers now have permanent representation in Brussels. The media generally are taking a greater interest in affairs there. That is heightening the awareness of people in European matters. The citizens of the United Kingdom are becoming alerted to the importance of the European legislative processes.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. lady makes a pertinent point. the fact that national newspapers are covering events in the European Parliament with greater thoroughness must make people more aware of what is happening there. That will undoubtedly result in people making greater demands on their MEPs and perhaps on their Westminster MPs. Indeed, hon. Members throughout the Committee will have noticed over the years an increasing volume of correspondence attributed to European matters. Those matters have involved, for example, motor bikes, driving licence conditions for Community coaches and the common fisheries policy.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow referred to populations. That in turn concerns the sizes of constituencies. After all, the bigger the constituency, the more chance there is of MEPs having to cover a wider diversity of interests, to the point where virtually every subject could arise.

I intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Lewes to refer to the South of Scotland, which is an extremely large seat. I note that several hon. Members who represent that area are in the Committee today, including the hon. Member for East Lothian. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) was in his place and will no doubt be back, as will my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). They represent divers parts of Scotland, but all within the same South of Scotland seat. I fought that constituency in 1979, unfortunately unsuccessfully.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Shame.

Mr. Wallace: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that word of sympathy, although, as the constituency was then known as Berwick and East Lothian, I do not think that he was so sympathetic at the time.

Mr. Home Robertson: I must admit that I did not vote for the hon. Gentleman.

5.15 pm

Mr. Wallace: That comes as no surprise.

During that, albeit brief, campaign, I learned a great deal about what goes on. I got my nomination papers in with about three minutes to spare, so late in the day had I been selected. I saved considerable public expense because the returning officer had already had the ballot papers printed and was biting his nails wondering whether I would make it in time.

I learned during that experience of the great diversity within that Euro-constituency, including the sheer difficulty of covering the whole area. During an election campaign, one is trying to cover a wide area in a short period compared with the time available when the European Parliament is sitting normally. I was fortunate to have a home base in Dumfriesshire, so, from the constituency point of view, it was useful to be 90 miles one way to Coldstream and 90 miles the other way to Stranraer, and one could travel easily to places such as Haddington or Killington in Ayr. That experience brought home to me just what a vast area was being covered.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Did the hon. Gentleman get to Prestonpans?

Mr. Wallace: I passed through Prestonpans, but I do not think there were many Liberal votes to be won there, so I would not have spent a great deal of time there. I remember a meeting at which I was to talk to fishermen in Eyemouth, but I am afraid nobody turned up. I met some of them in a local hostelry and had a good discussion about the common fisheries policy.

One of the biggest meetings that I attended during that campaign centred on the issue of nuclear waste dumping, though perhaps that had what might be called more of a general academic interest to people living in, say, Carluke. I had almost forgotten that Carluke was in the then European patch that I was contesting—until about a year later, when a student I was tutoring in conveyancing law

[Mr. Wallace]

at Edinburgh university said, "You must be the guy I voted for in the European elections." I had forgotten that I had sought election in his home area.

I have made those points to illustrate how vast constituencies are. Not only are they difficult to manage, but they can give rise to many issues. If the Government are as insistent on the first-past-the-post system as they appear to be, we are in difficulty, because some of the constituencies are so large that it can be difficult to identify a community of interests.

That would apply even more to the new boundaries, with 71 rather than the present 66 seats. The average size in England would be 512,835 hectares, and Wales and Scotland would be the figures I have given—*[Interruption.]* I apologise to the Committee. I have referred to electorates rather than to areas. I must give the correct figures. We propose something different, but I fear that I cannot immediately find the figures. Suffice it to say that our proposal would be more manageable than the scheme before us.

There is a strong political case for Scotland being given an extra seat. I am not putting a nationalistic argument. Indeed, the Secretary of State for Scotland said in his famous St. Andrews speech:

> "I have talked already of Scots being one of the people of Europe, as much part of the rich tapestry of the Community as Bavarians, Walloons or Catalonians."

That must be appreciated, as the hon. Member for Lewes has strongly argued.

Mr. Rathbone: Hon. Members will recall that I doubted the validity of the numerical base for such arguments as the hon. Gentleman is pursuing. Even greater doubt is cast on that numerical base if the single additional Scottish Member were elected for the whole of Scotland, whatever basis of voting might be suggested. It would mean the establishment of a constituency embracing all of Scotland. Any points that the hon. Gentleman is now making about the difficulties of getting around any part of Scotland would be that much greater. Will he explain how those two points are happily married?

Mr. Wallace: With pleasure. As the hon. Gentleman will be quick to appreciate, we are not comparing like with like, because I have been basing my argument, as we must, on the first-past-the-post system which the Government have proposed.

Much play is made of the Member of the European Parliament's identity with the community that he represents. In a seat such as the south of Scotland, there is huge diversity of communities. They undoubtedly have things in common—they celebrate St. Andrew's day on 30 November, and the nights around Burns night on 25 January and they have a good time. We all cheer for the same side at Murrayfield and Hampden park.

There are also other common factors that are much more important and deeply ingrained in the Scottish culture. A Member of the European Parliament deals with a multiplicity of interests. If we were to allocate one seat to Scotland using a proportional system, we would be elevating another principle—fair representation. I am sure that the hon. Member for Lewes would warm to that proposal, not least because it would achieve some representation for his party in Scotland.

There is a community of identity in Scotland. But clearly, if one were to have the best of all worlds, we would do away with the first-past-the-post system and have a proper system of fair representation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am pleased to hear the encouraging support from Labour Members. I shall not go into too much detail on that issue now, but I hope that we will debate it on another occasion.

I quoted earlier from the famous St. Andrews speech of the Secretary of State for Scotland, which I suspect has been over-quoted, as it did not amount to much.

Mr. Tom Clarke: It is overrated.

Mr. Wallace: That is a better way to describe it, particularly as it promised so much and has failed to deliver.

In that speech, the Secretary of State advanced one or two good arguments—on which the hon. Member for Lewes elaborated—on the political value of having an extra seat for Scotland. I hope that I have made it clear that the European Parliament has an increasingly important role which means that there is an additional work load for Members of the European Parliament.

If there is an opportunity to reduce that work load through a much better distribution of seats in Scotland to deal with issues that are peculiarly Scottish and have a specific and Scottish dimension, it should be taken. In comparison with other European Community countries, Scotland is not over-represented.

Vast areas will need to be covered. An additional Scottish seat elected under the first-past-the-post system would allow some steps to be taken towards achieving a manageable work load. It would be no means eliminate some of the greater travel distances, but nevertheless it would help to achieve that aim. For those compelling reasons, I cannot understand how the Minister can say that he is not going to give Scotland another seat. The speeches of hon. Members representing the Scottish National party, the Labour party, the Conservative party, and the Liberal Democrats show that there is great cross-party consensus which should be welcomed and encouraged. Therefore, I hope that the Minister will respond positively to the arguments I have advanced.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) has made a speech of stunning length—40 to 50 minutes, which seemed like only four or five hours. He held the House captivated throughout his speech. If he ever feels like publishing it, I am sure that it would sell well in the travelogue section of any of the bookshops in Scotland. One of the details which the hon. Gentleman failed to mention and of which I was reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke), was that the shoreline of Argyll is longer than the shoreline of France. The hon. Gentleman should have remembered and mentioned that when making such a detailed speech.

I have no intention of referring to the speech allegedly made by the Secretary of State for Scotland on St. Andrew's day. Like 99·999 per cent. of the Scottish people, I was totally unaware that the Secretary of State for Scotland had made a speech on St. Andrew's day. Now that I am aware of it, I have no intention of reading the speech.

Mr. Wallace: The speech was made in St. Andrews on 23 November, not on St. Andrew's day.

Mr. McAllion: That explains the matter. I was perplexed when I heard that the Secretary of State had made a St. Andrew's day speech on 23 November, as I had always believed that St. Andrew's day was on 30 November. I thought that perhaps I was wrong. I shall not refer to the speech because, if I remember rightly, the Secretary of State for Scotland is the same man who claimed that the Conservative party had won the general election in Scotland on the basis that it received one in four of the votes cast in 11 out of the 72 seats that were at stake. The speeches of anyone who is as out of touch with reality as the Secretary of State should not be listened to or accorded respect.

I am pleased with the group of amendments tabled in the names of my hon. Friends and hon. Members from other political parties in Scotland. As a founder member and stalwart supporter of Scotland United I was delighted to see the cross-party co-operation that led to the parliamentary leaders of the Labour party, the Scottish National party and the Liberal Democrats putting their names to the same amendments and being so nice to each other during the debate. It gladdened my old heart to see such cross-party co-operation and restored my faith in the fact that, even at this late hour, Scotland may yet rescue something from the debris of previous general elections, eventually get their act together and perhaps force the Tories into retreat. I certainly hope so.

Earlier in the debate, the complete lack of participation from anyone from the Conservative party in Scotland was noticeable. Not only Scottish Office Ministers, but Back Benchers, have yet to attempt to catch your eye, Mr. Morris, to try to participate in the debate and explain why they are opposed to Scotland's being given an additional seat and additional representation in the European Parliament. We had to rely on an hon. Member from the other extremity of the United Kingdom—as he described it—to argue the case for Scotland to be given additional representation.

What struck me about the hon. Gentleman's argument was that he said that he believed that everyone in the Chamber would be in favour of the proper operation of parliamentary democracy, but that it was important, within that process, for the voice of the political minority to be heard. I found that argument strange coming from a representative of the Conservative party as that party is the political minority in Scotland. Not only is the Conservative party given a voice in the proper operation of Scottish democracy: it dominates Scottish democracy. It runs every aspect of Scotland on the basis of only a handful of votes cast in its favour and a handful of seats.

The latest opinion poll in Scotland gives the Conservative party 16 per cent. support among Scottish people—*[Laughter.]* However, it is still able to make key decisions about how Scotland will be represented elsewhere. I see that Conservative Members laugh at my reference to the fact that the Conservative party has only 16 per cent. support in Scotland. A spokesperson for the Conservative party went on record as saying that he was delighted that his party had attained 16 per cent. of the opinion poll ratings in Scotland because it represented a marked improvement.

I was interested in some aspects of the argument of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). She left the Chamber as soon as I got to my feet—the Scottish National party must now be opposed to cross-party co-operation, as it skedaddles as soon as a Labour Member rises from his seat. The hon. Lady advanced the argument about the British state. It is important, particularly for Conservative Members, to understand what we mean when we talk of the British state and say that the British state is not a country or a nation.

As the hon. Lady correctly said, the British state is a multinational state. It consists not of one nation or one country, but three different nations and three different countries—Scotland, Wales and England. I clearly remember at the last Labour party conference in Scotland when we debated whether Labour should stand and organise in Northern Ireland. The biggest cheer of the day was reserved for one of the delegates who took the platform and, in a short speech, simply said that he did not think that the British state should be in Northern Ireland, never mind the Labour party. He received a tremendous reception.

I do not think that the British state should be in England, never mind in Northern Ireland. I do not think that the British state should be in Scotland, Wales, or, indeed, Northern Ireland. We need a new, democratic deal to bind together the different nations that make up the United Kingdom, not the present system which is supported by the Conservative party and by no other political party in this country which supports the status quo.

I could not agree with the hon. Lady when she tried to answer that, because we are part of a multinational state, Scotland should be treated as an equal partner with England and be given—as she put it—full and equal representation with England at the European Parliament. As I understand it, England currently has 71 Members of the European Parliament. If the amendments are defeated, it will have 76 Members of the European Parliament. If the hon. Lady is to be taken at her word, she is arguing for Scotland to have 76 Members of the European Parliament, which seems slightly absurd as we only have 72 Members in the United Kingdom Parliament. The Scottish National party seems to be arguing that we should have 76 Members at European level.

If anyone read *The Scotsman* this morning—I am sure that you, Mr. Morris, read it every morning of your life—he would have seen an article which was critical of Euro Members of Parliament. It attacked them for living off their expenses and consultancies, and the rich pickings that they can make during the five years of their tenancy in the European Parliament. I did not necessarily agree with the article, but it expressed a view that is held by some people.

The author is a member of the Conservative party. Indeed, he was a candidate in recent general elections. Naturally, like the majority of Conservative candidates in Scotland, he was defeated. I refer to Mr. Peter Clarke, who writes for *The Scotsman*. If the views that he expressed were in any way correct—if it were true that Scotland should have not eight but 76 Euro-Members of Parliament living off the fat pickings in Europe—it would be a rather strange world. It is surprising that the hon. Lady should advance such an argument.

5.30 pm

It was surprising also to hear the hon. Lady argue that the answer is for Scotland to have independence, that only with independence shall we be able to determine for

ourselves what our representation in the European Parliament should be. The hon. Lady went on to say that she is a great supporter of further integration at the European level. I have always understood that further integration at the European level would require member states to surrender sovereignty. Thus, the hon. Lady says that she believes in independence for Scotland, but that she believes also in giving up Scotland's independence, in ceding sovereignty to the European Parliament.

It seems to me that those are contradictory positions, which cannot be used with any kind of logic. I am always struck by the difference between the Labour party and the Scottish National party. We argue for a Scottish parliament within the United Kingdom, while the Scottish nationalists argue for a Scottish parliament within the union of a European superstate.

I should like now to turn to points that have been made in connection with the amendments. If the amendments are defeated, Scotland will have eight European parliamentary seats out of a total of 93 for the United Kingdom. That is about 6 per cent.

Mr. Wallace: Eighty-seven.

Mr. McAllion: I understand that the current number is 87, which will be increased to 93.

Mr. Wallace: The current number is 81.

Mr. McAllion: So it is to go up to 87.

In any case, 6 to 7 per cent. of the seats in the European Parliament will be Scottish. In the case of Westminster, we have 72 seats out of 630—11 per cent. It seems to me, therefore, that there is a contradiction in the Government's argument. They say that it is only fair that Scotland should settle for 6 or 7 per cent. representation at the European level. They argue that we must be fair to England, Wales and Scotland. But if it is fair for Scotland to have representation of only 6 or 7 per cent. at the European level, surely it is fair that it should have only 6 or 7 per cent. representation at the United Kingdom level.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Do not encourage them.

Mr. McAllion: They are being illogical, and the flaws in their argument must be pointed out.

They cannot have it both ways. They cannot say that it is fair for Scotland to have 6 to 7 per cent. representation in Europe—only about half its 11 or 12 per cent. representation in the United Kingdom. The application of consistency and logic would result in a reduction in the number of Scottish seats in this place to about 39. This is not my idea; it is the logic of the Government. They are pretending to be fair and logical in their treatment of Scotland. Of course, there is no fairness or logic. If the Government were to pursue their argument to its logical conclusion, they would have severe problems in Scotland.

Reference has been made to the White Paper, "Scotland in the Union—A Partnership for Good". In the foreword, written by the Prime Minister, there is a reference to the Government's deep commitment to the unity of the United Kingdom. The right hon. Gentleman recognised that no nation could be held irrevocably, against its will, in any kind of union. He conceded that there was growing anxiety in Scotland about the union and whether it was in Scotland's best interests. He promised that he would search for new ways of strengthening the union—in particular, Scotland's place in it—so that Scotland might flourish for a fourth century.

The Minister may believe that that is just so much guff strictly for the natives up in Scotland, that the Prime Minister makes such remarks only when he is there. When he comes down to England it is a very different argument —the argument that was advanced during the Second Reading debate: that Scotland's place in the union is no different from that of Essex, Yorkshire or Lancashire, that the governing principle must always be fairness as between individual constituencies and the size of electorates.

If that is what the Government actually believe, they should apply the argument not only in respect of the European Parliament but in respect of the United Kingdom. That would result in their ignoring Scotland's so-called special place in the union. We are to be denied an additional seat in Europe. Consistency would result in our representation in this House being cut.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I had an opportunity on Sunday afternoon to meet some of my hon. Friend's constituents at Timex. The regard of one of them—a woman—for my hon. Friend was exceeded only by my own. Those people made the point that, time after time, the Government miss opportunities in Europe—including the opportunity of the social chapter—very much at their own expense.

Mr. McAllion: That is an excellent point. Not long ago, I was accused in the Chamber by the Minister for Public Transport, the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), of supporting job wreckers at Timex. The hon. Gentleman was referring, of course, to the Timex workers who had been sacked and locked out by management, whereas the real job wrecker there is the multinational company itself. The Government consistently get it wrong by backing multinationals, as well as others who are rich and powerful, against their own people. There is no better example of this than the way in which they have set their face against the social chapter, which would give the workers of this country the protection that is available to workers everywhere else in the European Community.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) is muttering into his shirt. I shall not ask him what he said, as I understand that he has been promoted to the post of Parliamentary Private Secretary and is therefore not allowed to take part in debates. That being the case, he should not mutter either. He should just sit there quietly and accept what Opposition Members say.

There is no possibility that the Government will apply to the European Parliament the logic that they apply to the United Kingdom Parliament. If they were to do so, they would be faced with the break-up of the United Kingdom and of this Parliament, as they know very well. While North sea oil is important to them, there will be no possibility of their risking Scotland's breaking away and deciding for itself that the union no longer has anything to offer to its people.

The Government continue to be two-faced and inconsistent. They play the national card in England when it suits them to do so. For example, during this debate they say that they are fighting for fairness for England. When they are up in Scotland, of course, there is no such place as England, and Scotland has a special place in the United

Kingdom. What they say is totally inconsistent, totally two-faced and totally unbelievable. No one in Scotland, except diehard Tories, believes them any longer.

Ultimately, Scotland's representation in Europe should be a matter for the Scottish people themselves. The hon. Member for Moray argued that, with an independent Scotland, that would be the case. The trouble with her argument is that Scotland has not yet voted for independence.

Mr. Wallace: Will the hon. Gentleman note the fact that at 5.37 pm, almost two hours after the beginning of the debate, a Scottish Office Minister now graces the Committee with his presence?

Mr. McAllion: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. No doubt, when the Minister saw my name appear on the screen, he hurried to the Chamber.

It is for the Scottish people to decide how they should be represented at the European level. With an independent Scotland, that would be the case. But we have not yet voted for independence and no major Scottish political party supports that policy. I include the Scottish National party, which is willing to give up Scotland's independence and to cede its sovereignty to the European Parliament in a way that would be much more damaging to Scottish interests than in the sovereignty of this Parliament. The SNP, for example, supports an independent central bank beyond any kind of political control.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. We are dealing with a relatively narrow point, and I must ask the hon. Gentleman to address himself to it.

Mr. McAllion: I am trying very hard to do precisely that, Dame Janet.

How do the Scottish people express their views on what their representation should be in Europe? They choose not to do so through the SNP. Indeed, that would be a waste of time because the SNP holds out only an unrealistic promise. Nor do they choose to do so by voting for incorporation in a unitary Parliament, as the Tories want them to do and even pretend that they have done. The Scottish people did not vote for this Parliament to decide how they should be represented at the European level; they voted for something quite different.

The democratic authority for the Bill comes from the Tory vision of an incorporating union between Scotland and England. The Tories believe that this is a unitary Parliament in which the majority is all powerful. Their attachment to the reactionary principle that sovereignty rests not with the people but with whichever party happens to have a majority in the House is the vision that they pray in aid when they argue that they have the right to decide for Scotland how it will be represented in Europe.

That vision has been overwhelmingly rejected by the Scottish people. Three out of four of those who voted in the last general election voted against that sort of incorporating union, unitary Parliament and the Tories having the right to tell us what our representation in Europe should be. Indeed, 61 of the 72 Members who represent Scotland in this Parliament oppose that sort of incorporating union and unitary Parliament. That goes to the heart of the argument between the two sides tonight.

We do not believe that the Government have a democratic right to decide Scotland's representation in Europe—or any of the other issues that affect the Scottish people. The Scottish people have that right, which is why all the opposition parties signed the claim of right for Scotland——

Mr. Tom Clarke: I hesitate to become involved in this argument, but when we have a Labour Government and the majority of Members of Parliament in England happen to be Conservative, will the same logic apply and the Labour Government not have the right to govern England?

Mr. McAllion: If English people decide to vote overwhelmingly for parties that want to break up the United Kingdom, that is a matter for them. The sovereign right of nations applies to all nations across the globe, not just to this or that nation. If Scotland has a national right to self-determination, so has England. That is what the argument is about. We are discussing who decides the representation of different nations at the European Parliament. We are challenging the idea that that decision should be taken only by the majority party in the House, which does not even reflect the majority of the English people, let alone the majority of the British people.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. The logic of the hon. Gentleman's argument appears to be that we should not legislate on anything, at any time. We must deal with matters as they are.

Mr. McAllion: If the House decided to stop interfering in the affairs of the British people, that would be one of the most progressive decisions that it had made and the British people—especially in Scotland—would be the first to give three cheers and to say, "Thank God for that."

Scotland wants a new democratic deal. It wants a directly elected Scottish Parliament, sovereign in its own areas, which can negotiate with the Westminster Parliament, if that suits Scotland, on a particular area, or with the European Parliament, if that suits Scotland, on other areas. That Scottish Parliament would negotiate the division of competencies and powers between the Scottish, Westminster and European Parliaments. That is what Scotland voted for and that is what Scotland should be getting.

A Scottish Parliament should have been established in the aftermath of the general election, able to negotiate either directly with Europe or, if it thought it better, with Westminster about what the joint representation of Scotland and the rest of Britain should be. Before the House decides Scotland's representation in Europe, the consent of the Scottish people should be sought.

All too often, the House decides for Scotland and discounts what Scotland thinks. The Tory Government believe that there should be five additional seats for England and one for Wales—and Scotland can jump into the North sea if it so chooses. That is the Government's view, but they have no right to impose it on the people of Scotland.

One point that has not yet been mentioned is that the Bill is the consequence of an agreement reached at the European Council, which was held in Scotland's capital city last year. However, there was no direct representation for Scotland in the European Council when it discussed additional representation for the countries within the European Community.

In fact, we were represented by the Prime Minister, who is now so unpopular in Scotland that he is even less

[Mr. McAllion]

popular than his predecessor. To be less popular than Baroness Thatcher is some achievement, which I doubt will ever be paralleled. The feelings of the Scottish people were probably better represented outside that European Council meeting when 25,000 people demonstrated in support of a Scottish Parliament.

5.45 pm

The Scottish people are becoming seriously disillusioned with the Tory Government's views on how Scotland should be represented in the European Community. The Government argue that we are represented because the Secretary of State for Scotland happens to be a member of the Tory Cabinet. As has been said before, the right hon. Gentleman represents the Cabinet in Scotland; he does not represent Scotland in the Cabinet. That is a tragedy.

They say that we are represented because the Tory-controlled Scottish Office participates in the United Kingdom governmental machine that influences the United Kingdom's permanent representatives in Europe. They argue that we are represented because that same Tory-controlled Scottish Office participates through the Council of Ministers and agencies such as Scotland Europa and Scottish Trade International, which are essentially Government agencies under the control of Tory Ministers.

That indirect representation through the Tory Government, who are so unpopular in Scotland, is an affront to democracy and all Opposition Members recognise that. I suspect that Tory Members who are honest with themselves also recognise that. They know they have no democratic right to make decisions tonight about what should happen north of the border.

My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) said that there is no substitute for democracy. Tragically, in Scotland this Parliament is a substitute for democracy. The way that Parliament is governed is an affront to democracy. If the Tories do not understand that, their current poll rating in Scotland of 16 per cent. will plummet even further, and deservedly so.

Dr. Godman: It is curious that we, in this multinational Parliament, are debating the extent of the representation within another multinational Parliament——

Mr. Wallace: Has the hon. Gentleman noticed that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) has departed? Again, there is no Scottish Office Minister on the Bench.

Dr. Godman: The Minister came in so quietly that I did not spot his presence; I certainly did not spot his departure.

The legislative sovereignty of this Parliament has been severely restricted by the central institutions of the European Community, whereas over the next decade the power of the European Parliament must grow. It cannot be otherwise, because it cannot remain in its present condition. The Bill owes its very existence to the reunification of the two Germanies, which in itself was a most welcome European development? It has important repercussions for the European Parliament.

I agreed wholeheartedly with the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) that we are members of a multinational parliament. There are those who believe that, with European union, if Maastricht is ratified, Europe will develop—albeit slowly—into a multinational federal state. I parted company with the hon. Lady, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), when she argued the case for an independent Scotland within the European Community.

Given the treaty of Rome, the role of the European Commission, that of the European Council and, perhaps most important, that of the European Court of Justice, there are no independent member states of the European Community. It makes better sense, in my view, to talk about autonomous member states forming, in relation to the Maastricht treaty, a European union.

I believe that we all now accept, readily or grudgingly, the increasingly important role of the European Parliament and the Members of that Parliament. That greater power of the European Parliament must be matched—if that is the right way to put it—by the increasing diminution of this Parliament in terms of the power of the European Community's central institutions.

All 12 national legislatures are now subordinate to the European Court of Justice; it is in evey sense a supreme court. As Judge Christopher Bellamy of the Court of First Instance said in his De Lancy lecture last year, those of us who are aware of it are witnessing a quiet legal and constitutional revolution in terms of the power of these institutions. That includes the European Parliament.

In his lecture, Judge Ballamy claimed that, if we accept

"that the principle of the supremacy of Community law applies not only when the Act of Parliament in question is inconsistent with the Treaty, but also when it is inconsistent with subsidiary Community legislation, that is to say regulations and directives, then matters have moved very far indeed. Because in that event the will of the once sovereign legislature has become subordinate to another legislative act, which is itself derivative, passed by another legislature, the EEC Council of Ministers. On this view Parliament"—

he is referring her to the United Kingdom Parliament—

"has become subordinate not just to a constitutional instrument—the Treaty—but also to subsequent legislation based on the Treaty made by a rival legislature."

He is talking about the European Council of Ministers, but in time to come that statement would fit the role played by the European Parliament.

If we look at the powers of that Parliament and the role of the MEPs, we see that, in accordance with the Maastricht treaty, all Community citizens have the right to petition the European Parliament by way of their local MEP—that is article 18—and all citizens have a right to complain to the European ombudsman in respect of the actions of Community institutions. They cannot do this by taking a complaint to a Member of Parliament; they have to take the complaint to a Member of the European Parliament.

So, in terms of representing the interests of these huge constituencies, certainly where Scotland is concerned, MEPs will perforce, I believe, become much more involved, as the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) suggested, in a very wide range of issues. He said, rightly, that we are already referral agencies where some matters are concerned in terms of taking complaints to MEPs. This, I believe, will increase in the light of Maastricht.

Mr. Brian Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): Will my hon. Friend tell us how it is possible to consider an MEP in Scotland to be a local MEP, when two of them represent both the east and the west coasts of Scotland?

Dr. Godman: I am glad that my hon. Friend was listening so intently. I apologise for that slip of the tongue. I guess it is a contradiction in terms to talk about Alex Smith, the very fine MEP for South of Scotland, being a local MEP, given that his constituency, as was pointed out earlier, stretches from coast to coast. He represents, for example, both east coast and west coast fishermen.

We have to remember that these MEPs are taking part in a European Parliament which increasingly has a powerful role to play—the kind of role that this Parliament cannot play. In terms of the decision making of that unelected body, the European Commission, and of the Council of Ministers, these few MEPs have a more direct, more interventionist role to play with regard to the proposals emerging from the European Commission. Even now, they can block some proposals. For example, they can stop the accession of a country seeking to join the European Community.

In terms of the European Parliament, MEPs become, vis-a-vis the Maastricht treaty, in every sense co-decision-makers with the Council of Ministers. We have never had that power. According to article 189b, if the European Parliament is so minded, it can reject a Commission proposal. We in national Parliaments cannot do that. Even at this moment, the various Committees in the European Parliament can shape to a considerable degree proposals by the 17 Commissioners to the Council of Ministers.

So it is not an empty claim that the European Parliament now has powers that we do not have, but which it is often reluctant to use. I believe that I am right in saying that it can dismiss the President of the European Commission. We do not have that power. So we are talking about placing representatives on this increasingly powerful body.

Under article 189b, the European Parliament can stop a Council regulation. As Judge Bellamy said in his lecture:

"We will therefore have a joint legislature, the Council of Ministers and the Parliament."

He is referring, of course, to the European Parliament.

"In recognition of that fact Community regulations will be signed by the Presidents of both bodies."

We are literally standing on the touchline in this regard, but all this centres upon the immensely powerful role of the European Court of Justice and the roles, certainly nowhere near as powerful, of the European Commission and the Council of Ministers. In a very real sense, we are determining the extent of representation in another multi-national Parliament, which is growing in stature and power, while our legislative power is increasingly constrained by the actions and deliberations of central institutions.

6 pm

Some parliamentarians in other member states are even arguing that the members of the European Court of Justice should be appointed by the European Parliament rather by national Governments on the recommendation of law officers, as is currently the case. I do not want the European Parliament to be given that kind of power, but those discussions are taking place, and in the amendments we are arguing for more representation in Scotland.

We need that extra seat in the European Parliament. I consider it essential that Scotland should be well represented by the very finest people.

Mr. Marlow: Surrounded as I am by hon. Members concerned with Scotland, I hope that it will be all right for me to stand up and say a few words on behalf of England. Is that in order with the rest of the House?

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. It is a question of whether it is in order with the Chair. Provided it is relevant, the answer is yes.

Mr. Marlow: I will try my hardest—and I may well succeed—to make it both in order and relevant.

What does the European Parliament do? What is it for? I do not think that anyone is greatly impressed by the European Parliament at the moment, or particularly impressed by its Members. There are some very bright people, some of them with a great deal of ambition but not a lot of power. It would seem that their overriding objective at the moment is to increase the power of the institution of which they are members, rather than the good governance of Europe. So be it. If we have more members of that institution, we are concerned about how they should be allocated within this nation of ours, this state of ours, this United Kingdom. We are a united kingdom, and we are all equal within it.

Mr. McAllion: We are not a nation.

Mr. Marlow: From a sedentary position, the hon. Gentleman says that we are not a nation. I believe that we are a nation state, and the nation state is the United Kingdom.

Mr. McAllion: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Marlow: In a minute.

I believe that we are a nation state—to which I give my loyalty—and that everybody within that nation state should have equal rights and equal representation. People and businesses in my constituency may wish to get in touch with their MEP, and may have reason to do so. I cannot really conceive why, if this institution has any value at all—and hopefully it does—my constituents should be less fully represented than someone from another part of the country. I cannot conceive why constituents in Cornwall should have a different level of representation from that of constituents in Scotland, London, or the north-west. Why should the regions of the United Kingdom be catered for less fully, just because they happen to be in a different part of the nation state from that part known as Scotland?

Mr. Allen: Does the hon. Gentleman seek to erode the original premise of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 and subsequent amendments—that it need not be a pure mathematical formula that distributes seats around Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England?

"The electorate of any Assembly constituency in Great Britain shall be as near the electoral quota as is reasonably practical having regard, where appropriate, to special geographical considerations."

Does the hon. Gentleman concede that in Scotland, more than anywhere else in the United Kingdom, special geographical considerations apply?

Mr. Marlow: I think the hon. Gentleman is talking about size and scale. That is a factor, but there are many

[Mr. Marlow]

other factors, as I am sure he will agree. Increasingly, in this age of the communications revolution, a lot of work is done by telephone and fax; in the future, much will probably be done by videophone, and so on and so forth, and by meetings of that sort. Although I concede that the population is more sparsely distributed in some parts of the country than in others, I do not think that that in itself is a sufficient reason why people in those parts of the country——

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Perhaps I may help the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). The Act to which he referred does enumerate the normal boundary commission criteria, but that is in their respective parts of the United Kingdom. The Boundary Commission took cognisance of the geography of Scotland, which is why in the Highland and Islands constituency the large area is balanced by a much smaller population. That is done within the constituent parts of the United Kingdom, and not across the United Kingdom as a whole. The legislation is quite clear about that.

Mr. Marlow: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but there are parts of Scotland where the population is very densely distributed, whereas there are parts of England where the population is not as densely distributed as it is in Scotland.

The hon. Gentleman talked about geography and boundaries being consistent, to a certain extent, with identity. It makes sense where possible—where groups of people live within a county, or a high-density area, or a catchment area, or a London, or Edinburgh or Glasgow —that the boundaries should not go through the middle of Glasgow or Nottingham, but should be consistent with people's communities and identities.

If there is work to be done, the overriding principle of Members of the European Parliament should be that it is done for everybody—every business, every constituent and every interest—in the United Kingdom in equal measure. I see no reason why my constituents should not have the same opportunity of being represented by somebody in the European Parliament as any other constituent in the country, be they in Cornwall, Northumberland, Scotland, Cambridge or wherever.

The Government are quite right to allocate the seats in the way they seek. I think that in the past England has been unfairly treated, and that it is only right and proper that that unfairness should be addressed.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): How does the hon. Gentleman tie in what he is saying today with what he said on Second Reading? It is my recollection that his attitude to the enlargement of the European Parliament was, so far as this country is concerned, that it was totally unnecessary. If I recall his speech aright, he said it was simply a drain on the Exchequer and the taxpayer. If he is not terribly interested in enlargement, why not bow out of the debate and let those who do feel that it is important that we are represented have their way?

Mr. Marlow: It is an interesting point. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not quoting me aright. I am sceptical about the European Parliament and the motives of its Members, but I am not saying that it does not have a role and a purpose, or that it is a total waste of space. It may develop a constructive role which is helpful to the interests of my constituents and of the United Kingdom as a whole, although I am sceptical about that. I am not saying that we have reached that stage yet. It may happen.

The hon. Gentleman has his view, which is shared by some people in my constituency. I am likewise entitled to participate in the debate, particularly as many of the hon. Members who have already spoken have represented a small but vital part of the United Kingdom: Scotland. Someone should run up the flag for England and ensure that we follow the Government's lead in getting justice and a fair share for England. I am delighted that the Government are proceeding in such a way.

Mr. Wallace: I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving way. Perhaps what he fails to understand was betrayed by his opening remarks. He seems to regard the United Kingdom as one unitary state, without accepting that it is composed of the four distinctive elements of Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland. Recognising those separate identities within the United Kingdom, which I support, let us consider the fact that Luxembourg, with a population that might merit only about one Member of the European Parliament, has six. There has always been over-representation of peoples and nations within the European Community, and it is something that the United Kingdom should have tried to achieve.

Mr. Marlow: I accept that the United Kingdom, which I call a nation state, is made up of four different nations. They have their different identities and aspirations, but come together within the greater United Kingdom. I think most hon. Members are in favour of that, as it is a good thing. So I do not understand where the difference lies between the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and myself.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland goes on about Luxembourg. Since the inception of the Community, Luxembourg has been over-represented in the European Parliament. I am against over-representation and would like it to be reformed because it is wrong. It is nonsense. As far as possible, different parts of Europe should be equally represented in the European Parliament; different peoples, constituents, organisations and lobbies should have equal access. It is wrong that Luxembourg, which is smaller than Northamptonshire —which does not even have an MEP because it is not big enough—has six MEPs when its population is less than that of Northampton.

The main reason for my opposition to the Maastricht treaty is that the Commission has too much power and is seeking to get more. I want its power to be reduced. It is not properly democratically accountable, and because there is no such thing as party there and it is polyglot, and also because of different interests and shifting coalitions, I do not think that the European Parliament is likely to be an adequate institution to control the Commission in my lifetime.

The Commission uses its power by gaining the support of the smaller nations of Europe, which feel that it is on their side and that it will produce a federal Europe, which is what they want. They see their power coming from a federal Europe, whereas we see ours coming from the United Kingdom. The Germans see their power coming

largely from Germany and the French from France. The Belgians, to an extent the Dutch, and certainly Luxembourg, see their power coming through Europe.

Over-representation helps the Commission to get its own way. When there is a vote in the Council of Ministers, it is wrong that the small countries are over-represented, because that means that there is a bias in decision making in favour of the smaller countries. There is also a bias because some of the smaller countries happen to be the peripheral countries, such as Greece, Portugal, Ireland—the people who are in receipt of net moneys from the European Community.

6.15 pm

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. Do I hear the cantering footsteps of a hobby-horse? May we please return to the amendment under consideration?

Mr. Marlow: I am not arguing at all, Dame Janet.

I am concerned about the regional allocation of Members of the European Parliament. If the recipients of European funds, the small nations of Europe and the allies of the Commission are over-represented, not just on the Council of Ministers but in the European Parliament, that enhances the power and prestige of the Commission and makes it easier for it to get its way. In my view, when the Commission gets its way, it is more often than not contrary to the interests of the United Kingdom and of my constituents, whom I seek to represent.

Mrs. Ewing: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because I am following his arguments with interest. Given that during debates on the European issue the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) has consistently agreed with the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who said last week on Second Reading that it did not matter where the extra seats were allocated, why does the hon. Gentleman now take such a strong stance against the argument propounded by Opposition Members and supported by some Conservative Members that Scotland should have extra representation? Is it not because he is in principle against the idea of a European Parliament?

Mr. Marlow: I am not a great fan of the European Parliament, as the hon. Lady knows. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) is a wise and effective politician and we have a great identity of view, but perhaps the hon. Lady will understand that we are not totally as one on Scottish issues.

I have two arguments. First, let us be fair to England. Secondly, if we are fair to England and to the idea of equal representation throughout Europe, that will enhance the power of the larger units of Europe rather than the smaller units and, by doing so, will reduce the power of the Commission. I am therefore very much in favour of the Government's point of view.

Mr. Home Robertson: It is an unspeakable joy to follow the authentic voice of the Tory empire loyalist. I always enjoy listening to the speeches of the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), whether he is flogging a dead horse or not. When I saw him rising to his feet, I thought that he was going to solve all our problems. We are looking for an extra seat for Scotland and he has made his views clear on previous occasions—I understand that on Second Reading he thought that the number of seats anywhere would be irrelevant.

I thought that he was going to solve the problem by doing away with the MEP for Northamptonshire and giving an extra seat to Scotland. But I see that he is muttering behind his hand. Perhaps he is prepared to accept a manuscript amendment to that effect, which would get us out of the problem and give us an extra seat in Scotland.

I agree with practically every word that my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) said about the tyranny of the minority from which we suffer in Scotland. That is a deep running sore in Scotland. It is affecting every aspect of public policy and public life, and until that constitutional issue is sorted out, nothing will go right. It is about time that the Government addressed themselves to that problem, in relation to our representation in the European institutions and right across the board. It is an important and serious matter.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Home Robertson: Here is the other authentic voice of the empire loyalist.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman was discussing representation in Scotland. He suggests that there should be other constitutional changes there. Would not such constitutional changes mean that ultimately there would be a reduction in the representatives coming from Scotland to this place, as the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has suggested?

Mr. Home Robertson: I would not necessarily quarrel with that.

Mr. McAllion: Perhaps the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) will not be here.

Mr. Home Robertson: As my hon. Friend says, it would give us all the greatest joy if the hon. Member for Ayr and some of his hon. Friends stopped coming here, or—more important still—if they were not in the Scottish Parliament when we succeed in establishing it.

The hon. Member has made me think of another extraordinary argument of his hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North about Britain being a nation. How can a united kingdom be a nation? I know that Conservative Members find the fact difficult to grasp, but the United Kingdom is not a nation; it is a union of nations. For such a union to thrive, all the nations within it must have their place, and must be respected. That is not happening now.

I admit that I do not altogether agree with everything that has been said by some of my hon. Friends, which will not come as a surprise to them. I must own up to having been one of the five Labour Members who voted for the Third Reading of the Bill on the Maastricht treaty. I make no apology for that. I believe that Europe is important, that it is the way forward for our people, and that it must develop. Europe's Parliament and its other institutions must develop, too, and that will be possible only if those institutions are seen to be increasingly democratic and credible, and to identify with the peoples of Europe.

That brings me back to the geographical difficulties associated with the British single-Member constituencies

[Mr. Home Robertson]

in the European Parliament. I represent one of the numerous Westminster constituencies which lies within the Euro-constituency of South of Scotland. Several hon. Members have already referred to that Euro-constituency. Indeed, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) is the battle-scarred veteran of a lost deposit there.

Mr. Wallace: The first lost deposit in a European election.

Mr. Home Robertson: The hon. Gentleman takes great pride in that fact. The constituency stretches for almost 6,000 square miles, from Ailsa Craig in the firth of Clyde to the Bass rock in the firth of Forth.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): There are no voters there.

Mr. Home Robertson: I once visited the Bass rock, which is in my constituency, and I was a little alarmed to see that a copy of *The Sun* was delivered to the lighthouse keeper—so I was not all that distressed when the lighthouse was closed down.

Mr. Wallace: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be familiar with the expression, "addressing one's remarks to Ailsa Craig". Does that not feel much the same as trying to address a reasoned argument to Ministers, especially Scottish Office Ministers?

Mr. Home Robertson: That is rather a ponderous observation, especially as I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Ailsa Craig, or rather for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), is in the Chamber. He represents Ailsa Craig almost as well as I represent Bass rock.

I was arguing that the single-Member Euro-constituencies, as they exist for Great Britain alone—Northern Ireland is not involved—stretch democratic credibility too far. There is an overwhelming case for a proportional system in elections to the European Parliament.

As the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said at the time, if we had held a snap vote in the Chamber when he first made that point, I think that we would have carried the day, because the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) and one or two Liberals were here, and so were my hon. Friends the Members for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman).

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Home Robertson: Now here is the bad news.

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend may not have heard the bad news—bad news, that is, for him. Today, I am thankful to say, the Transport and General Workers Union decided to continue its support for the first-past-the-post system. I believe that that wise decision represents a turning of the tide for proportional representation. I hope that my hon. Friend will now get off the bandwagon of proportional representation and return to the major issues, such as unemployment, privatisation and the appalling record of the Conservative Government.

Mr. Home Robertson *rose*——

The Second Deputy Chairman: Before the hon. Gentleman continues, I ask him not to be diverted too far.

Mr. Home Robertson: I shall refrain from asking my hon. Friend how the Transport and General Workers Union democratically reached that decision, and whether it was reached proportionately. But I take your point, Dame Janet; this is all miles out of order—or at least, my hon. Friend's intervention was out of order.

I return to the question whether there should be an additional Member of the European Parliament for Scotland. There is a case for electing such a Member—and, indeed, for electing the whole lot of them—by proportional representation.

The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) moved the lead amendment in this important group. Does she trust the Home Office or the Scottish Office to do the business of providing an extra seat for Scotland? I must not be drawn into speculation about boundaries—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] An announcement about boundaries in my part of the world will be made in a couple of days' time. It is embargoed, so it would be totally out of order for me to speculate about where the proposed boundaries, daft though they may be, might be drawn.

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

Mr. Home Robertson: No, I must make progress.

Mrs. Ewing *rose*——

Mr. Home Robertson: I must give way to the hon. Lady.

Mrs. Ewing: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me, because he asked me a specific question.

Mr. Home Robertson: I have not asked it yet.

Mrs. Ewing: I do not believe that this is a question of trusting any member of the Government to argue the case for an additional seat for Scotland. The issue at stake is democratic representation for Scotland, where there is clear unanimity of opinion among the 61 Opposition Members of Parliament that there should be additional representation for Scotland in the European Parliament, which increasingly influences the decisions that affect our constituents's lives.

Mr. Home Robertson: Of course the hon. Lady is right about that, and I agree with her. However, the trouble with all aspects of life in Scotland these days is caused by the people who sit on the Government Front Bench. Good Lord! I see that the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) is sitting there at the moment. Is he a Whip? Or has he suddenly been appointed to the Scottish Office, or perhaps the Home Office? What is he doing? Has there been a reshuffle? This is exciting news; news is unfolding on the hoof.

Nowadays it is people such as the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham who make the decisions about how policies are administered and worked out in the machinery of government, and in everything else, in Scotland. We need look no further than last Friday's edition of *The Scotsman* to see what can happen when such people start trying to draw maps.

The leading article in *The Scotsman* described the Government's proposals for local authorities in Scotland as safe havens for the Tories. Who knows what might

happen if we got the extra seat for Scotland? Perhaps there would be an MEP for east Renfrewshire. If the Government are crazy enough to propose that there should be an all-purpose, single-tier authority for east Renfrewshire——

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): Or for Eastwood.

Mr. Home Robertson: My hon. Friend is too much of a cynic. Surely he is not suggesting to me or to the House that the judgment of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), would be in any way affected in the execution of his duties as the Minister responsible for local government in Scotland, or that he would take certain decisions on the future structure of local government, simply because he is the constituency Member for Eastwood. My hon. Friend would never suggest such a thing.

But who knows, if Eastwood is good enough to have an all-purpose, single-tier authority, running social work, education, further education and everything else, although it has a population of only 84,000, why should it not have a Member of the European Parliament too?

I see that the hon. Member for Ayr is nodding. He is giving the game away, because exactly the same could be argued for Kyle and Carrick—or south Ayrshire, or whatever it is called. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ayrshire—or rather, my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley—for saying so, but if the south Ayrshire local authority—Kyle and Carrick district council or whatever it is called—with a population of more than 100,000, makes sense as an all-purpose local authority, would it not be an appropriate candidate as a European parliamentary constituency?

Mr. Foulkes: I intend to nominate one of the councillors for Girvan, Glendoune for the job. She would do an excellent job, as I am sure my hon. Friend would agree.

Mr. Home Robertson: The thought of Councillor Foulkes in Strasbourg is appealing, and—I am sorry to have to tell you, Dame Janet—there are more such potential constituencies. There is Moray, and——

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether the idea of Councillor Foulkes, the councillor for Girvan, being dispatched to Strasbourg would be most popular with the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley?

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. It is previous for the hon. Gentleman to select candidates for seats that have not yet been established.

Mr. Home Robertson: It would be a good thing if there were more female Members of the European Parliament for Scotland. As an old friend of Councillor Foulkes, I must say that that is a most commendable suggestion.

Mr. Wallace: What about Stirling?

6.30 pm

Mr. Home Robertson: The hon. Gentleman mentions Stirling as another likely fiefdom or Tory safe haven. Stirling may be good enough for a single-tier, all-purpose local authority that would run the colleges, schools, social work departments, transport and everything else with a population of only 81,000. Stirling may be good enough for that. The area was described by an editorial in *The Scotsman*—who am I to differ from that newspaper?—as a safe haven for the Tories. Perhaps Mrs. Forsyth would be a likely candidate there.

The real shocker is one that I feel strongly about. It spoiled my porridge at breakfast last Friday. I read on the front page of *The Scotsman* that a new local authority was to be proposed in the House, either tomorrow or the next day, called Berwickshire and East Lothian. But it will not be Berwickshire and East Lothian, as it includes only a piece of East Lothian. The Government want to chop it up and add it to part of the Borders, because somebody thinks that that might be a Tory safe haven too. The population of such a local authority area would be 76,000—barely enough for a parliamentary constituency.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman is worried about what the Government could create as a European constituency. Does he feel that that is what the Boundary Commission will propose on Friday for a parliamentary constituency? If the Boundary Commission, which is politically neutral by all accounts, can do something like that, what does the hon. Gentleman think a committee of placemen set up by the Secretary of State will do to European seats?

Mr. Home Robertson: My lips are sealed on any speculation about what the Parliamentary Boundary Commission may be about to propose. It would be improper to say anything about that before it makes its announcement on Thursday.

We know what information *The Scotsman* has obtained about what the Government may propose for local authorities. They may hope for Tory safe havens, including the dotty little conglomeration of part of the Borders and part of East Lothian which is joined by the Dunglass corridor over a bridge which just about ties it all together.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman will have to show more ingenuity if he is to convince me that his remarks are relevant to the amendment.

Mr. Home Robertson: Do not worry, Dame Janet—I am about to conclude. This is the final one on my list, and it is the craziest. If that area is good enough to be an all-purpose, single-tier local authority—I do not know how on earth it could operate a full range of local services with such a small population and given the moronic geography of such an artificial local authority—perhaps the Government will propose it as a Euro-constituency?

I do not trust the Government. The hon. Member for Moray proposes the excellent idea that we can get an extra Member of the European Parliament to represent Scottish interests, even if we cannot pinch one from Northampton. But does she trust the Government not to mess around with the process——

Mr. Wallace: To gerrymander.

Mr. Home Robertson: I was not going to use that word. It never entered my head that the Conservatives would try such a thing.

Mrs. Ewing: This is a matter for the people of Scotland and their representatives. If all hon. Members who believe that there should be a Scottish Parliament were to take

[Mrs. Ewing]

destiny into their hands, the House would not be debating an increase in the number of Euro-seats in Scotland from eight to nine. Scotland would have 16 seats.

Part of the responsibility for this situation lies on the hon. Gentleman's shoulders, because he believes in the retention of the Union. I believe in the establishment of an independent Scotland that would put us on an equal basis with Denmark and other countries within the EC.

Mr. Home Robertson: I can see that I may run into difficulties with you in answering that question, Dame Janet. I believe passionately in Scottish home rule within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Wallace: Does not the hon. Member mean home rule?

Mr. Home Robertson: No, not home rule. I believe in home rule for Scotland within the United Kingdom and within the EC. Those are serious matters.

The trouble is that, during the past 15 years of grossly cynical administration by the minority administration in the Scottish office, the credibility of the machinery of government and the democratic process has been undermined again and again. We cannot trust the Government to do things in a fair, even-handed way. So in a sense, the hon. Lady may be right—we may have to take hold of our destiny. But how do we do it under the circumstances?

Mrs. Ewing: Recall the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Home Robertson: That may be one way. It is important that we should get extra representation for Scotland, and that it should be done fairly, and the sooner the better.

Mr. Maclennan: When the EC Council of Ministers met in Edinburgh on 11 and 12 December 1992, it would have been far from the thoughts of the Council that, in recommending the enlargement of the European Parliament, the one part of the United Kingdom that would not benefit from the decision would be Scotland —the country where it was meeting.

The EC Heads of Government, in reaching the decision to enlarge the European Parliament, properly took the view that those matters should be entrusted to the constitutional processes of the member countries, on the understanding that the processes would operate fairly and democratically, and in a proper constitutional manner.

It is set down in their decision, which it is the purpose of the Bill to enact, that the measure is recommended to member states for adoption in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements. It may well be asked, in connection with the group of amendments that we are considering, what the proper constitutional requirements are.

The phrase means little more than this. If it is necessary for Britain to proceed by way of Acts of Parliament to give effect to the decision, that is how we should proceed. As Members of Parliament, we are entitled to ask ourselves whether the proposals contained within the legislative provision are proper and reflect the consensus which prevails in the country about the constitution.

The basis of the Government's argument about the distribution of the six seats is too exclusively related to population. In all the member states of the EC, population did not count a great deal in determining how seats should be divided out.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman is a skilful barrister at law. Will he advise me whether it would be possible for a European seat to straddle Scotland and England? Does he think that that might have been one way of creating a rather more equitable distribution of seats?

Mr. Maclennan: I have no doubt that that matter would not be of interest to the Heads of EC Governments. If it were proper within our domestic law to make such a provision, it would be in order in terms of the decision that we are seeking to implement. It is possible within the EC. On the basis of previous Acts that established European parliamentary representation, it would not be possible within the United Kingdom.

It would be constitutionally possible to introduce an Act so to provide, but as we are building in the Bill on previous Acts which provided for the establishment of separate boundary commissions for the constituent nations of the United Kingdom, it would not be in accordance with precedent. But that is perfectly possible, just as it was possible in defiance of all constitutional convention not to transfer but to wind up entirely the government of London.

It would be possible to do almost anything under the terms of our unwritten constitution if Parliament were so inclined, which is a major reason why I think that the time has long since passed when we should have a written constitution setting out the precise powers, and limits to the powers, of the legislature and the Executive.

It is perfectly plain that the distribution of parliamentary seats between the member countries of the EC population was not a factor to which a great deal of weight was given in Edinburgh when the decision was arrived at. It is clear that there is great disparity of representation between Luxembourg and Germany. Luxembourg with its six seats is over-represented in population terms. Wholly different considerations from population gave rise to the decision to equate the treatment of France and the United Kingdom.

Therefore, it is neither necessary nor desirable to follow the argument in respect of Scotland that population should be the determinant, certainly for European purposes. The population argument has been well deployed by my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), so I do not wish to detain the House on that point. I do, however, wish to raise other issues.

The powers of the European Parliament, even as they are at present—a point touched on by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman)—are of increasing significance to the economic life of the nation, and touch in an immediate way upon the effectiveness of Government. Not a day passes in the discharge of my parliamentary duties when I am not conscious of the extent to which decisions of the Council of Ministers, which may or may not have been considered by the European Parliament but usually have been, affect the prosperity of my constituents.

I apologise for addressing my remarks to the interests that I represent in the House, but I do so briefly to illustrate the point. The fisheries regime, which is so critical, ultimately depends on decisions of the EC and the

attitudes of the European Parliament. The agriculture regime, which is critical to the prosperity of my agricultural and rural areas, depends so much upon the effectiveness of the European Parliament.

There are also the prospects of the oil industry, for preserving the environment, and therefore the attraction of tourism. Scarcely an issue that has to be dealt with in one's daily mailbag does not have a European dimension, and that is increasingly so.

Dr. Godman: I am listening closely to the hon. Gentleman's argument. Does he agree that the European Parliament has the power to constrain to some extent the decision making of that unelected body, the European Commission?

Mr. Maclennan: I think that the hon. Gentleman is entirely right, as so often with what he has to say on these matters.

Because there is a public and growing perception of the fact that the European Parliament impinges on the lives of people, it is beyond comprehension in Scotland—I put it in that emotive way—that, at a time when it is intended to increase the representation of the United Kingdom, Scotland will not share in that development. That argument cannot be countered by arguments about population when population so clearly has not played a part in the basic decision to increase the representation of this country.

6.45 pm

In earlier debates on the Bill, the Minister touched on some of the issues contained in the amendments. I put it to him that to focus so narrowly on the population question is entirely to miss the point. Others have spoken of the geographical difficulties of representing Scotland, particularly its highlands and islands. I am as aware of that as anyone in the House, as, even under the present dispensation, I represent some 2,800 square miles of Scotland, which is a substantial area.

If the Boundary Commission has its way, it is about to be enlarged by the addition of a further 300 or 400 square miles. Therefore, I know about that argument, but it is not one to which I would attach the greatest weight.

I wish to reply to what the Minister said on that in his winding-up speech on Second Reading. In advocating an additional Member, it is not our intention to seek to solve the Scottish geographical conundrum. I do not think that that is open to us. If we are to adopt the system of election that I and my right hon. and hon. Friends advocate, the geographical base of representation will be much wider than that at present. It would be wider even than that of Mrs. Winifred Ewing, Member of the European Parliament for the Highlands and Islands.

We do not seek to make the task of travelling around Scotland easier by adding to Scotland's representation, but rather to address the sense of outrage that is felt by those in Scotland who see a decision taken by Her Majesty's Government in Edinburgh to enlarge the membership of the European Parliament but to exclude Scotland from that process.

Scotland has at least as varied an economy and social problems as the United Kingdom as a whole. Many matters there are distinct and unique. Its peripherality and its sparsity are unequalled in any part of the United Kingdom.

I say that not because of the need to cover the ground by the MEP, but because it creates its own distinctive problems. Those problems have been recognised in recent decisions by the Council of Ministers, in deciding what structural assistance should be available in the highlands and islands, and there alone, not in any part of England. That makes the case for a particular deal for Scotland justifiable in terms of the diversity and heterogeneity of the United Kingdom.

I profoundly hope that, as the debate has progressed, and as hon. Members from both sides have supported the amendments—there has been only one intervention against the amendments: from the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow)—the Government should accept the force of the argument. I do not propose to canvas all the arguments that have been mentioned by others in the debate, but will simply confine myself to my own point.

When we move to alter the shape of our democracy, it is extremely important that it should be done with cross-party consent. If the Government do not accept the amendments, they are flying in the face of the expressed consent of the House. That would be a highly undesirable development, and, for that reason, I hope that they will agree to the amendments tabled.

Mr. Eric Clarke: The argument advanced by many of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members is that we need more representatives in the EC and in the European Parliament if we are to democratise that institution. That is the desire of many people throughout Britain and the other countries represented. The role of the Commissioners and appointees must be diminished, and Scotland's voice should be heard.

What do we do when the new member nations join? Will more time be taken to debate and discuss specific items on the agenda because there will be more representatives from those new member countries? I see them being slower and more deliberate—rightly so, if they are to have a say in laying down laws.

The United Kingdom representatives should not just be members of the august body: representations should be heard from all parts of the United Kingdom, as they are from the länder in Germany, which lobby for their own interests. I am all for that representation, because I think that we are losing.

As an hon. Member who represents an area that qualifies for RECHAR money, I lay the blame at the feet of the Government. That money is not being taken up —not because of any lack of effort on the part of the European Parliament and, in particular, our own representative from Lothian, who has cross-party support in this, but because of the lack of additionality money from the Government, who have not honoured their so-called promises.

As we heard in a debate earlier in the week, there are many areas throughout the United Kingdom that will now qualify for the RECHAR fund because of mine closures. There have been many promises and hints that the mining communities will be helped, but if they get as much help as we and many of the other older mining areas have had, they will be toiling in many ways.

There is a need to speak up in the House, in the European Parliament and, yes, in the media, because there is a practical proposition to be made. Many other countries, such as Eire, seem to benefit from being EC

[Mr. Eric Clarke]

members in a more practical way than Scotland. I hope that, when some of the legislation is passed—I am harking back to the mining industry—we shall not have closures alone in the steel and coal industries. I hope that the coal industry in Scotland will be an industry if privatisation comes off, and that there will be EC help to retain it for ever more. As we all know, we have great assets in that part of the world.

There has been talk of boundary changes. Some of the things that have emerged—especially pertaining to the leak from *The Scotsman*—are reminiscent of the Vance-Owen agreement. We seem to have corridors not of Muslims but of Tories—being kept in an enclave to ensure that no one encroaches on their positions.

There are some boundary changes that we should like to be made: we should like to have Berwick-upon-Tweed back, for example. Berwick belongs to the Scottish nation and was stolen from us many years ago—*[Interruption.]* Yes, and perhaps some other places that I do not know. I would happily put in a claim right now if that would give the Scottish nation another representative or two.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Gentleman has referred to my constituency. I hope that he will recall that Berwick-upon-Tweed has changed hands between England and Scotland 15 times over several centuries, and that it would be somewhat disruptive if that were to continue.

I put it to him that the Boundary Commission's activities on both sides of the border at Berwick-upon-Tweed could give us considerable cause for anxiety, given that the same people who will be implementing the Bill appear—if the rumours are true—to be making the most extraordinary proposals about the very piece of Berwickshire with which Berwick has traditionally been associated over those centuries.

Mr. Clarke: I do not intend to declare war on the people of that area, for whom I have great affection—as I do for my Geordie friends in the coalfields further south.

This is a serious matter, which should not be left to the Government. It should not be left to any Ministry, and especially not to Dover house or St. Andrew's house. If the people of Scotland were asked, they will give the answer that they gave at the election; they need full representation, and they need it in Europe. I shall leave it at that, as I think that the geographical case has been made by my hon. Friends.

Mr. Allen: This has been a very good debate. Although the Opposition wholeheartedly welcome——

Mr. Wallace: On a point of order, Dame Janet. Can you confirm that we are in Committee, and that it is open to any hon. Member to speak twice if called by you?

The Second Deputy Chairman: I can confirm that that is so.

Mr. Allen: Although the Opposition wholeheartedly welcome the Minister's decision to grant one of the extra seats to Wales, the decision to exclude Scotland from the distribution is unacceptable to us. It shows the contempt in which the Conservative party holds those parts of the country in which they lack support.

The Government are effectively saying to 5·1 million people, "You don't vote for us, so we'll deny you adequate representation." The Home Secretary said on Second Reading just the other day that he is fighting for England. It is a shame that he cannot bring himself to fight for the other countries in the Union with as much force as he says he fights for England.

Like other hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, I readily accept that the average size of a Scottish Euro-constituency is marginally smaller than that of an English one. It is nevertheless greater than the average constituency in Wales will be if the proposals are implemented.

The Home Secretary has given no indication that he took the geographical size of the constituencies into account in his calculation, as he is entitled to do by law, under the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978. If constituency size were taken into consideration, it would be obvious that Scotland requires greater representation than it is currently given. The Conservatives are willing to push through a measure amounting to a relative lessening of Scotland's representation in Strasbourg, without even an independent look into the matter.

The Labour party firmly believes that the Scottish people should have one of the extra seats. In the Europe of the regions and nations, the very least that this Parliament should do is allocate to Scotland a fair share of the new seats to be distributed. An extra seat for Scotland, like the extra seat given to Wales, would mean far more in terms of increased representation than one more or less seat for England. With that in mind, the Opposition propose to divide the House in favour of the amendment.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on assuming so effectively for the time being the leadership of the Opposition—even if she let it slip that she was only a front for her dynamic research assistant.

The hon. Lady sharpened up the attack from the Opposition Benches, but I do not think that her essential argument that, to be an equal partner, Scotland needs more seats is very convincing. Partnership cannot, thank goodness, be defined by numbers in that way. If it was, it would presumably mean that a partnership could be equal only with equal representation—as the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) cogently observed, although I thought that after that remark his speech went sadly astray.

Partnership between the countries of the United Kingdom is real and of enormous value to each of them. However, it does not finally depend on giving any part artificially high representation in the European Parliament or, indeed, at Westminster where Scotland has long had enhanced representation.

In many ways, this debate is a reprise of the one on Second Reading. I make no complaint about that. I realise that Scottish Members would like an extra seat in Scotland and I understand why they and other hon. Members argue persistently that they should have one. However, I am as sure now as I was on Second Reading that an extra seat would not be justified and that the Government are right to give five of the extra seats to England and one to Wales. That is what a distribution based on electorate sizes—the fairest way of deciding the matter—produces.

7 pm

It is impossible to get average Euro-constituency sizes exactly the same in the different countries of the United Kingdom—there must be a rounding up or down. In each case, that has always been done in favour of the smaller country and never in favour of England. As a result of this Bill, the average English Euro-constituency will still be 4 per cent. larger than the average Scottish one.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister made a fair point, that it is difficult to average the whole thing out. Does he accept that, by allocating four seats to England, one to Wales and one to Scotland—that would be the consequence of this amendment—the averages for Scotland and Wales would be within 8,000 of each other? That is a remarkably close proximity, given the large size of the constituencies. It would approximate much more closely to the Minister's objective than to what is being proposed by the Government.

Mr. Lloyd: No. It would mean that two constituent countries of the United Kingdom would be further from the average than they would otherwise have been. The next best thing to 5:1 would be to give the six seats to England. However, that would mean that the average Welsh seat would have a larger electorate than the average English seat. We did not want to allow that, so we gave Wales the benefit of the statistics and it has the extra seat. That is justified for Wales, but not justified for Scotland on the same grounds.

I understand the argument for distributing the seats in a different way. This distribution keeps to the advice given by the Select Committee in 1978, adopted by the then Labour Government in the 1978 Act and expanded from the Dispatch Box by Brynmor John, who represented a Welsh seat, and others in the Labour Government. The Labour Government were right at that time. This is the fairest way of distributing the seats. I am sorry to see Labour Members and the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), resiling from the arrangements that not he but his colleagues supported when in office.

The hon. Member for Moray quoted Garrett Fitzgerald suggesting that, in the negotiations that took place in the Community before it was decided how many seats each EC country would have, the then Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan, secured 81 seats for the United Kingdom on the understanding that Scotland and Wales would have enhanced representation.

Obviously, I do not know what Lord Callaghan said in private discussions, but the outcome was that the largest countries in the EC—West Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom—all got 81 seats, providing overwhelming circumstantial evidence that the needs of Scotland did not secure United Kingdom-enhanced representation. I cannot tell whether Lord Callaghan tried and failed or did not try at all, but, clearly, no special significance was granted by our fellow members with regard to Scotland, Wales or any national entity, two of which have been referred to this afternoon by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace)—the Walloons and the Catalonians.

Clearly, seats are distributed between the sovereign countries of the Community in Europe with regard to their being separate single sovereign entities. The hon. Member for Moray and several other hon. Members argued that Scotland should have at least the same number of seats as Denmark, which has a similar population size. Undoubtedly, if Scotland were a member of the Community separate from England, Wales and Northern Ireland—as the hon. Lady would wish—it would have a similar number of seats.

I am sure—I refer to points made and queries launched in my direction by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan)—that Scotland would overall have less leverage in the EC than it does as part of the United Kingdom, which has two commissioners to Denmark's one and, effectively, much greater representation in the European Community. Above all, the United Kingdom has a much more powerful voice in the Council of Ministers than England, Wales or Scotland could ever have on their own.

When the interests of Scotland especially demand it, Scottish Ministers can and do go to the Council of Ministers with the weight of the entire United Kingdom behind them. I do not want to dwell on this point. It is part of the wider argument about the nature and benefit of the Union, which puts Scotland in a more powerful position in the Community. It would be alone, as is Denmark with its number of seats in the European Parliament.

Before I sit down, I shall revert to the speech of the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). He referred to the St. Andrew's speech in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is alleged to have promised to fight for more representation for Scotland in the European Parliament. On Second Reading, I said that I had not read that speech, but I have now. I realise that the hon. Gentleman could not have read it at that time and probably still has not done so, judging by his interventions today.

It is clear that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was talking not about the European Parliament but about the Committee of the Regions on which he is determined to make Scotland's voice heard, together with organisations such as Scottish Europa and the Scottish Trade International. I have a copy of the speech here. I will throw it across to the hon. Gentleman. He should sideline those areas in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State promised or undertook to produce an extra seat in the European Parliament because I would be interested to read it. If he wants me to give way to him, I will do so.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I have had the misfortune to re-read the speech several times. The Secretary of State did not, in that speech or his introduction to the stocktaking exercise, say that he would commit himself to reduced representation for Scotland. Does the Minister accept that that is what this Bill means?

Mr. Lloyd: My right hon. Friend clearly said that he intended to work with the eight members of the European Parliament representing Scottish constituencies, whether or not he agreed with them politically. That was the undertaking he gave, and the number was eight.

Mr. Clarke: Does the Minister take on board that the Secretary of State, in his introduction to the document on stocktaking—he has joined us in the past few minutes, having shown no interest whatever in debate over several days—talked about increased representation in Europe? Where is that increased representation? If the Minister cannot assure us—as we are still in Committee and as the

[Mr. Clarke]

Secretary of State can still catch Dame Janet's eye—why does not the Secretary of State have the guts to get up and assure us, instead of hiding behind the junior Minister?

Mr. Lloyd: As the hon. Gentleman will know if he re-reads the speech, my right hon. Friend was referring to the Committee of the Regions. The hon. Gentleman owes my right hon. Friend an apology, and I hope that he will give it before the end of this evening.

Mrs. Ewing: There is a rumour sweeping the House that the closure will be moved on this debate, and many hon. Members still wish to speak. I draw the attention of the Minister to the development of the idea of direct elections, especially the debates that took place in 1977 and 1978 when the current Foreign Secretary said that the allocation of seats would be on a purely mathematical basis. Is the Minister saying that the Government have not moved from that approach, and take no account of geography or the needs of smaller nations in the European Community?

Mr. Lloyd: Smaller nations have an enhanced representation in the European Parliament when they are sovereign, independent entities. Seats are divided between sovereign countries. The United Kingdom has been allocated 81 seats and they are divided, on the advice given in 1978 by the Select Committee, between the countries of the United Kingdom on the basis of arithmetic and the size of the respective electorates.

Mrs. Ewing: The Minister has clearly stated that, if Scotland were an independent, sovereign nation she would receive a different allocation of seats. Does he not accept the basic constitutional principle, however, that the people in Scotland are sovereign, not Parliament? The people of Scotland have clearly shown that they want additional representation within the European Parliament.

Mr. Lloyd: Every part of the United Kingdom would like extra representation in the European Parliament. I am sure that the hon. Lady heard me say that if Scotland were a separate member of the European Community it may well have enhanced representation. I doubted, however, whether it would have as much influence and leverage as it does now; indeed, I was quite sure that it would not. I then explained why.

Mr. Gallie: Does my hon. Friend agree that the place in which we need strength is the Council of Ministers? Does he also agree that that showed through when we won objective 1 status for the whole of the highlands?

Mr. Lloyd: That is a good example. We want to be strongly represented in all parts of the Community. Scotland is part of the United Kingdom and benefits from that.

Mr. Wallace: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lloyd: I should make some progress, because I sense that the Committee would like me to conclude. *[Interruption.]*

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber. Hon. Members who want to engage in conversation should leave the Chamber.

Mr. Lloyd: Hon. Members have also put the practical argument that an extra seat could help the highlands and islands problem.

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

Mr. Lloyd: I will not give way, because the Committee wants the debate to come to a conclusion. [HON. MEMBERS: "No, it does not."] The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland had plenty of opportunity to speak. In fact, he spoke for longer than I will have done. If he will excuse me, I will conclude my remarks.

Mr. Wallace: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lloyd: I have said no.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister is frit.

Mr. Lloyd: That is not so.

The current Boundary Commission rules require that constituencies should be produced with electorates of, as near as possible, the same size. Departures can be made from the electoral quota, however, to take into account special factors such as geography. The Boundary Commission for Scotland did just that when it created the seat of Highlands and Islands, which has a much smaller electorate than the Scottish average.

I doubt whether any Boundary Commission would feel justified in going much further from the average than that. The odds must be that any new seat for Scotland would, therefore, reduce the average electorate size of the remaining more populous constituencies rather than radically reduce the geographical spread of the highlands and islands. I believe that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland, at least, is convinced of that.

As I said on Second Reading, the arrangements for the distribution of seats between the particular countries of the United Kingdom is fair to all of them—to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. Anything else, however, would be unfair to England.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The Bill is an extremely unsatisfactory way in which to address such a serious issue. I wonder how many other member states of the Community will decide the allocation of parliamentary constituencies on the basis of a vote in one Chamber of their Parliament. How many of them have some independent means of determining how that allocation should take place?

Mr. McAllion: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that this is such a serious issue, why was he not present in the Chamber for the first three hours of the debate? Why has he just turned up?

Mr. Bruce: I must say—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer".] Some Opposition Members now present were not here for the entire debate, either.

7.15 pm

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I would prefer the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) to continue his speech. If we are to have such harsh rules, I shall bear them in mind in the future.

Mr. Bruce: I should remind the Committee that I spoke on the Bill's money resolution, which was debated last week.

I am surprised that the Government decided not to accept the amendment. If they had, the debate need not have continued. I find it deeply offensive, as I said when I spoke on the money resolution, that the first line on the first page of the Bill mentions the city of Edinburgh.

The Prime Minister claimed that he was bringing the European process to Scotland and ensuring that Scotland is fully involved in that process. The fact that he has now introduced a Bill in which Scotland alone is denied a share of the increased representation at the European Parliament is deeply offensive. The Prime Minister's decision is extremely damaging to him and it is extremely harsh to Scotland. The Bill is not the way in which such matters should be decided.

Hon. Members have also referred to the current representation for Scotland, with which I should have thought the Government were deeply unhappy. There are eight MEPs from Scottish constituencies; seven of them are Labour Members, the other is an SNP Member. I am not criticising those MEPs individually—they were elected, and that is fine—but they do not give a true representation of the cross-section of political opinion in Scotland. It is a profound irony that the Government cannot even get one Conservative MEP elected. I should have thought that the Government would welcome the opportunity for a ninth MEP from Scotland, because that might give them an itsy-bitsy chance of returning a Conservative representative from Scotland to the European Parliament.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): That depends on how the Government gerrymander the boundaries.

Mr. Bruce: That is true.

It is a real disgrace—that is too mild a word—that we are about to have European parliamentary seat boundary reviews, in the middle of parliamentary boundary reviews, while the Government are making up their own local boundaries as they go along. There is no correlation between the three.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) asked my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) whether it was possible to have a seat that straddled the border. Presumably he believes that that would achieve a greater parity of numbers. Many of us would have considerable difficulties with the practical consequences of such a decision and would not wish to be the Member for that constituency and balance its conflicting interests. I suppose that it would, however, reunite the county of Berwickshire, although I know that two of my colleagues have differing views on the merits of that argument. If there was a will and pure numbers was the problem, the matter could be resolved. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley has a fair point.

Mr. Beith: If the commissioners appointed are not given an additional seat in Scotland to play with, does that mean that they will be unable to do what they are now doing in my hon. Friend's part of Scotland? In that region they are crossing all kinds of community and traditional boundaries to produce the most extraordinary configuration of seats. That option will not be open to the commissioners in Scotland under the Bill.

Mr. Bruce: My hon. Friend is right. His intervention and that of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley show that the Government's claim that this is simply a matter of numbers and an attempt to achieve a degree of parity is not the substantive argument.

Mr. Wallace: My hon. Friend has referred to cross-border seats for the eastern side of the border. Does he accept that there might be a case for having what could be described as a Solway seat, comprising Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, Dumfries, Carlisle, Penrith and The Border, Copeland and Workington? That area is a communal one, it is home to Border Television and it has a sense of community. It also includes the seat of the Secretary of State for Scotland, so he could kill two birds with one stone. The right hon. Gentleman might end up with a more compact seat for his MEP to represent and at least give Scotland half of what is required, if not the whole.

Mr. Bruce: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. It raises questions about the Solway firth and the fact that there would be two different local authorities and two different methods of discharging sewage by two different forms of ownership within the same constituency.

The Government's argument that it was impossible to provide justice for Scotland does not stand up. A numbers argument is not valid because, as the Government have acknowledged, that is not the paramount objective. On local government boundaries, the Government propose that the whole of the Highland region should be a unitary local government authority.

That is an absurd proposition. It may be all right in terms of numbers, but it makes no sense in terms of geographical community links and denies a proper community identity. It boils down to the fact that the only way in which a community can be represented as a single, all-purpose authority is for it to be Conservative-controlled or, better still, a dead heat with the Labour party, so that the gerrymandering will tilt the balance and secure control. That is not how to determine fair and democratic representation.

If the Government regard such comments purely as party political objection, they should think seriously about the implications of their actions. They have already abolished a tier of local government in London and the metropolitan counties and are fixing local government boundaries in Scotland to meet their own needs. They are determining the allocation of parliamentary seats for the European Parliament on the basis that it is controlled by a political chamber—Westminster—rather than an independent constitutional process.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland said, it is high time that we fundamentally reviewed our constitutional procedures and processes and how we do things in this country. Our constitution is such that a law passed by this Parliament can supersede a previous law. There is no external reference and no opportunity for second judgment or for effective judicial review of primary legislation.

Members such as the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), who spoke earlier and opposes the whole idea of the European Community, want to fight for the sovereignty of Parliament. Many of us regard the sovereignty of Parliament not as a democratic advantage but rather as a democratic abuse. A party that can take

[Mr. Bruce]

control of this Chamber on a minority vote can not only impose its policies for the duration of a Parliament but can fix the mechanism of the constitution to preserve its power base against external challenges.

That serious weakness of our political system is, ultimately, turning it into a decadent, corrupt and disintegrating system, which is becoming increasingly out of touch with the people, who cannot understand why they have a Government whom most of them did not vote for and decisions——

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman is placing a number of constitutional issues on this group of amendments. I do not think that it will bear the weight.

Mr. Bruce: I willingly accept your guidance, Dame Janet. The simple point is that we should have an independent mechanism for determining how people are elected to any institutions, not only the United Kingdom Parliament but the European Parliament. I object to the lack of independence of that procedure, which is why we have been forced to table an amendment.

I should have preferred it if we had not had this debate and this amendment. The only reason why we have them is that there is no other theatre in which we can make that argument, achieve justice or get an independent assessment. There is no other theatre in which the decisions are not determined by the political bias of the controlling group. In a true democratic constitution, the rights of minorities are safeguarded and the Administration's right to ride roughshod over minorities is limited. In the United Kingdom, that is not the case, and it is a damaging and weak feature of our system of Government.

The amendment simply seeks to ensure that the Government recognise that the Prime Minister took the European presidency to Edinburgh as a post-election symbol of the enhanced role that Scotland would play as part of the United Kingdom within the European Community. Nobody could have believed that the upshot of that would be the obscenity—from a Scottish point of view—of a Bill enshrined on the basis of an agreement signed in Edinburgh, which denies the citizens of the country of which Edinburgh is the capital a share in an increased allocation of representation.

The Secretary of State for Scotland should feel utterly ashamed that he has been unable to secure the follow-through which the Prime Minister promised in Edinburgh. The Scottish people have reason to question the Prime Minister because, a year after the general election, he came to Scotland and said that he stood by the United Kingdom. He said that Scotland had voted for the Union and that it was his mission as Prime Minister to ensure that Scotland played its full part within the Union. How can the Bill be encapsulated as Scotland playing its full part in the United Kingdom?

Scotland is finding that its influence within Europe is being deliberately diluted as a direct consequence of that action of the Prime Minister. His promises are worthless, as are those of the Secretary of State. Scotland will continue to be sold short. The Government talk about the Union, but use it as a bullying tactic to ensure that the aspirations of the Scottish people are frustrated. We insist that the Government think again and recognise that the Scottish people deserve better.

Mrs. Ewing: I welcome the opportunity to respond to the debate—*[Interruption.]* Although it may be disappointing to those standing beyond the Bar of the House to realise that the debate will continue for some time, this is an important issue and I suggest that they remain silent to hear the necessary arguments.

The Minister of State was rather ungracious to suggest that having a dynamic research officer should not be correctly recognised. All hon. Members are greatly indebted to their staff at constituency and parliamentary level for the work that they undertake on our behalf. If they correctly carry through our advice and instructions, that should be recognised. We could all do with a bit of humility in recognising our staff's work.

This fairly wide-ranging debate has lasted much longer than many people anticipated. It has been interesting to note the consensus that has emerged, not only among the Opposition but among Conservative Members, who have shown their belief that Scotland should have additional representation within the European Parliament. Members may disagree on points of detail, but, on the basic principle that Scotland should have an additional seat in the European parliament, the consensus is of fundamental importance.

The Minister of State failed to answer a question raised in the context of "Scotland in the Union". On page 22, section 5(9), the Secretary of State for Scotland said:

"the Government have taken steps to complement and add to that strong representation"—

he was talking about the European dimension—

"to ensure that this is a multi-pronged approach to promoting Scotland's interest in Europe".

The European Parliament must form a fundamental part of that approach, because it is an institution which will develop and accrue unto itself additional powers that affect all our lives.

The Secretary of State added:

"As Europe continues to develop, the Government will keep under review Scotland's profile in Europe to ensure it matches Scotland's needs".

Nevertheless, in one of the pieces of legislation that have emerged from the Edinburgh summit we find that Scotland's position is not enhanced; nor are her needs being matched.

Not only should the Minister read the book by Garret Fitzgerald, which makes interesting reading about the development of direct elections in the European Community, but he should look back to the 1970s, when the principle of direct elections was first mooted in this House. The record of the Select Committee at that time shows that the Scottish National party, which had substantial representation in the House,. gave clear evidence to that Committee. A great deal of interest was generated in the House on the issue of direct elections. Members continue to suggest that some people still fear the idea of European development, whereas I suggest that the development of the Community is crucial to what we are discussing.

Our discussion of the amendment has dealt with the relationship of Scotland to this Parliament and to the Community. It is clear that the Community is changing. That development will have an impact on the lives of us all.

I welcome that development; as part of it, the relationship of Scotland as a nation to the Community as a whole is of critical importance.

The Parliament to which we have directly elected representation is of paramount importance—*[Interruption.]* My remarks may be regarded as boring by some of the noisier elements in the Committee. Some hon. Members may be wondering why I am speaking in this manner. I assure them that there are strong arguments for the national identities of our communities in the EC to be continued. Otherwise, we might as well talk about having a seat for the south-west Pyrenees or north-west Germany. There are strong identities in the nations of the EC. There should be a single Member representing an identified constituency where there is a strong and continuing relationship between that Member and his or her constituents.

We must also have the settlement and negotiation of national interests between the different countries to ensure that we find an appropriate formula for proceeding. Our purpose in tabling the amendment is to point out that an appropriate formula has not been found to represent the national interest of Scotland. In that connection, during the debates in the 1970s, the present Foreign Secretary —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. I am anxious to hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) is saying. Given the babble of hon. Members who have not participated in our debates, it is difficult to hear her. Perhaps those who are anxious to listen to what is being said may be allowed to do so in peace.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): The Chair will decide. I should have thought, as the hon. Gentleman is sitting right next to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), that he would have no difficulty in hearing her. I agree, however, that there is considerable noise in the Chamber. If hon. Members are unable to remain quiet, they must leave and conduct their conversations elsewhere.

Mrs. Ewing: Some hon. Members may find it difficult to understand a Scottish accent, or perhaps I should refer to it as a European accent belonging to one who speaks with a European voice. Hon. Members who do not want to listen to a Scottish or European voice should perhaps go elsewhere.

I was about to recall that the present Foreign Secretary said in 1978, when we were debating what was then the European Assembly Elections Bill:

"The Select Committee decided that the right approach was the mathematical approach".—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1978; Vol. 943, c. 786.]

I find the whole situation depressing. Today, in 1993, the Community having moved substantially forward since that time, there has been no change in the British Government's attitude. They may have changed colour, but they have not changed their attitude. They observe mathematical niceties rather than looking to the communautaire spirit which I strongly endorse.

In the debates that followed the publication of the Select Committee report, many interesting speeches were made by hon. Members, some of whom are still here; others have departed. For example, in the debate on 24 November 1977—we were still discussing the issue of direct elections—the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) said:

"if one is talking about the capacity of individual people to exert influence in the increasingly complex world in which we live, if they are able to elect persons directly to a European Parliament, I contend that this gives them another dimension of influence".—[*Official Report*, 24 November 1977; Vol. 939, c. 1804.]

That remains true today. We are talking about the dimension of influence, and Scotland's influence will not be enhanced by this legislation.

In that debate in November 1977, Mr. Fairgrieve—now Sir Russell Fairgrieve—who then represented Aberdeenshire, West and who is now chairman of the European Movement in Scotland and played host at various functions during the Edinburgh summit, said that we were trying to put Scotland somewhere halfway between Denmark and Yorkshire. We are not in that position. Scotland should have full recognition in the Community, with additional representation in the European Parliament, and that is what the amendment is about.

It is almost demeaning that I should have found it necessary to table this series of amendments—that on behalf of the people of Scotland, who are equal in number to the people of Denmark, I should have to beg for a single crumb from the rich man's table here at Westminster. We in Scotland should be equal and have 16 seats in the EC. That may be achieved only as a result of being an independent nation, when we would also have access to the Council of Ministers, have our place in the discussions and, as the Community develops, have a position as the host nation for Commission activities.

I am fed up thinking about the time in Edinburgh at the European summit when we were seen as the tartan waitress. Our tartan was used for the benefit of a Conservative Government who had only 11 out of 72 MPs in Scotland, with no Member of the European Parliament representing a Scottish constituency. Yet from Edinburgh emerges a Bill by which we are denied additional representation.

I do not want Scotland to continue in the role of a tartan waitress. I do not want Scotland to have to continue to eavesdrop on the counsels of the world. I want Scotland to be there, helping to influence the development of the European Community and the international community as a whole. If the Government have any respect for Scotland, they will at least grant us one additional seat in the European Parliament.

Mr. Greg Knight (Treasurer to Her Majesty's Household) *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 302, Noes 49.

Division No. 317] **[7.37 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*	Atkins, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan	Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Alexander, Richard	Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*	Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Amess, David	Baldry, Tony
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*	Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Ashby, David	Bates, Michael
Ashton, Joe	Batiste, Spencer
Aspinwall, Jack	Bellingham, Henry

Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Alton, David
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Chisholm, Malcolm
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Davidson, Ian
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Harvey, Nick
Hood, Jimmy
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and Mr. Malcolm Bruce.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 255, Noes 306.

Division No. 318] **[7.50 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*

Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hepnell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones, and
Mr. Andrew Welsh.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*

Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Michael Brown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Maclennan: I want to speak——

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. I realise that the House is in Committee, but I seek your guidance on how to reverse that procedure so that the Home Secretary can make a statement on a certain matter. I was in court this afternoon when a young Irish man was set free by a magistrate and the——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman's point is nothing to do with this Committee. I cannot deal with it; it must be dealt with by the Chair when the Committee reverts to being the House.

Mr. Stott: Further to that point of order, Mr. Lofthouse.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I have ruled on the matter.

Mr. Maclennan: So far, clause 1 has been considered only in so far as it deals with the rather narrow question of whether an additional European Parliament seat should be allocated to Scotland. In fact, the clause goes a great deal further and wider than that. It is the core of the commitment to widen the United Kingdom's representation in the European Parliament, as set out in the decision "amending the Act concerning the election of representatives of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage annexed to the Council Decision 76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom of 20th September 1976."

The background to the decision is the view taken by the Community Heads of Government that it was proper to enlarge the European Parliament to give membership to the new Länder of east Germany which had adhered to west Germany and to the European Community. That was a welcome step. However, we must determine whether it is necessary to give effect to that decision of the Council of

Ministers through the manner proposed by the Government, whether clause 1 is necessary to give effect to that decision or whether it is a self-executing decision under the terms of the treaty of Rome and the European Community Acts.

I make no secret of the fact that I and my right hon. and hon. Friends feel that the way in which the Government propose to widen the representation is undemocratic because it will only extend the unfairness of the present representation in the European Parliament. It would not greatly disquiet us if the Bill were found to be so defective as to be unsuitable for implementation by the House.

The question is whether it would be appropriate as well as necessary to give effect to clause 1. It might be argued that if we vote against the clause, that could defeat the Government's intentions and make it impossible for this country to ratify the decision taken by the Community Heads of Government at the Edinburgh summit. That might be regarded as unfortunate, but we believe that the position is not entirely clear. The legal status of both decisions taken on 1 February, to which clause 1 would give effect, and of the so-called Act, as amended, which is annexed to the 1976 Council decision, is obscure. That makes it difficult to determine what would happen if the British Parliament declined to pass this implementing Bill.

The authority on the question who has been drawn to my attention is the author T. C. Hartley who, in his book "The Foundations of European Community Law", second edition, 1988, page 24, writes:

"The instrument providing for elections took an unusual form since all its substantive provisions are in an Act annexed to the Council decision. The legal nature of this Act is controversial. Does it take effect as an international agreement between the member states based on a draft recommended by the Council? Or does it take effect as a decision of the Council to which the member states have agreed?

Perhaps the best view is that article 138(3) of the European Community"—

he refers to the provisions of the European Coal and Steel Community and Euratom Acts—

"lay down a special procedure for amending these treaties which derogates from that in articles 236 EEC, 96 ECSC and 204 Euratom. If this view is correct, it takes effect as an Act of the member states, but forms part of the three treaties. The importance of this question is that the jurisdiction of the European Court to annul, interpret or enforce the Act depends on the Act's legal status."

I think that you will agree, Mr. Lofthouse, that that is far from a conclusive view as to the necessity of clause 1 for the implementation of the decision taken by the Heads of Government in Edinburgh. Certainly, it is true that, normally, if the Government commit themselves to a binding international agreement, the commitment stands, regardless of any subsequent inability, for domestic reasons, to implement it.

To take another example from a different European sphere, if the European Court of Human Rights finds that British law is incompatible with the European convention on human rights, to which the United Kingdom is committed in international law, the Government are obliged to take steps to change the law and to make it clear to Parliament that this is an overrriding commitment.

If Parliament decides to reject their advice, the Government are placed in a very difficult position, which most Governments would naturally seek to avoid. Normally, the situation is avoided because of the opportunity that Parliament is given, as the Government are giving us the present opportunity, to consider treaties and any necessary implementing legislation before the Government are finally bound by the act of ratification. It is, however, avoided in the case of European Community legislation because the primacy of this is established in United Kingdom law by the European Communities Act itself.

In the case of the European Parliament elections, therefore, the question arises: are the Government already bound by the agreement at Edinburgh and the subsequent decision by the Council of Ministers, or is the procedure set out in the decision whereby the provisions are to enter into force following receipt of the last notification akin to ratification?

The language of the decision which clause 1 purports to be importing is, I submit, quite unclear on this point. Council decisions in general are binding in their entirety. Article 189 EEC would seem to make that point clear beyond peradventure. This one is to enter into force on the day of publication—that is, 9 February. It also states clearly that the provisions "shall" be applied to the elections to the European Parliament in 1994. That is made clear in article 2 of the decision, which says that the provisions

"shall be applied for the first time in elections to the European Parliament to be held in 1994."

These questions may, therefore, fairly be asked. Is what we are doing necessary? Is it being done in vain? Is Parliament intervening in a manner that is simply not required by European Community law? Is it handling this matter in an inappropriate fashion?

On the other hand, the provisions—this is the curious contradiction in the decision—are merely "recommended" to member states

"for adoption in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements."

That comes at the end of the preamble, just before article 1.

In short, the reference to respective constitutional requirements seems to imply that this is really a ratification process akin to that in article 236 for amendments to the treaty of Rome. But the other language and legal form of the decision give some grounds for arguing that the Government are already bound to implement the provisions, and that if Parliament were to choose to reject amendment 1, that would not free the Government from their obligation.

8.15 pm

The method of implementation is not laid down; we are not required by the decision to proceed in the manner in which the Committee is proceeding. We are certainly not bound to implement the Government's policy in this matter, for it is clear that the adoption of the decision is to be in accordance with our respective constitutional requirements, not according to any European Community law. If the Government were faced with the rejection by Parliament of clause 1 of this Bill, they could conceivably seek an alternative method, depending on the reasons for rejection.

Nor is any firm deadline laid down for implementation. I put it to the Committee that, if we reject clause 1, it will still be perfectly possible for the Government to meet their obligations under the decision by bringing forward a system of election which does not depend upon a boundary commission procedure, but which gives effect to a system of election which is pursued in many other member countries of the European Community—a proportional system which relies upon the votes cast in the

[Mr. Maclennan]

existing European parliamentary constituencies. Therefore, a vote to defeat clause 1 would in no way defeat the objectives of the Government in seeking to give effect to the decision.

I therefore submit that it is an act of high responsibility to question whether the Committee should embark upon a legislative process to implement a system of election which runs entirely counter to the other commitment of this country to seek a common system for elections to the European Parliament, and which is not necessary.

I have taken a little time to deploy these legal arguments about the necessity of clause 1 to avoid any charge being made by the Government that, in advocating its rejection, we are acting irresponsibly.

Mr. Beith: I have been following my hon. Friend's deployment of his case, to which he brings his customary legal authority. Looking at it more from a layman's point of view, would I be right in assuming that there is at least an argument for saying that the authority that supports the position in the treaty of Rome requiring a common system is more compelling than the authorities that he cites for implementing the additional number of seats, which would be the basis on which the Government might press us to vote that clause 1 stand part?

Mr. Maclennan: I would certainly accept that argument. Indeed, I would go further and say that, in the light of the decision taken by the European Parliament in March this year to adopt the de Gucht proposals, and the fact that under the presidency of Belgium in the autumn this matter will undoubtedly be brought on to the agenda of the Council of Ministers, it is highly probable that member countries of the European Community will progress further down the road to a common system of election before the 1994 election. It would be acting very much within the spirit of EC law—and, I would argue, within the letter—if we were to reject the way of implementing the decision that the Government have recommended to us.

I referred briefly to the deadline laid down for implementation. The decision envisages implementation in time for the 1994 elections, but it does not specify any earlier date after which it would be difficult, or impossible, to proceed on the basis of the new allocation. I concede that that last point would add to the political difficulty if the Bill were rejected—when I say "the Bill" I am talking about clause 1 of the Bill, because that is the heart of the matter. Other member states would not know whether to proceed on the assumption that the United Kingdom would find the means of implementation, or to conclude that the agreement could not come into force in time for the elections and make their own arrangements on the basis of the present allocation.

It seems reasonably clear from the wording of the decision that, if we fail to make provision for the election of extra MEPs, and therefore fail to notify in accordance with the decision, the other member states would be prevented from taking up their own allocations and the whole agreement would be held up. However, this is not the only way in which our obligation to implement the decision can be fulfilled.

It is possible that, if we do not pass clause 1, that will be seen by other member countries of the European Community as putting a block in the way. That might be so interpreted by the Government that they felt unable to give effect to the decision. It is possible that other member states might try to bring us back to the negotiating table, seek an opt-out for Britain from the Government, or seek to take us to the European Court of Justice to clarify the legal position.

I referred earlier to Hartley. His view would seem to imply that the European Court of Justice might have the power to enforce the decision once notification had been given, but might be inhibited from doing so beforehand if it regarded the notification procedure as akin to ratification. There is another theoretical outcome: the Council of Ministers might recognise the difficulty of the United Kingdom's implementation by adopting a decision to amend the Act, leaving the United Kingdom allocation unchanged at 81 seats.

Mr. Beith: My hon. Friend is worrying me a little, or at least Hartley is. Does he conclude from Hartley that, in any challenge in the European Court, it is likely that the provisions of clause 1 would appeal to the Court more strongly than the provision of the treaty of Rome which requires us to have a common electoral system? I would find that a worrying conclusion for the court to draw.

Mr. Maclennan: I do not think that that is the conclusion to be drawn from Hartley. I think that the court would be more likely to conclude that the matter should be governed by Community law rather than by the domestic law of this country.

If the outcome of this temporary impasse was that the Council of Ministers thought it appropriate to ask us to adopt a new decision, leaving the United Kingdom representation allocation unchanged, that would require the consent of Her Majesty's Government. I have no doubt that Her Majesty's Government would be reluctant to accept an allocation of seats lower than that of France and Italy. It would be a temporary way out of the impasse for the Community because we would not be holding up the Community's development, but simply inflicting a wound on ourselves. It would be an unnecessary wound, as it would be open for us to proceed very speedily in a different way.

Clause 1 is unnecessary to fulfil our obligations: that is really the core of my argument. It is not necessary because a wholly different way of proceeding is available to the Government: it implements the purposes of the Bill as set out in its long title. All that the Bill seeks to do is to

"give effect to a Decision of the Council of the European Communities . . . of 1st February 1993 having the effect of increasing the number of United Kingdom representatives to be elected to the European Parliament; and for connected purposes."

Nothing in that long title requires us to go down the route that the Government have chosen to give effect to the decision. The preferable route is one that has been adopted in all the other 11 countries of the European Community. It is a system of election that does not depend on the work of boundary commissions or allocation of seats along the lines proposed in the Bill. It would be necessary to insert a reference in the European Communities Act 1972—either by Order in Council or by primary legislation—but it would no longer be necessary to amend the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 as the Bill proposes.

There is a perfectly straightforward way of proceeding, which, to my mind, is infinitely preferable. It is more

democratic, and tends to support the obligation of this country under European Community law to adopt a common system of election, reinforced by the European Parliament as recently as March.

I submit that the House should strike out clause 1 of the Bill and proceed in a wholly new way to give effect to the decisions made at Edinburgh. If it does, it will meet with total understanding from our European Community partners, and widespread support from the vast majority of people in this country who recognise that the system that the Bill seeks to perpetuate in clause 1 is unfair and unrepresentative, distorting our representation and that of other countries' political parties in the European Parliament. It is damaging to the representativeness of Parliament, and is a step back from the developments that we want. I suggest that the clause should not stand part of the Bill.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who has spoken with courtesy and scholarship on what is undoubtedly a very important point. He was technical in its presentation because, as he rightly observed, it has much wider ramifications and I am sure that the Committee will be interested in the ministerial reply.

The hon. Gentleman's approach had something of the relentless charm of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) and I hope that unofficial negotiations can be undertaken to conscript him into that wider audience of men of good will on this topic. However, I am not a mascot to the hon. Gentleman's organ grinder, so my contribution will be brief and wholly different. My intention is simply to place on record the fact that the clause increases the membership of the European Parliament, and the United Kingdom component of it, so that the total membership will stand at 567.

8.30 pm

Unlike the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), I am happy to support the clause, but I should like to leave, just as a trace in the sand, a question mark over the assumption that we should always be increasing the membership of the European Parliament and of the Commission. I shall not say that such things are done thoughtlessly, but the rhetoric that accompanies them—phrases such as "increasing our influence"—implies that the additional Members in a larger Parliament will give us a more significant and indentifiable national interest than would otherwise be the case.

In the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone), who is well versed in North American affairs, I observe that I do not consider that Congress loses any of its effectiveness by being a smaller entity than many European national Parliaments and smaller than the Parliament at Strasbourg. I say that as no more than a passing observation to my hon. Friend, but it is not an idle passing observation.

The enlargement of the Community is in prospect and that will constantly call into question what size the Parliament should be. It seems to me that, unless we have a much clearer idea of what its finite functions will be and how they will be conducted, we shall be dribbling along accepting increases in membership because we can think of no more suitable way of conducting our affairs than to assume that more means better. I do not say that more means worse, but I say that the idea of more has to be considered rather more objectively than has been the case hitherto.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Of course it is necessary to give effect in domestic law to the Council's decision of 1 February, but I realise why the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland raised that issue on clause stand part. I entirely sympathise with him and I hope that he will not think me satirical when I say that that was his way of bringing up the subject of the absence of proportional representation in the system. His failure to bring his amendments into order meant that he had to raise the issue in that roundabout way.

The Council's decisions could not be put into effect, and we could not increase the number of seats, without changing the 1978 Act that governs our representation. The clause and the Bill as a whole demonstrate how that should be done, in terms of distributing the extra seats between the four countries that make up the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland was teetering on the edge—indeed, I think that he teetered over it—of suggesting that it would be possible to drop the clause from the Bill and to meet the Council's requirement that all the countries in the Community should have adopted the appropriate number of additional seats that they had been awarded, without any of them being prevented from being able to fill those seats at the 1994 election.

However, it is clear from the latter part of the Council's decision—I believe that the hon. Gentleman has a copy of it with him—that, if we do not include the clause, we shall not be able to take up the six extra seats, and nor will any of the other countries in Europe be able to take up theirs, unless we produce other legislation in double quick time. No doubt the hon. Gentleman would prefer us to produce other legislation that would award the seats differently within the United Kingdom and introduce a different method of voting. It is for the House to decide which it should choose.

Mr. Beith: Why does the Minister say that that would have to be done in what he calls double quick time, given that such legislation would not require the same apparatus as is required by the Bill in its present form?

Mr. Lloyd: I shall risk straying out of order if I talk about a form of voting different from that provided for in the Bill, but if we produced another Bill, introducing proportional representation, no doubt even more hon. Members would complain about the type of election being adopted. Such a measure would be no easier to get through the House than the present Bill, and there would have to be an enormous amount of consultation beforehand on the appropriate form of proportional representation.

There is no easy alternative to the method that we have chosen. It is in line with our traditions and—I regret to say—it will not pre-empt the argument on future elections, but we shall have those arguments after the Council of Ministers has considered the De Gucht report. The Council has not yet done that, so there is no obligation upon us to interpolate the report into our system of electing European Members of Parliament.

Mr. Maclennan: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and for his candid admission, with which I do not

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disagree, that there could be another way of doing things. It appears that the only argument is about time, yet he will recall that, when the House legislated in such a manner before, it agreed to introduce a form of proportional representation for Northern Ireland. Things were done with at least as much celerity in 1978 as would be required now, and it has to be said that it was rather more complicated to set up such an arrangement for the first time. Even under the timetable now proposed, the process is unlikely to be concluded before the end of the year at the earliest. It would be a remarkable consultation on the system of voting which could not be concluded in a much shorter period than that.

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman refers to the previous time that we dealt with such an arrangement, when we had at least twice as long to make the arrangements that we have now. Of course he is right to say that we could have adopted a different system of distributing the seats and of organising the elections. The form that the Government have chosen to present to the House in the Bill is the form that I think is most likely to command the most widespread support.

The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends would not agree with me. They believe in a different system, but on that matter they are in a minority.

Mr. Rathbone: In answer to an earlier intervention, my hon. Friend the Minister said that the House, or perhaps the Committee, would decide what the method of election would be. May I ask him to clarify at what point in the consideration of the Bill that decision will take place? Is it taking place at this very moment, or will it take place on clause 2, or on the schedule?

Mr. Lloyd: I did not mean that the decision would be taken on the Bill. When I said that the House would return to the issue, I did not intend that to apply to the 1994 elections, but afterwards, when the Council had considered the De Gucht proposals, as it no doubt will. I am sure that the House will return to the subject, but not in the Bill, and not yet.

I shall refer briefly to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) said. He made a point that we shall have to bear in mind when we revisit such matters, especially when the Community expands. It is undoubtedly a characteristic of legislatures to accrete members. The House of Commons has done so over the years and it is inevitable that there should be pressures for legislatures to do so, especially with the Community assemblies, when new members are joining. However, as my right hon. Friend rightly said, in terms of cost, of management and of effectiveness, the question of how large legislatures—the European Assembly and, indeed, the House of Commons—should be, must be tackled at some point.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I wonder whether clause 1 should stand part of the Bill. That is not because I believe that proportional representation is the answer. I believe that proportional representation would be an undemocratic disaster. But I wonder whether we should enlarge what is in essence not a legislature but a consultative assembly. I speak with some experience, because for five years I was an elected member of that bickering body. I was grateful to be elected. The European Parliament is one of the best Government job creation schemes that has ever been devised for defeated Members of Parliament. So I do not quibble about the availability of seats when resting between general elections.

However, the fact that I put all that behind me and preferred to return to the United Kingdom Parliament is an indication of the great importance that I attach to the House of Commons and the low importance that I attach to the EC Assembly, which meets in Strasbourg and Brussels and has its offices in Luxembourg. It is worth bearing that in mind. Life in the EC is such that there is simply not the demand among the ordinary people for the extra MEPs proposed in clause 1.

The amount of correspondence that MEPs receive is but a tiny fraction of that received by Members of the United Kingdom Parliament, even though MEPs have constituencies of more than 500,000 people in Britain. Indeed, they are so large as to be completely amorphous. MEPs do not have any recognition among the vast majority of their constituents.

It is also worth noting that, in the Strasbourg Assembly, the United Kingdom is the only member state in which the MEPs have a constituency and some recognisable connection with the people who elected them. In that sense, the United Kingdom representatives are unique. The contempt with which representatives from other member states regard the quaint notion that United Kingdom representatives have some connection with a group of people in the country from which they come is telling.

All the other representatives are chosen by some form of proportional representation which involves the central bodies—the apparatchiks of the parties—choosing the representatives. There is no direct constituency involvement.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) argued that clause 1 should not stand part of the Bill, because he wanted a circuitous route to the introduction of proportional representation to be adopted. I am hotly opposed to that.

Mr. Beith: I intervene not so much on the issue of proportional representation as on the point about what the additional MEPs would do. Did not the hon. Gentleman find it odd when he was an MEP that the representation of the two British party groups was so distorted? On his point about the role of the United Kingdom MEPs, surely he recognises that there are two categories. There are those in England, Scotland and Wales, who, with the best will in the world, cannot be expected to identify with the electorate in their huge European constituencies in the same way as the hon. Gentleman does with the electorate in his smaller constituency. Then the three Northern Ireland MEPs are elected on a different system. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Northern Ireland Members are not representatives of the community there?

Mr. Cryer: For those who are elected by the first-past-the-post system, there is a much clearer and more recognisable relationship with the electorate. I include the people of Northern Ireland in that. The amorphous system of choosing people is one of award of favours by the political parties.

After the election, apparently there is a whole lot of new faces in the Assembly. That is brought about not by changes in the electoral decisions, but by the political party to which the Members belong simply switching them on the lists to which they were appointed to exclude them from the Assembly.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Beith *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. The preceding debates came to an end after my constituency had been mentioned. I sought to take part in that debate, but I was prevented from doing so by the moving of the closure motion. There have been only three or four speeches so far in this debate and I still have not been permitted on clause stand part to make the point about the part of the Bill that relates to my constituency and which was raised in the preceding debate.

I plead with you, Mr. Lofthouse, after all our experiences during the Maastricht debates, to recognise that it is only reasonable that hon. Members should have a fair opportunity to take part in the debate in Committee.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I take the view that there has been a wide-ranging debate on clause stand part. The matter has been reasonably covered during the debate.

Mr. Beith: Further to that point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. It would have been out of order in the preceding debate to discuss matters relating to England, which I could not have raised even if I had been allowed to make a short speech.

The First Deputy Chairman: I have explained my decision and that is where the matter stands.

The House having divided: Ayes 238, Noes 41.

Division No. 319] **[8.44 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*

Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Arbuthnot and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

NOES

Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Callaghan, Jim
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cryer, Bob
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gordon, Mildred
Harvey, Nick
Hood, Jimmy
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Lewis, Terry
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Primarolo, Dawn
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Trimble, David
Welsh, Andrew
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 245, Noes 31.

Division No. 320] **[8.55 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N. Norfolk)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Waller, Gary

Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Callaghan, Jim
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Bob
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Galloway, George
Gordon, Mildred
Harvey, Nick
Hood, Jimmy
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Lewis, Terry
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Mahon, Alice
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Don Foster and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Beith: I beg to move, That the Chairman do report Progress and ask leave to sit again. I wish to speak to that motion.

The First Deputy Chairman: I am not prepared to accept that motion at this point. We move on to——

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. I wonder whether you could draw my attention to the provision in "Erskine May" that restricts my right to move progress, so that I may be sure that you are not in some way confining that right to those on the Government Front Bench, who seem to be calling the shots.

The First Deputy Chairman: The Standing Order gives the occupant of the Chair discretion, and I am exercising that discretion. We now come to clause 2.

Clause 2

INITIAL DRAWING UP OF THE NEW CONSTITUENCIES

The First Deputy Chairman: The first amendment is amendment No. 15, with which it will be convenient to consider amendments Nos. 18 and 22.

Mr. Maclennan: Not moved.

The First Deputy Chairman: In that case, we come to amendment No. 19, with which it will be convenient to consider amendments Nos. 20 and 26 to 30.

Mr. Maclennan: Not moved.

The First Deputy Chairman: We now come to amendment No. 23.

The Treasurer to Her Majesty's Household (Mr. Greg Knight) *rose——*

Hon. Members: No!

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. Will the House settle down?

Several hon. Members *rose——*

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. *[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I want to hear the point of order.

Mr. Beith: I put it to you, Mr. Lofthouse, that, given that some 15 seconds ago you argued that you could not use your discretion to accept from me a motion to report progress, it would be unacceptable if you now accepted such a motion from the Government Front Bench.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. Before I deal with that, may I remind the House that amendment No. 23 is an Opposition amendment? Is it not moved?

Several hon. Members *rose——*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order.

Several hon. Members *rose——*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. Hold it. I am the Chairman running this show at present. Hold it.

Let me clarify this matter. Amendment No. 23 stood in the name of the official Opposition. Has it been moved?

Mr. Greg Knight: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. Before that amendment was reached, I sought to catch your eye.

I beg to move, That the Chairman do report Progress and ask leave to sit again.

The First Deputy Chairman: The question is, That the Chairman do report Progress and ask leave to sit again.

Several hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The motion is debatable. Hon. Members who wish to do so will have the opportunity to debate it.

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. Before we come to the motion——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The motion is that I report progress. As many of that opinion say "Aye"——

Mr. Beith *rose——*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. Does the right hon. Gentleman wish to speak on the motion?

Mr. Beith: I wish to oppose the motion, because I do not understand the situation. I moved a motion to report progress about a minute or so ago. At that point, you said that, in your discretion, you did not think that it was reasonable to take such a motion at that stage. A matter of seconds later, the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight), sought to move an identical motion, despite my having shown my concern by way of a point of order.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. I point out that, since the right hon. Gentleman moved the motion, a number of clauses have been passed, mainly on the nod.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. Is it not the case that you put the motion that we report progress? There was a voice vote and the Ayes shouted, "Aye" and the Noes shouted, "No."

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The Chair had not finished collecting the voices.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) seems to be unaware of what happened in those few seconds: no clauses were passed, no amendments were passed, no amendments were withdrawn and no amendments were moved. No amendments were before the Committee during that period.

That further underlines my point that, in the space of seconds after my moving a motion to report progress, nothing happened at all. Nothing happened to change the circumstances in which you, Mr. Lofthouse, should consider whether to accept a motion to report progress. Yet seconds later, your discretion was somehow influenced by the fact that—I am trying to find the right phrase. The circumstances in which you exercised your discretion seemed to you to have changed, even though procedurally nothing whatever had happened in the intervening period. It seems to us that what is at stake—you may be unaware of what has gone on—is a cosy deal between the Labour party and the Conservative party.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. Is it in order for the right hon. Gentleman to question your judgment, because that is exactly what he is doing? *[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The House will settle down. I am listening carefully to what the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is saying. I do not take it that he is questioning my authority at all.

Mr. Beith: I sought in some way to separate my questions of advice about the circumstances in which the Chairman of the Committee can and cannot accept a motion to report progress by dealing with them by way of a point of order.

I am now coming to my speech against the motion. In passing, it would be helpful if Back-Bench Members could be given a clearer understanding of what transpired in the seconds between my moving the motion and the Government Whip moving the motion which turned the situation—obviously the situation was turned, and I do not question that—from one in which it would have been wrong for you to accept the motion to one in which it was right for you to accept it. Obviously, you are well aware of the circumstances and you were being advised in some detail by the Clerk of the Committee as to what the change signified. Undoubtedly, he has given you extensive reasons for it.

It would be helpful for the future if at some stage, you could respond by giving us some guidance on that point. However, that is not the substance of what I want to say in opposition to the motion.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would agree that we should oppose the Government's motion to report progress. It is extremely fortunate that the Labour party did not move its amendment, because virtually no Opposition Members are here to speak to it.

Did the right hon. Member note the extraordinary exchange of desperate glances between those on the two Front Benches as they panicked and started to realise that their cosy arrangement was starting to go awry? Should our proceedings be dominated by such secret backstage deals between the Tory and Labour parties?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman is right. I, too, saw those exchange of glances. The hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) looked distinctly concerned about what was going on. You know nothing of this, Mr. Lofthouse. I am bringing to your attention matters with which you do not concern yourself.

9.15 pm

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The right hon. Gentleman can be assured that I know nothing of any deals.

Mr. Beith: I am seeking to underline that point. All the more reason, Mr. Lofthouse, why the House should understand what has happened. The Government have offered us no reason for their decision to move a motion that they would have resisted had my attempt to move the same motion a few seconds earlier been accepted. What a place this is. I sought to move a motion and a minute later, the Government, who would have voted against my motion if it had been put to the vote, moved the exact same motion themselves. I know why they did that.

Mr. Wallace: I was just finishing my meal when I saw various details appear on the Annunciator. Can my right hon. Friend explain how the Chairman could refuse to accept his motion to report progress and, within one minute, accept from the Government the motion to report progress?

Mr. Beith: My hon. Friend——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I might be able to assist the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, the decision to accept a motion is a matter for the Chairman's discretion. Things altered somewhat between the moving of the motions. Two sets of amendments that were expected to be put were not moved. That is what changed between when the first and second motions to report progress were moved. The person in charge of the proceedings also has the right to move the motion, which he did. The other amendments were not moved, so I accepted that motion. I hope that that is helpful to the right hon. Gentleman and means that he will not have to speak for as long as he had anticipated.

Mr. Kirkwood: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. I am anxious to get this absolutely clear in my mind, because important precedents could be established concerning Committee Chairmen being under pressure from different parts of a Committee, at different stages of a Bill. It seems to me that you have just set a precedent, Mr. Lofthouse, because, after no time at all in terms of procedural progress made, you were prepared to accept a motion from the Government, when you were not willing to accept a motion——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I have already explained that.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. We must return to the motion before the Committee.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. Am I not owed an apology from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), because the point that I raised with him was precisely the one that you have given as your reason for granting the second request that the House should report progress? He told me that I did not know what was going on.

The First Deputy Chairman: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed to speak to the motion before the Committee.

Mr. Beith: You were helping my argument, Mr. Lofthouse, when you set out what you understood to be the circumstances that had changed, procedurally. I say that to help the hon. Member for Lancaster. Procedurally, nothing had happened. Nothing had been passed, nothing had been withdrawn.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Yes, it had.

Mr. Beith: Nothing had been withdrawn. Some amendments were not moved, and, therefore, they were of no procedural consequence to the affairs of the Committee. In that sense, nothing had happened.

Your explanation, Mr. Lofthouse, helps me to explain to the House why the Government moved the motion. They found that they could not honour their deal with the Labour party without putting a motion to move progress. The nature of the deal was confirmed by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), who said, "Well done" in a loud voice when the Government moved the motion.

The deal was that all amendments would be disposed of tonight, up to the amendment which you, Mr. Lofthouse, invited the Labour Front Bench to move. The basis of that deal was how nice it would be for the Labour party to move their amendment early in the afternoon rather than late at night. Such are the understandings between the Conservative and Labour parties that motions are made for personal convenience and the timing of amendments, which is why we are being asked to make no further progress on the Bill tonight.

You, Mr. Lofthouse, saw what happened. In exercising your role as Chairman with as much care as you could muster, you sought to remind Opposition Front-Bench Members that if they did not move their amendment quickly it would fall. The only thing that saved it from collapsing was the fact that the Government moved a motion to report progress. That is why I am so critical of the motion and it explains the difference in the attitude to the motion that I sought to put and that put by the Minister.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Will the right hon. Gentleman explain why the Liberal Democrats did not move their two groups of amendments?

Mr. Beith: Yes, there are two reasons. First, we are not party to that deal. We see no reason why we should organise the affairs of the House to suit the Con-Lab pact that runs this place. To fit in with their deal, they wanted us to speak on those amendments to ensure that the Committee would not start debating Labour's amendment when you, Mr. Lofthouse, invited the Labour Front Bench to move it. That was contrary to the plan agreed by the two parties.

Mr. Riddick: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: No, I am answering the hon. Gentleman's question.

When we did not move our amendment, Conservative and Labour Members were at sixes and sevens and did not know what to do.

I now come to the crucial point. If you, Mr. Lofthouse, had accepted my motion to report progress and we had debated and then disposed of that motion, you might have had difficulty in inviting the Committee to accept another identical motion a few moments later, reversing the effect of the decision that you had already taken. That would not

I see that the Government Whip is fidgeting on the corner of his seat again. Perhaps he should take the tablets so often recommended by his right hon. Friends. He clearly wants to move a closure motion before I have even started my speech, most of which has been taken up dealing with interventions and points of order raised by Conservative Members. He has already stopped me speaking in the first debate this evening after someone said that my constituency should be included in the amendments to clause 1 because, in his view, it formed part of Scotland. He then prevented me from dealing with that argument in the debate on clause stand part.

A point that I wished to make on clause stand part concerned an issue on which I wanted to seek wider consultation. There was a case for saying that an understanding could have been reached enabling a seat to be created on both sides of the border around Berwick. However, that would have required an amendment in another place, so I could not develop that argument. I thought that it would be appropriate at that stage to seek leave to report progress to enable me to consult on the matter.

However, I then discovered that behind all that was a deal to cover the whole matter up. It is a mini-deal within a maxi-deal. The maxi-deal is that Labour delivers the Bill for the Government. You, Mr. Lofthouse, have much experience of Committee proceedings on the Maastricht treaty Bill and served many long hours in the Chair during those debates. Labour Members were constantly trying to explain during those proceedings how vigorously they were opposing the Government on motions such as this.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is an honourable man who always preaches the truth. Will he now admit that the truth about the shenanigans this evening has more to do with the vacant seat at Christchurch than with the additional seats in Europe? He may talk of deals, but I suggest that he casts his mind back only a couple of months to the time when, on eight occasions, the Liberals voted with the Government and got the Maastricht Bill through.

Mr. Beith: You would probably rule me out of order, Mr. Lofthouse, if I started talking about the Christchurch by-election.

Mr. Dixon: Answer my question.

Mr. Beith: I am doing that. Having asked me a question, the hon. Gentleman might have the decency to listen to the answer. In any event, he must have missed many of our proceedings——

Mr. Dixon: How about an answer?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman pressed me to give him a truthful answer. I am seeking to do that. Will he just listen while I answer him? He put it to me that this is all about the Christchurch by-election, yet, throughout the earlier proceedings, we were accused—and the Minister made the same accusation—of debating matters—*[Interruption.]* We are concerned that the Government are using an unfair system of election to the European Parliament.

We plead guilty to the accusation of wanting to change the system. But that is not what the motion is about. I am seeking to answer an intervention from as prominent a source as a Labour Front-Bench spokesman. It was a significant intervention, because I was at the time drawing a comparison between this motion and arguments against it in relation to this Bill and the way in which similar motions were dealt with when we debated the Maastricht Bill.

The hon. Member for Jarrow said that we had voted with the Government. Yes, but we were in favour of getting the Maastricht Bill through. It was our policy to do that, which is why we voted for it. We voted for motions which ensured that it would get through. Apart from the hon. Member for Jarrow and those sitting below the Gangway, Labour Members were in favour of that Bill getting through, so they said, even though they were not prepared to support, or vote for, any procedural motions. It is clear that the mask, the disguise, has slipped. The hon. Member for Jarrow is a closet opponent of Maastricht on the Labour Front Bench.

But that is not the issue before us tonight. The issue is whether the Government should be allowed to use a motion to report progress to stitch up a deal with the Labour party about the handling of the measure. Should hon. Members vote for the motion in the knowledge that that is so? I am explaining that it is so because I fear that there are hon. Members in many parts of the Committee who do not know what lies behind the motion.

Mr. Salmond: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the risk of creating two separate types of hon. Members? There are those who, when they have amendments down in their names, must turn up in time to move them. There are others, such as those on the Labour Front Bench, who, if they are not here to move their amendments, can depend on the occupants of the Government Front Bench to come to their rescue and get them out of difficulty.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman raises a significant point—*[Interruption.]* I gather that the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) is now ready to move the amendment. I hope that the Committee is aware of that because, Mr. Lofthouse, when you looked around for him some time ago, he was not prepared to move the amendment. The Government are inviting us to vote for the motion because they want to rescue the Labour party. They want to get Labour Members off the hook of their embarrassment.

Mr. Wallace: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. If the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) is now willing to move the amendment, do you think that the sitting should be suspended, as often happens with Committees, so that the two Front Benches can get together and concoct another deal?

Mr. Beith: I am having difficulty in making—*[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I am having difficulty hearing the right hon. Gentleman. Will hon. Members please give the right hon. Gentleman a fair hearing?

9.30 pm

Mr. Beith: There is such zeal on both sides of the Committee and many little private discussions are taking place, like the one taking place between the Minister and the Clerk inside the Chamber. The Minister has taken the Clerk's seat—I think that the Minister wants to be the Clerk.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I am in the Chair, and I am running the debate, not Ministers or Clerks. I make the decisions and I have responsibility for the Chair.

Mr. Beith: Of course, Mr. Lofthouse. I think that, in response to that very proper assurance of your authority, the Minister has left the Clerk's chair and has ceased to give the impression that he was trying to influence your decision. I know that he could not do so. You act strictly within the rules of procedure. You act simply to implement rules which, in some ways, give many advantages to Ministers and, when used by Ministers, can advantage the Labour party. There is not a lot that you can do about that.

We in the minority parties and Back Benchers often ask you to use your discretion to give a fair hearing, but you have to implement the rules of the House, which you do. Who am I to question that?

My task is different. It is to persuade hon. Members that they should vote against the motion because it is wrong——

Mr. Riddick *rose*——

Mr. Beith: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. I quite like giving way, but, unfortunately, hon. Members keep diverting me to speak on subjects of which you, Mr. Lofthouse, would disapprove, as they go wider than the terms of the motion.

Mr. Riddick *rose*——

Mr. Beith: I shall give way, reluctantly, to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Riddick: I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he agree that the reason the Liberal Democrats are so opposed to deals—as he puts it—is because the last time the Liberals made a deal, in the form of the Lib-Lab pact, it was a total disaster for them? Will he answer an earlier question? Why did the Liberals table amendments which they were not prepared to move?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman has made my point for me. He has drawn me into speaking about the Lib-Lab pact, with which he compares the Con-Lab pact before us tonight. He told us that there is a deal between the other

two parties, which should be compared to the Lib-Lab pact. He approves of today's deal, but disapproved of the Lib-Lab pact. I should not start discussing that subject.

Tonight, we must consider whether it is sensible for hon. Members to vote for a motion to report progress on the basis that would stitch up a deal. Another of my fears is that, every time I give way to another hon. Member, I strengthen the argument that might be used by the Minister—who keeps scurrying around the Government Whip—to move the closure motion in the middle of my speech, as he did in the speech of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). Such a procedure is not conducive to sensible debate in the House.

Mr. Allen: It may be that some hon. Members in the Chamber are trying to teach the Chair a lesson on not calling amendments on proportional representation. The Chair may wish to take into account in future the fact that such behaviour may be replicated. I hope that the Chair does not bend to such pressure. It is clear that some hon. Members are happy to disturb the debate purely because their amendments have not been selected.

The First Deputy Chairman: Was that a point of order or an intervention?

Mr. Beith: I gave way to the hon. Gentleman, but should not have done so. I think that he is after your job, Mr. Lofthouse. I think that he is trying to argue the Chairman's case, when he has already stitched up a deal with the Government.

There is another important aspect to discuss. A rumour was circulating earlier today that the Government did not want to reach clause 2 tonight because they had an amendment which they would have to table today and which would have been starred tomorrow.

Mr. Allen: It is not a rumour.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman, who knows all about what the Government are doing, says that it was not a rumour. He must know that it is the truth—now I have the evidence. What better source could I have than an hon. Member who is clearly very close to all this?

The Government plan to move an amendment that they could not have moved if we had made too much progress tonight. They resiled from the plan, leaving it open for them to move the motion to report progress. It occurred to them that if the amendment were carried, we should have a Report stage, at which other aspects of the Bill would be open to question and debate.

I assume that what we are to learn from this is that the Bill is defective and that any Government amendment will be made in another place. So far, we have not been told so, though we ought to have been. If we are to consider procedural motions, we ought to know the Government's intentions.

The broad deal that this motion is intended to implement is, first, that the Labour party will not impede progress on the Bill and, secondly, the continued use of the present electoral system for the extra seats, so long as the Government have their amendments considered at times of day that suit.

That being the case, the Government could not let you, Mr. Lofthouse, invite the Opposition Front Bench to move the amendment. When you started to do so, they were very worried. When you began to issue this helpful invitation to Labour Front Benchers, the Minister started to jump up and down in an effort to move a motion that he would not have accepted when I moved it.

The overall deal is that Labour will deliver the goods. What is the concession? What is the basis on which Labour Members are being asked to vote for this motion? What is the basis on which the hon. Member for Bradford, South is being told that he must troop through the Lobby with the Tories and on which the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis)——

Mr. Cryer: Whatever circumstances the hon. Gentleman is conjecturing, I shall make up my own mind. I hope to have an opportunity to speak on the motion, in which case I shall express my view that we ought to vote against it. I shall certainly vote in that way.

Mr. Beith: In my heart of hearts, I knew that it was so. I knew that the hon. Gentleman would not be pushed around by the Whips. And I should be surprised if the hon. Members for Worsley and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) were prepared to be treated in that way.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that, as always, I shall be in the Lobby in defence of democracy in this place. Before he goes too far along this route, let me tell him that it is not long since I watched him and his colleagues do very similar deals. The Labour Members on the Front Bench below the Gangway can say, hand on heart, that they do deals with nobody.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly fair point, and I did not seek to suggest otherwise. We did not have deals; we simply voted for what we believed to be right, as the hon. Gentleman is contemplating doing in respect of this motion. I am very pleased that he is prepared to oppose the motion, on the basis of some of the arguments that I have advanced. It is decent and honourable that there are still Members of Parliament—people with whom I may disagree fundamentally with regard to the issue in the Bill—who care about fair procedures, about how we conduct our business. On such issues, we can make common cause.

Mr. Wallace: My hon. Friend will have noted the indication from the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) that Labour accepts that there has been a deal, just as the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick)—a Conservative—did a few moments ago. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) is always talking about open government. Why is he not honest enough to accept that there has been a deal between the two Front Benches?

Mr. Beith: Nobody is now denying it. You, Mr. Lofthouse, might have been the last to be told about the deal, but you have now heard, from various corners of the Committee, plenty of evidence of it. The question is whether the deal, in the form of the motion to report progress, should be accepted.

I have been seeking to address the argument that Labour Members should support the deal, which is: "Chaps, comrades"—I cannot find any comrades—"we shall get our amendment on at 4 o'clock tomorrow afternoon if we let the Government have this Bill." That is a pretty shabby basis for voting for any motion, even one to report progress. It is certainly a shabby basis for

[Mr. Beith]

supporting every dot and tittle of the Bill, with all the faults that some Labour Members—conspicuous by their absence—know full well.

There are quite a few Labour Members who would make common cause with us. Indeed, later in the year they may find that their party conference decides in favour of a different electoral system for the European elections.

Perhaps there is another reason for the Government moving the motion to report progress. Is it possible that it is to give the Labour party time to consult its party conference before tomorrow? I cannot see how it can do that, but perhaps it wants to consult its national executive on whether Labour Members should vote for any of the amendments or for the schedule, an issue which we shall deal with tomorrow. Of course, we could have dealt with it tonight. My hon. Friends conspicuously co-operated in making it possible to reach Labour's amendment, clause 2 stand part and the schedule. We could still achieve that if we do not agree to the motion to report progress.

Throughout the proceedings on the Maastricht Bill, the Government constantly came to us and said, "We must make progress on the Bill." Some nights we said, "No, there are important issues still to be considered so we will not vote for the 10 o'clock motion. Why should we sit after 10 o'clock, night after night, on a Bill that we could consider in a more orderly fashion?" Now, the Government Whip—who has recently been promoted up the hierarchy—says that we must report progress on this Bill, not to suit the Government, but to keep the Labour party happy.

Conservative Members will shortly be invited to go through the Lobby in favour of a motion to report progress. We should remember all those occasions on the Maastricht Bill when considerable pressure was put on Conservative Members such as the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen)—my colleague on the Treasury Select Committee—to vote for very different sorts of motions.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): There will be a great deal of distaste throughout the Committee for the contempt that the right hon. Gentleman shows for the Government and Opposition Front Benches. One of the most conspicuous features of the past six months has been the courageous way in which the two Front Benches together fought the remainder of the House to get the Maastricht Bill through its stages.

All of us who so dislike the adversarial element in politics and admire the consensus and conformism that have been the most outstanding tribute to the two Front Benches very much resent the vulgar contempt that he shows for those hon. Members who have so stalwartly stood against public opinion, denied the nation a referendum and, above all, have tried to make themselves respectable and agreeable, especially to the London chattering classes.

I am sure that those who supported all that was responsible and respectable in the old Liberal party regard the right hon. Gentleman's rather impertinent remarks with nothing more than contempt.

Mr. Beith: As Ministers so often say, "The hon. Gentleman makes his own point in his own way." He is right in one aspect, if not all, of what he says, which is that that was exactly the case on the referendum——

Mr. Tyler: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. The Government Whip and the Opposition Whip have left the Chamber to consult. I wonder whether——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Beith: Oh, Mr. Lofthouse, how difficult my task becomes when extraneous activities flourish, when toings and froings—*[Interruption.]* The Opposition Whip, the hon. Member for Jarrow has returned to the Chamber bursting with some new truth that he wants to impart—not to me; not to you, Mr. Lofthouse; not to the Committee; but to the Clerks. Perhaps he is offering to do the Minister's difficult job and move the closure——

Mr. Dixon *rose*——

Mr. Beith: I shall give way provided that the hon. Gentleman does not move a closure motion.

9.45 pm

Mr. Dixon: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I have no intentions at all.

Mr. Beith: I always believed that, from the moment that he became a Whip, the hon. Member for Jarrow had no intentions at all. It is clear to me from everything that he does in his activities as a Whip—I am sure that some of his hon. Friends, if they were here, would support me—that he has no intentions at all; he just has duties. He has the duty of compelling people to come into the House; the duty of keeping them out of the House, as now, when they are not wanted. He has no intentions; merely obligations.

Mr. Dixon: The right hon. Gentleman asked me if I was going to move the closure. I said that I had no intention at all of moving the closure. That is fairly simple, and I should have thought that even he could understand that.

Mr. Beith: I did not interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but he chose not to complete his sentence. Had he done so, I would have understood. That felicitous phrase, which seemed to me to describe so vividly the characteristics that make him such a well-known and recognised individual, summed it all up. But, of course, he meant to say something else—that he was not going to move the closure—and I accept that. He was distracting me, as the hon. Member for Nottingham, North is also trying to do, from what I was seeking to argue.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North is now apologising. He says that he is sorry that he got the Committee into this mess; he is sorry that he did a deal with the Government under which Labour would deliver the Bill so long as they got the procedural motion and could get his amendment on at 4 o'clock tomorrow.

Mr. Allen: In case there is any misunderstanding, I was making it clear that I was sorry for the right hon. Gentleman, rather than for anything that had happened.

Mr. Beith: I can do without the sympathy of the hon. Gentleman. I do not think that it would do me a lot of good.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North) *rose*——

Mr. Beith: I do not know whether I should give way to so many interventions, because it might count against me at some later stage, and I am seeking to develop an argument. But I will give way this time.

Mr. Heald: Did the right hon. Gentleman forget to move the amendment? Is that the reason why we are being treated now to this lengthy speech? If that is the case, is it right that he has lost his party six hours of debate?

Mr. Beith: I do not think that we would have got six hours of debate. On the last clause stand part, we got only one hour. Of course we did not forget. The hon. Member could not have been in the Chamber at the time, or he would have seen my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) rise and say, "Not moved." That was the appropriate step to take when we did not wish the matter to come before the Committee. We thought that it would be a good idea to get on to Labour's amendment. Then we suddenly discovered that Labour did not want to get on to their own amendment.

But all this is distracting me from the structure and order of my remarks, and from coming on to the arguments which are directed at Conservative Members as they are invited to vote for this motion. They are being told that this has to be done to keep the Labour party happy.

So when hon. Members go back to their Conservative dinners, their buffet suppers and their women's committee lunches, they will be able to say that they did their bit for the Prime Minister and the Government. They will be asked what they did for their nation and their party, and they will reply that they looked after the Labour party, which was what they were sent here for. They will be asked why that was necessary.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, who is one of the most candid Members, will tell his ladies committee that he will explain it to them, although it will be difficult to understand because the proceedings of the House are sometimes strange. He will say that his friends the Whips, with whom he always seeks to work closely because they give such stalwart support to the Prime Minister, agreed with the Labour party that it would be expedient for their amendment to come on at 4 o'clock on Wednesday.

The ladies committee will ask why it was important, and the hon. Gentleman will reply that he does not know, but the Whips told him that it was. Then the ladies will ask why it is that something that is important to the Labour party's organisation of its day-to-day business matters so much to the Prime Minister and other Front-Bench Ministers.

Mr. Budgen: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will stop this impertinence. It must be clear to the whole Committee that Opposition Front Benchers have been the most loyal supporters of the Conservative Administration over the Maastricht treaty. It really is most impertinent of the right hon. Gentleman to be rude about it. A very small obligation is being paid now for loyal support over a long period.

Mr. Beith: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman's explanation would pass the auditors. I think he has got the balance sheet confused, which is unusual for him, because he is a member of our Treasury Select Committee.

The hon. Gentleman is fundamentally right—a small obligation is being repaid—but I think that the obligation arises in relation to this Bill, and that is why he and his hon. Friends are being asked to vote for this motion. He thinks it is an obligation in respect of the Maastricht Bill —that is the nub of the disagreement between us—but that should not affect the attitude he should take to this motion.

The arguments are the same either way. I think that the hon. Gentleman is wrong about Maastricht; I do not think that the Labour party was very good at getting the Maastricht Bill through. Labour Members were very good at defeating the referendum proposal and ensuring that the British people did not have a vote on the issue, but they were not so good on procedural motions. They are relying on that rather than on this motion. The reason I raise it for comparison is that they blocked all the procedural motions but did not vote for the Labour amendments. They did not vote on most of their amendments.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. It would be helpful if the right hon. Gentleman would get back to the motion and leave Maastricht out of it.

Mr. Beith: Let us agree about this motion. It is the repayment of a debt of obligation. The Government Whips are obligated to the Labour party for their great kindness. I believe that it is a kindness in getting the European Parliamentary Elections Bill through the House; the hon. Gentleman believes it is a kindness over the Maastricht Bill. Either way, the Government are obligated.

Conservative Members will now have to go to their ladies committees, luncheon clubs and supper clubs, and, heaven forfend, possibly their Conservative clubs, where the argument may be even more robust than in the ladies' committee, and be expressed in more uncouth terms on occasion. They will have to say, as they gather around the bar of the Conservative club, "It is all right, fellow club members, we have been in there helping the Labour party out by moving a motion that the House do report progress."

The Conservative club will not be like the ladies' committee; they will not say, "Oh, Mr. Budgen, why did you do it?" They will say, "Come off it." They may use expressions that I would not use at all, let alone in the Chamber. They will say, "Are you telling me that we subscribe in our club to put money into local Conservative funds, to send you to Westminster to prop up the Labour party? You are not telling us that, are you?" But that is what Conservative Members will have to tell them; they will have to explain that that is how the whole show is run. The hon. Gentleman can call it consensus, but that is how the whole place is run.

"Explain it to us," they will say. They may use more robust language, but they will demand to be told by the luckless, hapless Conservative Members—who should think about that before they go through the Lobby. They will have to stand in the bar of the Conservative club and say, "John Major and the Government Whips told me it was absolutely vital that Labour's amendment came on at 4 o'clock on a Wednesday. For that I will do anything; I will vote for any motion that the Government put before me." That will not be accepted for one moment. I think that Conservative Members will have to refrain from going through the Lobby in support of the motion.

[Mr. Beith]

Let me give Conservative Members another reason. If I had moved the motion, and had advanced arguments very different from those that the Government would have advanced had they dared, the same Government Whip would have told Conservative Members to vote the other way. I am putting that on the record because, when they go to the Conservative ladies' luncheon, they will also have to explain that. They will ask, "Is it true, Mr. Budgen? Is it really true that, when you voted for this motion to help the Labour party, you voted the opposite way from the way in which you would have voted if it had been moved 30 seconds earlier?"

The hon. Gentleman will have to say, "Yes, my dear ladies, I am afraid that it is true, because that is the way in which the politics of our country is run. We in the Conservative party have a debt of gratitude to the Labour party, and although we prefer to leave you in the mindset of constant anti-socialism, because that is how we keep the party going, you must recognise that in the real world of Westminster our obligations to the Labour party run deeper than some of our opposition to it." The Conservative ladies will find that hard to take; there may be tears in their eyes when they are confronted with the harsh truth.

Mr. William Powell *rose*——

Mr. Beith: In the middle of my argument, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Powell: Is the right hon. Gentleman not suffering from tunnel vision? Surely, when our constituents ask us about such things, we are much more likely to hear the comment, "That Mr. Beith is a nice man. Why on earth was he talking all that nonsense?" The fact is that the right hon. Gentleman is advancing an argument for the most corrupt bargain possible. We have been denied the opportunity of debating the amendments that the Liberal Democrats did not move, and which we wished them to move, so that we could expose the falsity and preposterous nature of the politics that they wish to advance. Our constituents are not impressed by what the right hon. Gentleman says, because it is all nonsense.

Mr. Beith: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman believes much of that; he certainly did not make it sound convincing. We are party to no bargain at all. We did not move a couple of our amendments, but the Minister had already made it abundantly clear beyond doubt that in no circumstances would he accept them. He was determined to ensure that our amendments were defeated, because he knows the form in which he wants the Bill to be enacted, and he has known it for ages, since before the Maastricht Bill even started. Honestly and candidly, he made that clear earlier this evening.

The idea that our amendments would have been uplifted in the arms of Conservative Members who had suddenly come into the fold with us is absurd. Even Conservative Members who agree with our amendments are being a little cautious, although I acquit the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) of that charge. He intervened helpfully and purposefully to ask the Minister when the House would be given the opportunity to decide what would be an appropriate election system for the European Parliament. The Minister's answer, basically, was, "Not on this Bill."

Some day the House may be invited to decide, but what is before us now is a grubby deal to support the Labour party. Conservative Members now have the task of setting out from this place at the weekend and explaining to loyal Conservatives all over the country that they are here in order to help out the Labour party. That seems a wholly inappropriate reason for voting, and a wholly inappropriate way of treating the various resources and help that those loyal Conservatives have given.

Perhaps I am presuming too much about the sense of loyalty of Conservatives all over the country. It may be much less prevalent than it used to be; they may be much more restive. The knowledge that there is a Con-Lab pact, which is the basis of the motion, will not help, and that knowledge will spread further and further.

On top of some people's feeling that an even more unfair system for elections to the European Parliament is being foisted upon them, comes the discovery that the Labour party is conniving with the Conservatives to get the motion through, and that the Conservative Whips are asking their Members to support a motion in order to keep that deal going. It is a pretty shady way of proceeding, but it is the way that things have gone here tonight.

Mr. Cryer: I should like to say a word or two about the motion to move progress. I imagine that the Whips have it in mind not to move the 10 o'clock motion. The curious thing is that the Whips have foolishly moved closures tonight. The Whip earlier moved the closure when a short speech was coming to an end, and when one other Member was to speak.

The Government want to turn this legislature into some sort of sausage machine for subordinating Parliament to their wishes. That is why their motion to report progress is being debated. It has taken far longer than it would have if the Whips had sat on their hands and done nothing. The debate on the motion to report progress has taken longer than it would have taken to debate all the items before the Committee of the House tonight.

Mr. Wallace: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. I feel embarrassed about cutting across the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). However, once again in a speech of his, one must move, That the Question be now put. We have spent longer on the debate on the motion to report progress than we spent on clause 1 stand part. The Government did not advance any arguments. My right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has spoken at great length and the hon. Member for Bradford, South has spoken briefly and concisely. I beg to move, That the Question be now put.

The First Deputy Chairman: I am not accepting that motion.

Mr. Kirkwood: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. I spy strangers.

It being Ten o'clock, The Chairman *left the Chair to report progress and asked leave to sit again.*

Committee report progress; to sit again tomorrow.

Mr. Beith: No.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. If hon. Gentlemen will listen to what I have to say, instead of all jumping up and down at once, which makes it impossible for me to decide who genuinely wants to catch my eye, I will listen to them.

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I heard the Government Whip move the motion to report progress. I voted against the motion with my voice seeking a Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Whip was simply reporting to the House what had happened in Committee.

Mr. Wallace: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand, although I will certainly stand corrected if I am wrong, that the Whip also sought leave to sit again. Will you perhaps tell us precisely what the terms were? If he sought leave to sit again, is it possible for the House to vote against the motion?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that that is a normal procedure at 10 o'clock.

Mr. Kirkwood: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have ruled on that point of order.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I beg to move, That strangers do withdraw.

Notice being taken that strangers were present, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Standing Order No. 143 (Withdrawal of Strangers from the House), put forthwith the Question,* That strangers do withdraw:——

The House divided: Ayes 21, Noes 253.

Division No. 321] **[10.2 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Maclennan, Robert
Maginnis, Ken
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Simpson, Alan
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Don Foster.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Cryer, Bob
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dixon, Don
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gerrard, Neil
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Home Robertson, John
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lewis, Terry
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Loyden, Eddie
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madden, Max
Madel, David
Mahon, Alice
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn

Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spearing, Nigel
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Michael Brown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Local Government Finance

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): I beg to move,

That the Special Grant Report (No. 8) (House of Commons Paper No. 724), which was laid before this House on 14th June, be approved.

The special grant report which is before the House for debate tonight concludes some unfinished business from this year's local government finance settlement.

The report honours a commitment that the then Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), made in the revenue support grant debate last February to provide special financial assistance to certain local authorities. The package of assistance comprises two separate special grants. We expect that, taking the two grant schemes together, between £3 million and £4 million of Government support is likely to be provided during the next 12 months.

The first of the two schemes is a continuation of the special grant in respect of displaced persons from the former republic of Yugoslavia introduced towards the end of the last financial year.

The turmoil in what was once Yugoslavia tragically caused many thousands of people to flee their homes or to be driven from them. That led to the largest number of refugees and displaced persons in Europe since the end of the second world war. Many of those people made their way to this country during the first few months of the Bosnian conflict.

As a result, local authorities in some areas faced the prospect of demands on local services disproportionate to their resources. For example, some 170 people had to be accommodated by Uttlesford district council following their arrival at Stansted airport. That is why the Government agreed to provide financial help to those authorities that were most affected.

In some parts of the country local authorities are still having to cope with the problems associated with the refugees who arrived here last year. We are therefore extending last year's scheme of assistance into the current financial year.

Similar considerations apply to the exceptional costs associated with refugee and asylum-seeking children who arrive in the United Kingdom unaccompanied by parents or guardians. The second grant scheme covered by the special grant report relates to that problem.

The costs to local authorities of responding to the needs of unaccompanied refugee children are considerable. Authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989 to care for and maintain such children unless they are privately fostered, in which case they have a duty to satisfy themselves that the welfare of the children is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted. The costs are highest immediately after the arrival of the children in this country.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): How many local authorities have applied for the grant and, of those, how many have had the grant application accepted and how many refused? Secondly, does the English language support element of the grant cover travel costs and fees for English tuition?

Mr. Baldry: No one will be able to apply for the grant until the order is approved, so no local authority has applied for the grant this year. There are two grants, one for Yugoslavs and the other for unaccompanied children. We expect that a number of authorities will apply for the grants. Whether the grant will be applied will depend on whether they meet or exceed the threshold.

Next year, the pressures associated with unaccompanied children who have arrived in recent years should be fully reflected in standard spending assessments because detailed information from the 1991 census will, for the first time, feed through into the assessments. However, as this year's SSAs do not take account of those data, we accept that there is a case for special financial assistance towards the costs incurred in 1993-94 by the authorities that are subject to the heaviest financial burden.

Generally, local authorities should be able to make provision within their budgets for the costs of dealing with refugees and asylum seekers. The mechanisms of central Government support for local authorities already take account of the sorts of spending pressures that tend to be associated with the presence of refugees.

Most asylum seekers settle in London. The needs of the London boroughs are assessed as high—within SSAs—precisely because they face a range of unusual pressures such as refugee arrivals. For example, in London the children's personal social services element of SSAs is much higher than the national average. For 1993-94, the national average is £35 per head; the averarge per head for inner London is £131.

We take the view—entirely reasonably, I believe—that generally it should be possible for local authorities to budget for the costs that refugees and asylum seekers impose from within the resources provided by SSAs. We believe that SSAs provide the best means of distributing resources to local authorities; they allow the authorities maximum discretion to set their spending priorities in the light of pressures from all residents, whether indigenous or not. We are conducting a review of SSAs and would welcome any constructive suggestions on the methodology that may relate to refugees.

From time to time, however, situations can arise leading to a sudden influx of asylum seekers from a particular area, which may place on certain local authorities burdens that are outside their normal experience. The influx of asylum seekers from former Yugoslavia is an example—hence the Yugoslavian displaced persons grant last year and this year.

It is only reasonable that authorities should have made some provision for contingencies within their budgets. That is why grant is to be targeted at authorities that incur expenditure above a threshold. In 1994-95, the SSAs for authorities with refugee children resident in their areas should provide sufficient resources. That is likely to mean that a further grant scheme will be unnecessary.

Both grant schemes have been modelled on the Bellwin scheme. The principles are broadly the same. A spending threshold set for each local authority represents the amount for which the authority could reasonably be expected to budget as a contingency. Grant will be paid to meet 85 per cent. of the eligible expenditure above the threshold.

We have, of course, consulted the local authority associations about the schemes, and have taken their comments into account. In particular, we have accepted their suggestion that authorities that incur spending under both schemes should not be obliged to spend up to the level of their threshold twice in order to qualify for grant. To respond to the point made by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), local authorities will have the first of several opportunities to claim grant within the next few weeks.

It remains our view that the most appropriate means of distributing resources to local authorities is through their SSAs. SSAs permit local authorities to use their discretion in determining their own spending priorities within the resources available to them, and to weigh up the competing demands on their services from all local residents, whether indigenous or not. Special grants restrict that discretion.

Nevertheless, we accept that there is a good case for making exceptions to this rule this year in view of the timelags that affect the SSA calculations. The two grant schemes incorporated in Special Grant Report (No. 8) should ensure that assistance is targeted at the local authorities that are most in need. I commend the report to the House.

10.22 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): The House will recognise—even at this, a later hour than anticipated—that the movement of peoples seeking asylum across borders is not constant, but fluctuates depending on the world situation. The average number of refugees seeking asylum in this country was 3,736 per month during 1991, and that had changed to 1,796 between January and June 1992. I hope to prod the Minister on more recent figures later.

As part of our meeting their international obligations, countries such as ours quite naturally want to be able to show concern for people who face political difficulties, and who seek asylum. That means that countries such as ours will on occasion want to give certain refugees temporary residence, and at others will want to give permanent asylum to those who seek to escape from troubles in their original land.

Substantial costs are involved, including those in resettlement, social services, education—many of the refugees cannot speak much English—housing and counselling. Local authorities in which people locate after seeking asylum will probably be able to identify many other costs. Indeed, the order itemises a number of areas where authorities may claim grant.

The crucial question is: who pays for those costs on society? Some people in the private sector may be able to make a contribution. Obviously, such contributions are welcomed. Clearly, the charitable sector makes an important contribution in meeting the needs of refugees and other people in a similar plight.

Few hon. Members would argue that the largest burden falls on the public sector. It is a question whether the needs of refugees can best be met through central Government finance or local government finance. That is the question that is raised by the order before us tonight.

If refugees settle throughout the country in an even pattern and at a predictable and even rate throughout the year, certainly it would be possible theoretically to reflect their needs in the way in which the standard spending assessment is calculated for local government annually, if the House accepts that the largest part of the burden must be met by local authorities.

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

I hope that the Minister recognises that that is not what happens, because the number of those seeking asylum is not constant or predictable, and the spread across different parts of the country is not even. Because of the lack of predictability, it is difficult for the SSA to reflect the needs of any community at a specific time. Therefore, it is right and proper that the Government will meet special needs which cannot be foreseen as they arise.

In the case of the Vietnamese refugees who sought asylum recently, the Government's policy was to ensure that there was, as far as possible, a broad distribution throughout different parts of the country. However, in the case of those refugees from the territory previously known as Yugoslavia, the Government's policy—it is not challenged by the various agencies involved—is that there should be an attempt to cluster those who are seeking asylum in this country, perhaps for good reasons. They will know each other and will be able to stand together in building a new life in the United Kingdom.

My purpose is not to argue about the rights and wrongs of how best to deal with the matter. I want to look at the impact of the lack of predictability on the necessary financial provision. Because of the unevenness and lack of predictability,the current SSA system does not cover the needs of the local authorities where the refugees are located.

Even if we lay to one side all the arguments about what is right and wrong with the way in which the SSA is designed, the formula does not take account of the true costs of providing refugee services. The assumptions that are built into the SSA are not realistic. When the SSA is based on a high assumed tax base, many authorities do not qualify for the special grants, because of the threshold provisions. I can foresee a situation in which some refugees who have located in an authority where there is a higher tax base will be locating in an authority that will not qualify for special grant, and therefore will not be able to meet the needs of many of those who are seeking asylum.

Does the Minister recognise that this system of assistance is based on unrealistic assumptions? It is unrealistic to believe that, in the current financial regime, local authorities have contingency funds that can be used and set aside to meet the needs of refugees.

Most local authorities are already struggling to meet the needs of their ordinary population because of the financial regime under which they must operate. Many of the contingency reserves that those authorities have wisely built up over the years have had to be used to meet those needs.

Where such contingency funds are available, the local population in Conservative-controlled boroughs in London, such as Barnet and Enfield, argue that those boroughs should use those funds to meet the needs that those residents have already identified. It does not make much sense then to argue that the special needs of refugees can be met from funds that should be kept in reserve, especially when those funds are already earmarked for local purposes. In any case, many authorities no longer have such funds.

The Government argue that a threshold system must be introduced, so that part of the assumed cost of meeting the refugee need is built into local government finance, but, with their introduction of the special grant, the Government also recognise that local government lacks the necessary resources to meet that need. The threshold system will not meet the needs of refugees, and boroughs under all political control will have to seek special help from the Government to meet the challenges they face in trying to meet those needs.

Can the Minister confirm that, in the previous financial year, only three authorities received special grant? Can he also confirm that less than £90,000 in total was paid out to meet the needs of those who claimed that special grant? I accept that the Minister is unable to tell us how many authorities are likely to claim special grant this year, although his civil servants may have some idea.

I am sure that the Minister can identify, however, those authorities that applied for the grant last year and were told that they did not qualify because they were assumed to have the resources to meet the need, or had prepared schemes that were not in line with the Government's thinking. I hope that the Minister can supply that information, which has already been requested by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden).

Since November, responsibility for funding has largely passed to the British Refugee Council and the British Red Cross. Since then, only 240 people from the former Yugoslavia have settled here. As part of the Government's international obligations, however, they have already accepted that 1,000 people, plus up to 4,000 of their dependants, can settle here. Does the Minister believe that more than that 240 will come to our country? To what extent has that already happened?

To allow a proper debate, can the Minister tell us what moneys have already been paid to the British Refugee Council? How much money does he expect to pay this year and in the future to that council to meet the needs of those refugees who have been accepted and are in need of assistance?

The order relates to the period from April 1992 to November 1992. Can the Minister confirm that 6,000 people from the former Yugoslavia came to the United Kingdom between January 1992 and January 1993? How many of them have subsequently left the country or stated their intention to do so? How many refugees applied for asylum up to June this year? How many applications were rejected and how many cases are pending up to the end of June this year?

Can the Minister estimate how much special grant will be distributed to local authorities during the period in which the order will take effect? He may be tempted to say that he will not know the size of the pool available until he knows the demand, but his civil servants would be unwise not to have made some calculations on that matter. It is better that the House realises now that difficulties lie ahead, rather that being told about problems later.

As the Under-Secretary said in his opening remarks, the Government recognise that there is considerable unease at how the formula that flows from the standard spending assessment is calculated. They have already said that they are prepared to review the criteria. In that connection, will the Minister agree to meet representatives of the various local authority associations to consider a fairer and more effective system to deal with the distribution of grant in relation to special needs?

There are many unknown factors, and I do not know to what extent the Minister can answer all the questions this evening. Does he accept that a monitoring system should be established so that Parliament can scrutinise what is

happening? We would then not have to debate this matter every year to try to examine what has happened in the past, what difficulties arose and what should be done in the future.

There should be an automatic system of scrutiny. Parliament should know how many people are involved, their geographical distribution and location, how many applications have been received from local authorities and others, whether they have been accepted, and on what grounds. Parliament should know the Government's response to those applications and the cost to the Treasury. Can the Minister give a commitment that he will consider the possibility of providing an annual report to Parliament, so that those matters can be properly scrutinised?

Mr. Madden: My hon. Friend is asking some extremely pertinent questions, and I fear that the Minister may be unable to supply answers, because there is an urgent need for the Government to co-ordinate refugee policy. We have two Ministers on the Front Bench, and the Department of Education is also directly involved.

Does my hon. Friend agree that, as refugees will remain in this country for the foreseeable future, there is an urgent need for Government co-ordination led by a single Minister of a senior status, so that the information that he is rightly requesting can be supplied to Parliament annually, at least, and a Minister would be accountable for all aspects of refugee policy?

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. I have received correspondence from the British Refugee Council, which has made a similar point. The different Departments desperately need to pull together on that important matter, and one Department should be clearly identified as a lead Department, so that decisions can be made more swiftly.

The British Refugee Council makes the criticism that too many of the Government's decisions and initiatives on those matters are short-term, and that a much longer-term approach is needed. Refugees do not come to this country for six months and then suddenly disappear as a problem from the area that they locate. They have housing, education and social service needs, all of which develop as they begin to establish themselves in communities.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that, some three years ago, in 1990, when a group of unaccompanied Eritrean children arrived in this country, a delegation of Labour Members from London and other places went to the Department of Health to discuss their needs? We then went to see the Department of the Environment, the Department of Social Security and the Home Office. At that time, we were calling for a serious co-ordination of strategy to ensure that those children were properly looked after and given the necessary support. Three years later, that co-ordination has still not happened.

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point, which has been made to me and others by the various organisations that are trying to provide assistance for refugees. They wonder what difference there is between refugees originating from the former Yugoslavia and those originating from other areas, such as Eritrea and Somalia, and believe that there might be an equally strong case to be made on their behalf.

That is precisely the type of matter that could be disussed between the lead Department and the various local authority associations which are having to meet the needs of refugees generally.

A leader of one such association has suggested that some Government contingency funds designated for refugees from the former Yugoslavia have already been earmarked to deal with problems concerned with refugees from elsewhere in the world who have settled here and for whom no special grants are available. That is another reason why it is difficult to deal with the issue through contingency funds.

We need a long-term, properly co-ordinated approach. So long as Britain plays an important role in international situations, such as in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere, and accepts international obligations and demonstrates humanity, there will be a continuing need for funds to meet the needs of refugees.

That need cannot satisfactorily be met through the standard spending assessment if the bulk of the burden is to be carried by local authorities. Too many of the issues involved lack predictability. That being so, the SSA system, even if all the anomalies were ironed out, is not the best way to cope with that type of need.

I urge the Minister to be straight with the House and accept that his proposals, while better than nothing, are pathetically short-term. Having accepted the obligation of caring for refugees, which does this country no harm in international negotiations, we risk being accused of failing to make adequate provision for people whom we have identified as deserving.

Will the Minister accept that, despite less than £90,000 by way of special grant, less than £12 per head, having been paid to local authorities last year to meet the needs of refugees, and despite the good work done by some charities and individuals, the main burden continues to fall on local authorities? It is time for a fair deal to be given to councils which must, and want to, help refugees. It is also time for a fair deal to be given to the refugees themselves.

10.42 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I warmly welcome the report and the terms in which the Minister explained its purposes. My local authority, the London borough of Hillingdon, will benefit from the grant referred to in the report. I anticipate that it will benefit by about £550,000 this year. That will be of enormous relief to my constituents in Uxbridge and to those of my hon. Friends the Members for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks), whose constituencies, like mine, are situated in the borough of Hillingdon.

I agreed with some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) about the standard spending assessment. It is difficult, if not impossible, for local authorities to meet from their contingency funds the high cost of caring for unaccompanied child refugees.

We all know that local authorities are hard pressed. Every pound of expenditure has to be accounted for and there is no spare cash available to meet the substantial costs involved in such an exercise. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North spoke of the need for scrutiny. While I agree with him on that, I must say that the Public Accounts Committee takes a keen interest in the

[Mr. Michael Shersby]

way in which public funds are spent, and it would not surprise me if the Public Accounts Committee involved itself in such affairs in future.

The grant available represents 85 per cent. of Hillingdon's relevant expenditure on unaccompanied child refugees who arrive, principally at Heathrow airport, from Eritrea, Uganda, Angola and elsewhere in Africa. In Hillingdon we do not have much of a problem with caring for people who come from former Yugoslavia; our problem mainly involves unaccompanied child refugees from Africa. For Hillingdon that expenditure amounted to £1 million last year.

The expense is resented by many of my constituents, who find the cost reflected in their council tax bills. It is incurred by Hillingdon because Heathrow airport is located within its boundary and the local authority has a duty, under the Children Act 1989, to care for refugee children who are abandoned at the airport. I am talking about young people under the age of 18. A number of those who have been taken into the care of my local authority have been teenagers in their late teens, just under the age limit. We are not talking merely about tiny children.

The cost to a borough such as mine of caring for anything between 35 and 50 youngsters is substantial. The money is spent on accommodation and maintenance and on promoting the welfare of children who are fostered within the district. It is expensive because sometimes when a child is fostered, he or she takes the place of another child from the immediate vicinity who might have been placed with those foster parents. There are also the costs of publicity and advertising for suitable foster parents. In addition, there is the not inconsiderable cost of interpretation services. It is not surprising that those costs are high when one considers that the young people involved frequently do not speak any English, but a variety of African languages—interpretation is essential.

How do those youngsters arrive in a borough such as Hillingdon, and the furthest extremities of the county of Middlesex? We all know that they come to Heathrow airport because they are abandoned, usually on the passenger side of the terminal, but sometimes on the air side. They often arrive in the United Kingdom having boarded the aircraft at the point of departure in one of the African countries using false papers which have been supplied to them by an unknown agency. They use the papers to pass through emigration, board the aircraft and make the passage to the United Kingdom. Those papers are frequently destroyed on the flight, when they are flushed down the lavatory. Having arrived at Heathrow, the young person waits until the aircraft which brought him or her to this country has departed for another destination.

When the youngsters eventually present themselves before the immigration services, they are unable to speak our language and unable to say how they arrived or with what assistance. It is impossible to refuse them entry or care for them, and the local authority has to take them into care in accordance with the provisions of the Children Act.

My constituents are generous and tolerant, but they ask me some difficult questions. The straightforward question that I hear from my constituents, whether they live in Harefield in the north or West Drayton in the south, is, why do we have to pay the costs of caring for the youngsters when it is a national problem? If national policy is that they should be cared for, surely the cost should be borne by the national Exchequer. That view is very understandable.

Once such youngsters have arrived in this country, there is no realistic possibility of their being returned to the countries of origin, even if those countries are no longer at war. Even if they have child care facilities, it is virtually impossible, because of the provisions of this country's legislation on children, to return them. A child has only to object.

This matter has exercised my hon. Friends the Members for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) and Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and myself for more than two years. It is partly as a result of our representations to our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, as well as to my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), as successive Secretaries of State for the Environment, who have considered the matter with sympathy, that I am welcoming this step. We are confronted with a very difficult problem, which should be dealt with and paid for by the nation rather than by the people of one or two local authority areas.

I welcome what my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment has said about a review of the rate support grant formula for future years. I am particularly glad to welcome the assistance that he has provided, thus demonstrating that we have a listening Government who are dealing with a very complex problem that requires the sympathy and understanding of all hon. Members.

10.51 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): As I am the Member for a Scottish constituency, it is appropriate that I should first pay tribute to Mrs. Christine Witcutt, who was killed yesterday by sniper fire in Sarajevo. She was delivering clothes and medical supplies in that part of the former Yugoslavia. Mrs. Witcutt represented an organisation called Edinburgh Direct Aid. All hon. Members will want to express their deep sympathy for her family and to make it clear that alongside their great grief is their pride in what she was doing.

I want to ask hon. Members to consider the omissions from this provision. This is a report of the Department of the Environment, issued under local government finance legislation relating to England. There is no reference to or provision for Scotland. We have been told by the Scottish Office that the Secretary of State for Scotland does not have power to make specific grants for this purpose and that if Scottish local authorities face additional expenditure for the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers, this will be taken into account, in consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, in determing the level of aggregate external finance. Any hon. Member who believes such a thing is not fit to be let out on his own. There is no such specific power, although Scottish authorities will face similar additional expenditure in terms of provision for extra teachers and social workers.

I pay tribute to the Scottish Refugee Council and to Scottish local authorities and Government Departments that provide for education, social work, social security, housing and health. I am not so unreasonable as to expect the Under-Secretary of State to answer my questions tonight. I am sure, however, that he will be able to forward my queries to the appropriate quarters and to direct attention to this anomaly, to which my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) will also no doubt refer.

On page 7 of the report, paragraph 1(d) refers to

"the cost of interpretation services, other than costs which have been funded through grant under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966."

The problem is that section 11 does not apply to Scotland. Labour Members have frequently asked for it to apply, but that has been resisted by the Scottish Office. Therefore, the cost of interpretation services in Scotland does not qualify for additional grant.

The Scottish Office has said that urban aid can be used as the equivalent of section 11 grants, but a recent parliamentary answer confirmed that no projects for refugees or asylum seekers have been funded under urban aid. Worse than that, a project submitted by the Scottish Refugee Council, fully supported by Strathclyde regional council and, I believe, the social services group within the Scottish Office, has been turned down by the administrative arm of the Scottish Office on the ground that it is not appropriate for urban aid.

The lack of necessary powers leads to problems, especially when linked with some recent Government proposals. For example, the setting up of independent further education colleges, with a duty to provide further education in their areas, meant that when the Scottish Refugee Council wanted a 10-week English course for some refugees, Stevenson college charged it £6,250. Of course, the council does not have that sort of funds, so I am pleased that the course has now been funded by the Scottish Office on a one-off basis, using the mechanism of a section 10 grant under the Social Work Acts. However, the council was told that it was definitely a one-off, last-chance grant and not to expect it again.

The problems of refugees will not be solved by a 10-week course, so where will future funding come from? We are dealing with people who have been through appalling experiences and who will probably have health and social problems for a long time to come. Anyone who is realistic about the position in the former Yugoslavia cannot be anything other than pessimistic about the likelihood of further refugees coming to Britain—certainly if we have a decent Government who take their fair share of responsibility.

There is an anomaly because the Scottish Office cannot pay the special grant provided for in the report because the Secretary of State does not have the necessary power to do so. Section 11, which is referred to in the report, is also not applicable to Scotland. The report refers to urban aid, but particular projects have been turned down on the ground that it is not appropriate to refugees.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make these points, and I hope that the Minister will be able to redirect them to the relevant section of the Government. I believe that I have demonstrated that this order is being put forward in a way that will lead to anomalies as between the different countries of the United Kingdom.

11 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I do not want it to appear to be simply a love-in with the Minister on the Conservative side, but, like my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), I want to express my gratitude to him and to the Government for the measures enshrined in the report.

I represent the whole of Uttlesford district council, which contains Stansted airport. With no disrespect to the efforts put in over a long period by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and the other hon. Members representing Hillingdon, I like to think that it was the circumstances that confronted Uttlesford district council when a planeload of refugees from the former Yugoslavia arrived one Sunday evening that helped to tip the scales in Government thinking about how this kind of situation was to be addressed.

The arrival of 150 or more refugees in a small rural district council area was out of all proportion to the circumstances of that council and its ability to deal with them. I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister will agree that it dealt with it extremely well and capably. He listened most patiently and sympathetically to the representations that the council subsequently made to him, and I was delighted when there was an indication of a positive reaction.

It is all very well, I say to my hon. Friend—so that I do not appear to speak entirely in terms of fulsome praise—to refer to contingencies, as the Government have traditionally done, and to say that local authorities must be assumed to be capable of dealing with them, but some things are out of all proportion to any kind of preparation for contingencies that an authority can make.

I concede that every local authority in the country can have different forms of contingency. If there is an airport within the boundaries, one may speculate on a certain type

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of contingency that may flow from that. Other problems, such as a cliff falling away, may occur in a coastal constituency. All manner of disastrous unexpected events can occur. Obviously, therefore, prudent local authorities must be assumed to be making some provision; but there will from time to time be very unusual happenings that must have special attention.

I therefore anticipate that it may be very difficult, in the ordinary mechanisms of dealing with local government finance, to cover all the sorts of situations that may arise, and not just in the field of immigration and refugees. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) put a whole variety of possibilities, in the form of questions, to my hon. Friend.

Inevitably, however, the Government cannot—and a Minister from the Department of the Environment, away from the baleful glare of the Treasury, certainly cannot —make commitments to spend money in almost any circumstances that might arise. But I hope that, if unusual situations do arise, they will be looked at on their merits, and perhaps the House will be asked again to approve unusual measures of this kind to deal with them. I do not believe that they can necessarily be covered through the mechanisms of local government finance.

Very unusual circumstances arose for Uttlesford district council in this case. It is grateful for the way in which the Government reacted, as am I. We have a very satisfactory result for the people I represent in the district of Uttlesford, and I thank the Minister for that.

11.4 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On Saturday morning, a citizen of the former Yugoslavia came to see me—along with a representative of the British Refugee Council and an interpreter—to talk through his predicament. He has arrived here, has settled in my constituency and has refugee status; his wife has permission to come here. However, his sole remaining close relative—a young adult son, a second-year mechanics student—is not being allowed into the United Kingdom. The wife therefore remains at home in the former Yugoslavia, enduring daily threats, harassment and persecution.

The only other person staying in the family home is the student son's cousin, an 18-year-old who is also unable to come to the United Kingdom. His family have been accommodated in Dewsbury; I shall write to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) probably tomorrow, to enlist her help with the other half of the extended family. No other members of the cousin's family are left in the former Yugoslavia; the other members of both parts of the family are here, or elsewhere in the world.

Two families, then, are settled in two different parts of the United Kingdom. They are part of the small number referred to by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) who have been accepted into the United Kingdom—far fewer, so far, than the number that we were led to expect. They cannot yet be accorded the basic decency of being joined by their closest relatives, because technically they are not dependent—although the cultural and financial reality is that they are entirely dependent: they could rely on no one else if the rest of the family came here as refugees.

The first priority is for the Government to exercise a little humility in regard to what they are doing about refugees from the former Yugoslavia. I do not think that any hon. Member is likely to vote against the motion, because something is better than nothing; 85 per cent. of the cost that falls to local authorities in England and Wales is better than nothing.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): What about Scotland?

Mr. Hughes: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. He is speaking not just for himself, but for his Scottish colleagues. The distinction between the treatment of Scotland and that of England and Wales is unfair, both generally and specifically—for instance, in regard to section 11 grants. The hon. Gentleman makes his case well; perhaps one of his hon. Friends will add to it.

Let me make a generic point. Although we are using the report to top up funds for British local authorities where refugees are settling, in many respects we are probably not yet dealing adequately with the fundamental problem. We must ensure that, when the moment of need arises, people can come into this country to be with their families. I am glad that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department is present. This case, along with others, will wing its way to his desk very quickly. I hope and expect that he will be generous; I do not expect the Government to be difficult about the matter. I trust that it will not be a question of special pleading, and that the basic merits of the case will facilitate the proceedings.

The hon. Members for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) and for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) have referred to the haphazard way in which refugees settle, in the first few days, in the country to which they have fled. Most settle in constituencies, districts and boroughs that contain airports. Many come to urban areas—to the capital, and to cities such as that represented by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), where there is a settled immigrant community. Many, however, come to places where it has not been traditional for them to settle as a race, a people or an ethnic group. They come because that is the first place where somebody makes them an offer.

I make no complaints about the number of refugees who have come to Southwark, because it is a moral duty, a theological duty and, some of us would say, a clearly Christian duty, for the rich world to accommodate refugees. But we have had a succession of refugees, from Somalia, from Eritrea and from Vietnam. Many of those people have come to Southwark not because there were hundreds of other people from their countries here before, but because it was the first available place where they could be housed.

My local authority, Southwark, and all the other local authorities, are left to pick up some of the tab because the money from the Government will fall short. The report gives only, at best, 85 per cent. of the money. There may be an argument that the local authority should make a contribution. I do not necessarily dissent from that, but the issue is the fair spread of contributions, when the responsibility is an overall British responsibility. I do not want to be misunderstood; I make no complaint about the fact that we have our share of refugees. My argument is that we as a nation have a duty, which I hope that we shall continue to have, to accommodate refugees.

Compared with most European Community countries, we have been pretty mean in accommodating refugees from the former Yugoslavia. The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department looks as if he disagrees, but the number of people who have come into this country recently as refugees, compared with the numbers going into Germany, Denmark and Luxembourg, for example, are small in relation to our population.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Charles Wardle): I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and I hope that he will bear in mind the fact that the large numbers of people who have gone to Germany from the war-torn zone of Yugoslavia have not done so as a result of any political decision made in Germany. The German Government have not decided to enable those people to enter; they have simply arrived across the frontier. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will also bear in mind the fact that since September 1991 about 70,000 people from former Yugloslavia have come here in one capacity or another.

Mr. Hughes: I do not disagree with either of the Minister's comments. I know what the figures are for the refugee entry that we have allowed, in terms of heads of families and their dependants. I know, too, that the rate has slowed down and that we have still not reached the target. I do not deny what the Minister has said—that, in terms of the number of people who are here because they cannot be where they want to be, the relative burden on us, as a rich country, is smaller than the burden on other countries.

Mr. Corbyn: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is aware of the fact, but the report does not apply to the generality of refugees, but only to those from former Yugoslavia. Many of the problems that his constituency and mine gladly face—in the sense that we are happy to support people who are refugees—will get no recognition and no help from central Government.

Mr. Hughes: I understand that. I know that the order relates only to the former Yugoslavia. One of my complaints is that the Government may be trying to present a compassionate face—in connection with the former Yugoslavia they may have some justification for doing so—when their general response over the years to the needs of local authorities dealing with refugees has not been especially generous or consistent. I agree with the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has been misled by the hon. Member for Islington, North, who arrived late. The report relates not to one grant but to two. One concerns refugees from former Yugoslavia, but the other concerns unaccompanied children, wherever they may come from throughout the world.

Mr. Corbyn: What difference does that make? That proves my point.

Mr. Hughes: I accept what the Minister says, but the assistance for refugees who are not unaccompanied children is specific to former Yugoslavia. I believe that the House is clear about that, and I do not want to raise a false issue. The report is specifically designed to deal with the problem of refugees from Yugoslavia, and to give local authorities in England and Wales 85 per cent. of the funding to deal with certain categories of refugees that result from that problem.

I have two specific points to make about the detail of the report. The first is about section 11 funding. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) said that the provision was absent in Scotland. It is not as generous as it might appear. In many cases, section 11 funding has been reduced from 75 to 50 per cent. Therefore, the report assists in making up a considerably larger gap in meeting continuing needs in the education sector. They are important needs which local authorities and their schools and teachers, with the best will in the world, find it extremely difficult to meet.

In schools such as some in my constituency, there are 28 mother tongues. Each time that a new category of student armies—say youngsters from Yugoslavia who speak Serbo-Croat or whatever—they have to be provided for. I hope that we shall equally be able to grant fund people such as the students to whom I referred at the beginning of my speech who will want to go to university, polytechnic or college to continue their education.

My second point has been referred to by others. What the Minister said about the review of the system for allocating funding and assessing needs is important. The Government are doing a general review. The standard spending assessment mechanism needs to be far more accurate and honest in reflecting differential need, and far more responsive. I have always taken the view that the best judges of what is the best system, if they can agree—I believe that if they are asked to agree, they will—are the local authorities.

I hope that, at the end of the review, the system for making sure that local authorities are compensated for dealing with particular burdens such as those that fall across all the sectors dealing with refugees is one that the local authorities propose and support. If we all knew that the report and others like it came to the House blessed in every detail by the local authority associations in England and Wales and by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the House would be much happier.

11.16 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I am obviously pleased that some money is being provided for refugees from ex-Yugoslavia and unaccompanied children. I shall speak about the shortcomings of the proposals, but I welcome the provision of some money.

The proposals seem to be a minor, low-key response to what for many local authorities is a major problem. They have to cope with large numbers of refugees. It is a pity that the proposals coincide with other action by the Government which will be prejudicial to the interests of refugees. The cut in section 11 funding from 75 per cent. now to 57 per cent. in 1994-95, and eventually to 50 per cent., is particularly prejudicial. It is a pity that that is happening at the same time as the Government have accepted a private Member's Bill which I originated to widen the definition of section 11 funding and make more refugees eligible to receive the money. I hope that the Government will see that that money needs to be matched by a commitment to reverse the cuts.

There seem to be several problems with the specific grant which is the subject of the order. The first problem is the time limitations. The Minister made it clear that he

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saw the money as a one-off grant. He did not envisage the grant being made in future years, when he expected the SSA system to deal with funding. But that limitation is not the only problem.

If one reads the report carefully, one finds that it covers only refugees from ex-Yugoslavia who arrived between 1 April 1992 and 6 November 1992, when the visa regime was introduced. One consequence will be that many of the Bosnian refugees whom we will accept through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees programme will not be eligible for funding because they will have arrived after the date on which the order ran out.

It would be too much to expect a retroactive order, but, as has been pointed out, in the past two or three years some London boroughs have spent large amounts of money dealing with unaccompanied children, particularly those who arrived from Eritrea in 1990.

It is strange that we still rely on a formula to distribute grant to local authorities to deal with refugees which was originally devised to deal with the effects of hurricanes, which is what the Bellwin formula was when it was first produced. The last time that it was used was in 1989 when large numbers of Kurdish refugees arrived in this country. I recall then being part of a local authority delegation to the Department of the Environment to discuss that issue.

The issue now, as then, is that the decision whether to admit refugees or asylum seekers to this country is not for local authorities but for the Government or Government agencies. Local authorities have little, if any, control over how many people arrive in their areas at any one time. That depends on existing communities, whether the local authority is located near an airport or railway station and how sympathetic the local authority is.

There is no doubt that which local authorities are likely to adopt a sympathetic attitude to new arrivals is spread by word of mouth, and those that are rightly sympathetic end up being financially penalised. My borough will have to spend more than £300,000 before it qualifies for any money whatever, and some London boroughs will have to spend approaching £500,000.

Local authorities with tight budgets simply do not hold such contingency funds which are not earmarked. Their contingency budgets are set aside to deal with pay rises, interest rate changes and inflation during the year. They simply do not have such amounts of money sitting around not already earmarked.

I am also concerned about the limitations on eligibility. I have already mentioned the time limits and who is eligible from the former Yugoslavia, but what will happen to other refugees? What will happen to local authorities, such as those in east London, where there have been significant arrivals in the past two or three years from Sri Lanka and Somalia? Exactly the same points on dependants apply to those people as to people coming from the former Yugoslavia. Both groups come from countries that have been affected by war and human rights abuses and exactly the same conditions of acceptance of refugees apply to them as to those from the former Yugoslavia.

Why do we have to wait for a crisis before money is found? Why is there no coherent resettlement programme? Why do we have to rely so much on the voluntary sector, the Refugee Council, the refugee arrivals project and on community groups? It is often the community groups that end up putting in a great deal of effort, work and resources to support new arrivals.

It simply is not the case that standard spending assessments can make adequate allowance for such costs. The Minister really gave the game away when he talked about the 1991 census soon being available. That is already two years out of date. It can in no way cope with people who have arrived since. We all know what happens between censuses. The census used for standard spending assessments becomes more and more out of date and unreliable.

To quote London average figures is no answer either. As everyone knows, refugees are not evenly distributed. Even within London, which attracts far more refugees than many other areas of the country, some London boroughs have far more refugees within their boundaries than others. SSAs are simply not sensitive enough to cope with differences between one local authority and its neighbour or with the changes that take place from one year to the next when large numbers of people arrive. We know that there are always anomalies in SSAs. The factors that affect SSAs in large measure are not the arrival of refugees——

Mr. Corbyn: On the point about the attitudes of local authorities, is my hon. Friend aware that the whole system is a positive disincentive to local authorities at the point of arrival and a positive encouragement to them to send them on elsewhere? I am sure that he will be aware that in London a surprisingly small number of refugees are assisted by Westminster city council and a much larger number by councils surrounding the City of Westminster. He can draw his own conclusions from that.

Mr. Gerrard: That is absolutely right, and that pattern is repeated across the country: refugees tend to be concentrated in certain areas, often depending on how sympathetic a local authority is.

Local authorities are being put in the invidious position of having to cut services for other people to provide for refugees. The potential that that creates for resentment and for racism should not be underestimated. The services and items of expenditure that are listed as eligible are virtually all related to temporary services. No doubt it will be argued that SSAs will cover the rest. But how temporary is temporary? As many hon. Members have pointed out, refugees do not stay for six months and then go away.

Local authorities that try to avoid, for example, the use of temporary accommodation, and whose policies are, wherever possible, to put people into permanent accommodation straight away, are the ones who suffer because they do not qualify for the grants that are proposed. In future, the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Bill will force local authorities into using more temporary accommodation and that will entail much greater cost.

Not all local authorities have to deal with refugees. There are good reasons—often to do with community—why refugees end up in certain local authority areas. We know that local authorities vary considerably in the extent to which they take their responsibilities seriously. At present, those which do take them seriously are penalised. The Government should be prepared to accept their responsibility, but the report does little other than to emphasise the inadequacy of what they are prepared to do.

11.27 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I refer in particular to the plight of refugees from former Yugoslavia: first, because, when I visited both Croatia and Bosnia with the Select Committee on Defence back in February, I saw a little of the mayhem from which people are trying to escape; and, secondly, because I have in my constituency a small reception centre for some of the refugees from Bosnia who have been accepted by Britain. That reception centre is run by the Scottish Refugee Council at Cheylesmore lodge in North Berwick and I may say that people have rightly been made immensely welcome by my constituents. I pay tribute to all the voluntary agencies and to everyone else who has been involved.

I am afraid that there is a slight contrast between the enthusiasm and efficiency of the Scottish Refugee Council in its work and the kind of support that has been forthcoming from central Government. I see the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department in his place. He may recall that I spoke to him and was in touch with his office. I ended up having to table a parliamentary question to ensure that the initial tranche of £75,000 actually got through to the Scottish Refugee Council to provide for the needs of those refugees.

The situation was absurd. These people had arrived from Bosnia and there they were in a former local authority old people's home which had been refurbished using voluntary work over the weekend. The advice that came from the Home Office when the money did not come through was, "Oh dear. We are in the process of changing our accounting system. Can't they get a loan from the bank to tide them over for a bit?" The money came through, and so far, so good. I understand that the next tranche is due shortly and I hope that we will not have the same problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) made the point that the order does not apply to Scotland. I appreciate that not as many refugees come to Scotland as come to other parts of the United Kingdom, but we do have refugees. Certainly, there are the refugees in my constituency to whom I referred. Local authorities are providing back-up and incurring costs and they should be able to get the support that they require to cover those costs.

I stress that the refugees in my constituency are extremely welcome. I am delighted that many of them are resettling in public sector housing in my constituency. However, it would be helpful if the local authority could get an additional capital allocation to compensate for the fact that some of the limited housing stock is being made available to them. Such matters should be taken into account and I fear that that is not happening at present. The same point could be made about education costs and other costs that arise.

There is no way in which the contribution to local authorities in England is begrudged in any way, but the Government should put in place a system for Scotland. It is right that we are debating the order for a special grant for local authorities in England which are affected, but why do we not have something equivalent to support local authorities in Scotland?

I visited the reception centre in North Berwick and was concerned to hear reports of difficulties involving dependants coming to join their families. This point was raised by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). I am worried to hear that these people are experiencing difficulties with genuine dependants—they may not be direct relations but they are dependants—who are apparently finding it difficult to join their families who have been evacuated to Scotland.

I wish that we could do more to make it possible for those people to remain in their own country. However, as the United Nations is conspicuously failing to do that, it is right that we should give some of those people a safe haven here. We probably need more of them. Let us get our act together and ensure that there is proper back-up for local authorities, not only in England but in Scotland.

11.32 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I apologise to the House for missing the Minister's speech and part of that of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson). I was detained outside on an extremely urgent matter and that is the reason why I missed those speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) has given me a full and accurate account of everything that was said. I am sure that the Minister will trust my hon. Friend to relay his words to me. Perhaps not, but we can all read *Hansard* tomorrow.

My brief point—because I want to give the Minister sufficient time to reply—is that we live in a world in which a large number of people are forced to seek refuge in other countries. The experience of many of those people in their own countries is absolutely horrific. When they finally arrive at a place of safety—in this case, we are talking about this country—they obviously need help, support, consideration and recognition, but they also need respect.

We should recognise that those who seek asylum here are not coming here to be supplicants for the rest of their lives. They have suffered a terrible defeat. They want to make a positive contribution to our society in education, health and many other areas. The enormous achievements of former refugees must also be recognised. I refer to those who fled from Nazi Germany in the 1930s and the enormous contribution that they have made in so many areas, as well as those from Chile, Vietnam, Iran, Iraq and many other places. We should recognise the positive achievements and not allow the debate to be dragged into the gutter by the xenophobia of some of the popular press in this country. It is important that we recognise that.

There are many inadequacies in the Government's strategy for dealing with this matter. I have had experience of dealing with refugees from a large number of different places and circumstances. I recall the terrible experience of the unaccompanied Eritrean children who arrived here in 1990. There were various reasons why they were unaccompanied. There were understandable reasons why their documents were destroyed, why they sought refuge in this country and why their parents sent them here. Their parents felt that it was no longer safe to keep their children in that country and, because they could not get away, they put their children on planes to come here.

I hope that the Government recognise that the attitude adopted by local authorities at that time was variable, to put it mildly. Some did a great deal to support those unaccompanied children, but they ended up with a large bill because they are demanding children who need help and support.

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

The problem with the order is that it applies solely to the former Yugoslavia and all unaccompanied children. I am glad that it applies to all such children, but I want to see it extended to provide greater guarantees for authorities and refugees. I do not believe that it is likely, as the Minister so grandly says, that future SSAs will bear in mind the needs of refugee communities. Up to now, they have not. Unless some change is made to the way in which SSAs are calculated, I do not see any likelihood of any future change.

I have the utmost sympathy for all the refugees from the former Yugoslavia. I do not believe that our country has done enough for refugees from Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia or wherever. We must do far more and history will not look kindly on the attitude shown to those refugees who have sought asylum. Their situation is terrible and they deserve support. There are, however, refugees from Somalia, Zaire, Angola, Mozambique and many other places who have been subject to equally horrific experiences.

Horror and disturbances do not occur where the BBC and Kate Adie happen to be; they occur where they happen—in many other places other than the former Yugoslavia. The Government scheme for the former Yugoslavia may be inadequate and limited—it does not apply to refugees in Scotland—but if they can introduce it for that country, the same should be introduced for people from other parts of the world.

11.36 pm

Mr. Baldry: With the leave of the House, I will reply to the debate.

Everyone who has spoken has welcomed the report and the grants included in it. It has been a debate about questions and issues and I know that hon. Members have no intention of dividing the House on the order.

The crux of the matter is whether some special grant should be introduced to deal with refugees. It is important to note that the pressures that refugees bring to bear on local services are not different in kind from the pressures that anyone with distinctive needs places on a local authority.

The most appropriate means of central support for local government is through the distribution of revenue support grant, based on SSAs. In general, we believe that authorities should have sufficient resources to cover the costs incurred by asylum seekers and refugees.

The kinds of pressure that refugees exert on local services are picked up in the SSA. Those refugees do not impose additional costs on local authorities because they are refugees; extra costs are incurred because many refugees, though not all, place extra demands on the housing, education and social services provided by those authorities.

The need for such services in an area is already reflected in the SSA. The SSAs of those local authorities in which refugees tend to congregate, particularly in London, are generally higher than those of other authorities precisely because those authorities face the spending pressures that tend to be associated with the presence of refugees. As they are assimilated into the local population, the personal circumstances and characteristics of the refugees are recorded in the various indicators used to calculate SSAs, so that the costs imposed by them are reflected in the resources available to a given area.

Concern has been expressed about the threshold that local authorities must reach before they qualify for grant. It is important to remember that that threshold is, in effect, the equivalent of the product of a tuppenny rate, under the old system, and the equivalent of £5 for a band D equivalent under the council tax. It is not unreasonable to expect local authorities to be able to meet that sort of contingency, and rightly so.

It is also important to appreciate that not all local authorities face the sort of pressures described tonight. For example, Birmingham estimates that this year its costs, under this grant scheme, will be £71,000, which is equivalent to only 0·008 per cent. of its total spending. It is not unreasonable to expect an authority in those circumstances to be able to meet that expenditure out of its contingency and reserve funds.

The order relates to two grants. The first is for Yugoslav refugees and the second is for unaccompanied children. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) asked how much I thought we would be paying out in grants. As I made clear in my opening comments, it may be somewhere between £3 million and £4 million. I was asked whether I would meet local authority representatives.

As I also made clear, we are perfectly prepared to consider any constructive suggestions about how the methodology of the standard spending assessments could be improved to accommodate refugees but, as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said, that methodology must be robust. We are undertaking a comprehensive review of the SSAs and I anticipate that, within the context of that review, the local authority associations, particularly those in London, will want to make their views known as to how the SSA formula could apply. We shall listen to those views positively.

I was asked whether I would make available to the House an annual report on asylum seekers. I am prepared to provide details to the House on matters for which I am responsible as and when they are requested.

I welcome the constructive comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) and for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst). I pay tribute to the constructive way in which their local authorities, and many other local authorities, have met the challenges with which they have been confronted. However, it is important to make it clear to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge, who is concerned about unaccompanied children, that the number of unaccompanied children appears to be dropping. In April this year, the total was one from the Ivory Coast, one from Kenya, one from Lebanon, four from Somalia, one from Sri Lanka, one from Turkey and three from Zaire. So we must put the matter into context.

The hon. Members for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) and for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) asked what happens in Scotland. It is fair to point out that the Scottish Office is in consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the question of refugees, and that COSLA has so far received no representations from member authorities about additional burdens being placed on them by the need to provide services for refugees.

I recognise that the hon. Member for East Lothian has a number of refugee families in his constituency. He described the circumstances relating to them, and I shall draw the attention of ministerial colleagues in the Scottish Office to the points that he raised.

The order concerns two grants that have been devised because we recognise that special circumstances relate to the Yugoslav refugees and unaccompanied children. But the methodology of allocating money should enable local authorities to make adequate provision for refugees within their areas. I have no doubt that they can do that.

Of those London authorities likely to qualify for grant for unaccompanied children this year, no authority that will not qualify comes within more than half of the threshold. So very few local authorities will have incurred significant expenditure this year on the two areas that we are considering. For example, the London borough of Barking estimates that it will spend only £15,500; Barnet estimates that it will spend £24,000; Kensington and Chelsea will receive grant; and the London borough of Merton estimates that it will spend £68,000.

We are ensuring that those local authorities that are making significant contributions will be refunded——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business).*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Special Grant Report (No. 8) (House of Commons Paper No. 724), which was laid before this House on 14th June, be approved.

St. Bartholomew's and Royal London Hospitals

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

11.44 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): The future of hospitals such as St. Bartholomew's raises questions about the very nature of civilisation. The doctors at the hospital are engaged in a war against disease, perhaps the noblest activity known to mankind. The Secretary of State and her acolytes, who plague the pestilential sewers of government, are engaged in a war against the doctors and their supporters, the patients and the public.

Rarely in politics can there have been an issue which so cruelly defines the difference between right and wrong and where the victims are the most vulnerably poor among us, while the persecutors are so arrogantly powerful.

Bart's was founded by a miracle in 1123, when the monk Raherer had a visitation from God. God has stood by the hospital. Amazingly, our greatest cathedral, St. Paul's, was denounced by the Secretary of State for praying to God to save the hospital. However, the Secretary of State, in turn, was denounced in excoriating terms by the Catholic priest who took the service which preceded this year's dinner at the medical college, at which I was the guest of honour. The Church of England and the Catholic Church may be divided on many things, but they are united in their ecumenical contempt for the Secretary of State.

It is just possible that we are on the verge of another miracle, and that the Secretary of State will be prevented from closing Bart's. I have spoken to a number of barristers and judges about the chances of success of a judicial review of the Government's actions. They are agreed that there is a prima facie case of improper and unlawful conduct on the part of the Secretary of State, on the part of Admiral Staveley, the regional chairman, and on the part of Sir Tim Chessels, chairman of the London Implementation Group.

Judicial review proceedings could be instigated by Bart's, by the community health council, by the City of London corporation, by Hackney, by Islington or by the Save Bart's Campaign, or by all of them together. They could also be instituted by the special trustees who administer the £100 million endowments to prevent those moneys, given by loving and grateful supporters of Bart's down the years, from being stolen by the Government. Perhaps the Minister will confirm tonight that, if Bart's closes—the Treasury wants that money—there would have to be legislation to make the theft of the endowments lawful.

Last week, along with Jeffrey Blum, a victim of the Baltic Exchange bomb, and Bart's cardiac specialist Dr. Duncan Dymond, I met Admiral Staveley to protest about the proposal to close the accident and emergency department. Mr. Blum, a shipbroker from the City, told the admiral that he would be dead if the Secretary of State had had her way earlier and shut the accident and emergency department. Many people feel that the Secretary of State has betrayed the City of London and given succour to the IRA, for whom the higher the body count the better is the publicity.

[Mr. Brian Sedgemore]

The consultation process on the proposal to close the accident and emergency department brought forth incandescent rage from the people of Hackney and the City of London. The admiral asked a mere 100 individuals and institutions for their views in the consultation process, but to his amazement received about 41,000 responses, including from every major financial institution in the city, every major company, almost every set of chambers and every firm of accountants. Such is the admiral's contempt for the democratic process that he complains that those people in the City have been got at.

No fewer than 99·95 per cent. of those who responded called for the retention of the accident and emergency department, but earlier this afternoon, at a meeting which I attended, the admiral, acting unlawfully on behalf of the Secretary of State, announced that he would recommend the closure of the department. Astonishingly, the admiral ignored the unanimous views of hon. Members, peers of the realm, local authorities, family health services authorities, general practitioners, community health councils, the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of Surgeons, the Royal College of Obstetricians and the local purchaser.

What we have witnessed is not consultation, but precision Stalinism on the part of people so ignorant that this afternoon I found myself involuntarily gasping with disbelief at what they were saying.

One must understand that the temporary reprieve given to the accident and emergency department pending the build-up of facilities elsewhere, including the Homerton —which is bound to take years—and the qualifications with which the closure decision is surrounded are essentially devices to satisfy the judges because the admiral expects to be taken to court. He knows that this is the second bogus consultation process on Bart's over which he has presided in the past year—the other involved the abolition of the trust. The courts have held that consultation is unlawful where decisions carried out are decided before the consultation process begins.

The City of London corporation has recently been talking seriously of setting up a private accident and emergency department at Bart's, through the use of private bonds. Will the Minister tell us tonight whether the charges of private accident and emergency departments in NHS hospitals will be regulated by the Government? I see that the Minister looks shocked—perhaps he will tell us whether patients from Hackney and Islington who cannot afford the entry fee will be refused admission, as in America.

A week ago, six distinguished old grey men in suits presented their paper plans for the future of London specialties. Their plans were, for the most part, designed to appease the Secretary of State. Like Neville Chamberlain, who had a little bit of paper to appease a great dictator, the six men were well intentioned, but foolish. The specialty review on cancer recommended that cancer services provided by Bart's should be moved to the Royal London site. Few recommendations in the history of medicine can have been as brazenly unjustified as that one.

Consultants John Shepherd, the oncology gynaecologist, Maurice Slevin, head of chemotherapy for solid cancers, Professor Andrew Lister, who looks after chemotherapy for blood cancers, and Professor Eden, who deals with children, made that clear to me when I discussed the review with them, line by line. They are four of the best specialists in Britain—indeed, the world. They work in a unit of international renown which is admitted by everyone in the medical world to be superior in clinical facilities and research to the small unit that exists at the Royal London.

The data show that Barts gets better results of paediatric tumours than any other hospital in the country. Although the data are more difficult to interpret, the same is probably true of ovarian cancer. The head of the review team, Dr. Paine—a competent radiotherapist who is anxious to climb the greasy pole of administration—now intends to destroy the priceless asset.

Dr. Paine's criticism that the cancer services are too dispersed is plain silly. As I was shown round every inch of them, I realised that what Bart's has is not only state-of-the-art medicine, but state-of-the-art management and organisation. It is a pity that Dr. Paine did not compare what exists at Bart's with what exists at the London.

Dr. Paine becomes incomprehensible when he writes of a

"less complete range of regional specialties"

than is available at the London. Bart's deals with every kind of cancer, and has all the specialties in addition to cancer which any major hospital has. Ultimately, the cancer review comes down to the idiotic argument that, as Tomlinson says that Bart's should close and the Secretary of State is besotted by this lunatic idea, the services at Bart's will have to be moved to the London hospital in order to save them.

The same false argument can be seen more graphically on page 7 of the executive summary of the neuroscience review prepared by Mr. Rab Hide. I was seven years old when I first realised the logical fallacy behind that sort of circular argument. Later, when I studied logic at university, I learned how to formalise the fallacy. My correspondence with Mr. Hide and his protestations of innocence on television only serve to suggest that he is guilty as charged of lack of independence.

Worse, Mr. Hide has got his facts wrong about the financial position of Bart's. I assume that the London Implementation Group has deliberately misled him, as it was misleading Ministers a few months back.

The cardiac review proposes shutting down another famous department of excellence at Bart's. It says that, as Bart's has the smallest unit, its services should be moved to the London. It is a pity that Professor Smith, who headed the review, got his database wrong. Despite the fact that Bart's has marginally fewer facilities than the London, it carries out more cardiac procedures—that is to say, it gives better value for money, and, I might add, better treatment.

In 1991-92, Bart's carried out 1,249 diagnostic coronary angiograms, compared with 946 at the London. Professor Smith does not mention this. Bart's carried out 216 balloon dilatation procedures—angioplasty—compared with 140 at the London. Professor Smith does not mention this. Bart's carried out 442 pacemaker procedures and electrical investigations, compared with 247 at the London. Professor Smith does not mention this.

When it comes to the grand total of angiograms and balloon and electrical procedures, including pacemakers, the figures are 1,907 for Bart's and 1,333 for the London. These figures are achieved with slightly fewer beds at Bart's. It is true that, in 1991-92, the London performed

789 open heart operations, compared with 627 at Bart's. Bart's has approval and funding for a third heart surgeon, but, because of the uncertainty created by the Secretary of State, no appointment can be made at the moment.

Dr. Duncan Dymond has written to me, following my talk with him, about what he describes as "crass errors" in the cardiac review. I challenge the Minister to challenge Dr. Dymond. For example, the review's figures for coronary bypass operations are hopelessly wrong. Moreover, as regards quality, the review takes no account of the issue that matters most—a comparison of the condition of patients when they enter the hospital with their condition when they leave. Dr. Dymond has offered to debate these matters publicly with Professor Smith. Professor Smith should now put up or shut up.

Professor Raine, head of the Bart's renal unit, told me yesterday that Professor Mallick, who headed the specialty review team, has not been able to give a single reason coming within his terms of reference for moving the Bart's unit to the London. Indeed, Professor Mallick, for the review team, admits that Bart's has better clinical facilities and a better academic record than the London.

However, Professor Raine criticises the review team for failing to report that, whereas Bart's has provided satellite units for 15 years, and recently opened one at Wanstead, the London hospital, which is still living in the past, has none. Nor did the review team point out that, in Richard Wood, Bart's has the only professor of surgery in central London who is a renal transplant specialist. What—I must ask Professor Mallick, through the Minister tonight—are the reasons for these curious omissions?

Professor Raine, who is scornful of the access arguments in the review, added:

"I am not what you'd call a Bart's man. I come from Oxford, so I can view these things dispassionately. Whilst I am prepared for change, and would be able to work with people from London, the case for moving facilities from the London to Bart's is much stronger than the case for moving facilities from Bart's to the London."

Moreover, on quality, Professor Raine, in a letter to me, points out that Bart's is the only renal unit in central London for all dialyses to undergo urea kinetic modelling, which is the accepted standard provision for adequate dialysis and is recommended by the pending Renal Association quality of care guidelines.

With regard to the children's review, Professor Eden tells me that the closure, in east London, of Bart's and the Queen Elizabeth hospital would produce a major beds shortfall of 120 to 140 in one of the most deprived areas of the country, where nearly one quarter of the population would be affected.

However, all is not lost. The smirks are about to come off the faces of those at the London hospital who have been telling me recently that the Bart's Smithfield site will be cleared within two years. That was the Secretary of State's plan, but Sir Derek Boorman, who is to be chairman of the new merged trust, and Gerry Green, the new chief executive, realise that this is impossible without creating chaos in the national health service in the east end. I have discussed the future with Sir Derek.

Even if the Secretary of State accepts the recommendations of the specialty reviews, and even if it is decided to close Bart's eventually, there will now be a medium-term strategy for five to eight years, during which some facilities will move from the London to Bart's and some from Bart's to the London. Effectively, Bart's has been reprieved until the end of the century, while the Department of Health begs the Treasury for cash to invest in new facilities for the east end. Hundreds of millions of pounds could be involved, which this bankrupt Government simply do not have.

A steering group from Bart's, the Royal London and the London Chest has been set up to negotiate the medium-term strategy for the merger. Some, like the Secretary of State, will see the strategy as a prelude to the closure of Bart's, but I suspect that she will be long forgotten before it has worked its way through. Others will see it as a breathing space during which Bart's can regroup. On this side of the House, we must pledge ourselves to ensuring that that is the case, and show that it is not only in films and novels that good can triumph over evil and strength can be built in adversity.

Meanwhile, my message to Ministers tonight from Bart's, its patients and supporters is a time-honoured one —"We won't let you bastards grind us down."

12 midnight

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): It is a pleasure to be here tonight to debate the future of Bart's with the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore).

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is faced with the fact that there are too many hospitals and too many acute beds to service the current population of London. There is an imbalance in the ratio for London compared with those for areas outside London. Her predecessors faced that problem and her successors will face it. Rhetoric will not make it go away, however amusing the hon. Gentleman's rhetoric might be.

There is no reason why a proportionately larger amount of money should be spent per unit of population in London than is spent outside London. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should spend some time visiting hospitals outside London. He might then appreciate that there are excellent hospitals, and that people must be treated outside London. The strange diabolical motives that he attributed to my right hon. Friend simply made him sound ridiculous.

A number of changes have been proposed, so I want to reassure the House that the overriding priority is the overall patient care for London and its impact on the surrounding areas. We have a responsibility not just for London, but for the whole of the national health service. It is a priority for all the relevant agencies, purchasers of health care, providers and, of course, the Government.

As the hon. Gentleman well knows—he has become something of an expert—the Tomlinson report made some radical recommendations in response to the problems of health care in inner London, to which I have just referred. The recommendation for a shift in resources from acute hospitals to primary care will result in fewer hospital beds and a reduction in the number of sites where acute services are delivered. The problems of the relationship between acute beds and London's population will become more difficult as more and more facilities, in all sorts of specialties, are established outside London, especially just outside London and in the home counties.

I shall deal with some of the specific concerns raised by the hon. Gentleman about the specialty reviews, but I want to put into context the recent press reports about possible changes.

[Mr. Tom Sackville]

The specialty review reports are independent advice to Ministers. The reports are not policy, and certainly will not alone determine the future pattern of services. The review reports will not determine the future pattern. The advice will be part of a complex jigsaw of elements which will together inform decisions about future service configuration. Other important elements are, for example, a review of special health authority research—due to be published later this month; hospital site appraisals, already under way; and the views of local purchasers and academic interests. The London Implementation Group will ensure that the implications of the review's recommendations, including the implications for other acute services and academic and teaching interests, are fully assessed.

Proposals for change to the pattern of services will be developed mostly at local level and will be presented to Ministers in the autumn. Over the summer, the London Implementation Group will be working to take this process forward and will maintain the direction and momentum of the strategy set out in "Making London Better". Before any changes are considered, Ministers will need to be convinced that they offer real benefits to patients overall as well as value for money. There will be full public consultation on major proposals to close or relocate services.

The Tomlinson report recognised that there was a longstanding need for rationalisation of services between the Royal London and Bart's and for progress towards the full integration of clinical undergraduate teaching. It recommended that the City and east London area would be better served by a merged hospital bringing together the best of both institutions. It proposed that a single management unit be created to embrace St. Bart's and the Royal London and that, in the light of this, the Bart's trust proposal should not proceed as planned.

In "Making London Better", the Government accepted that Bart's could not continue in its present form and outlined three options for the hospital: the closure of the Bart's Smithfield site; the management of Bart's, the Royal London hospital and the London chest hospital to merge to form a new combined trust; and Bart's to be retained as a much smaller specialist hospital, subject to the specialty reviews and purchasers accepting its costs.

North East Thames regional health authority is carrying out an appraisal of these options, taking into account the views of purchasing health authorities and GPs with a view to making firm proposals by the autumn. The specialty review recommendations will be assessed as part of these appraisals.

In addition, "Making London Better" accepted that other significant changes will be needed to provide a better pattern of services for the local population in the east of London. The people of Hackney and the surrounding area would be best served by the development of the Homerton hospital to meet their needs. Indeed, a further phase of development at the Homerton hospital is now getting under way, as the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch knows.

As I have said, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to respond to his remarks.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 7 July 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

For the county constituency of Christchurch, in the room of the hon. Robert James Adley Esquire, deceased. —*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Royal High School

1. **Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the Crown Office to vacate the old Royal High school in Edinburgh; and what plans he has for the future use of the building.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): The Crown Office is expected to vacate the old Royal High school at the beginning of 1994. The building is the responsibility of Property Holdings, which is currently considering its future.

Mr. Robertson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given that the Crown Office is leaving the old Royal High school, that it costs £150,000 per annum to maintain and keep secure, and that it was used only three times last year, surely the time has come for the Government to dispose of the building, which has become a monument to and a relic of the failed and discredited policy of the Labour party? Does he furthermore agree that it would make an ideal art gallery or museum of Scottish history?

Mr. Lang: The building is not the direct responsibility of the Scottish Office, but the developments that I have just described show the need for the Government to consider where future meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee —if and when in Edinburgh—should take place. There is no shortage of alternative buildings in Edinburgh.

Mr. Canavan: Would not it be in everyone's best interests if the Scottish Parliament moved into the old high school building? The Crown Office team could move across the road to the ministerial suite at the Scottish Office, and the ministerial team at the Scottish Office could be evicted to the top of Leith walk, where I am sure there is a convenient phone box big enough to hold them and their dwindling band of supporters in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: If the hon. Gentleman has given us a glimpse of the Labour party's manifesto for the next general election, I look forward to that campaign.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the Secretary of State recall that three quarters of the Scottish people voted for a Scottish Parliament, and would much prefer that that Parliament met in the Royal High school? Would not it be outrageous if the Government's profiteering dogma led to that building being used for any other purpose? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Scottish people would much prefer their elected representatives to discuss, for example, their local government than to have policies handed down to them in dribs and drabs by leaked documents in a thoroughly unacceptable way?

Mr. Lang: The Royal High school was built as a school —it may have been an appropriate design for a school in its day—but the building has no special significance as regards the deliberations of the House or its Committee. If it stands as anything, perhaps it is as a monument to the folly of the last Labour Government who, in anticipation of the outcome of a referendum and of a subsequent general election, spent hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money and subsequently found themselves rejected in a referendum and a general election.

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

2. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of COSLA to discuss the provision of services in Scotland.

5. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of COSLA to discuss the provision of services in Scotland.

12. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet COSLA to discuss the provision of local government services in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend the Minister for industry and local government and I will be meeting representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on Friday this week as part of the normal consultation on local government finance matters.

Mr. McMaster: May I jolt the Secretary of State's memory back to the time when he first mooted that stupid plan to reorganise local government in Scotland? Does he recall that the Opposition predicted then that he was not about to embark on a voyage of discovery, because he knew precisely where his journey would lead? If the stories in *The Scotsman* are right—I suspect that they are not far wrong—how does the Secretary of State justify treating the House and the people of Scotland with such arrogant contempt? Which Minister authorised the leak or, if it was not authorised, what action has the right hon. Gentleman taken to find the source? How can he deny that the purpose of the exercise is to save the last few Tory enclaves in Scotland? Does he seriously expect anyone to believe that the whole blatant, bogus, bankrupt exercise is anything other than a squalid and corrupt piece of gerrymandering by a squalid and corrupt Government?

Mr. Lang: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that it is not normal practice to comment on allegedly leaked documents. The proposals for local government reform that we shall bring before the House shortly will be the outcome of a longer, more detailed and comprehensive consultation process than any previous Government

initiative that I can remember. It is encouraging that, far from being unpopular, local government reform is rising consistently in the opinion polls.

Mr. Norman Hogg: If local government reform is rising in public opinion polls, the same is certainly not happening to the prestige of the Secretary of State for Scotland, which is hitting a new low. Surely the leaks in *The Scotsman*, which have not been denied by anyone in the Government, confirm that the Secretary of State has lost his hold on the Scottish Office administration, and that something really has to be done about it. It is not good enough to treat the representatives of Scottish local authorities with such contempt. They are elected in their own right, and speak for the people of Scotland in a way that the Secretary of State could not hope to achieve.

Mr. Lang: Setting aside the hon. Gentleman's last remark, which questions both the validity of election to this place and the importance of this Parliament for Scotland, as for the rest of the United Kingdom, allow me to emphasise that I have considerable respect for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which is why I, along with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland responsible for local government, have regular meetings with its representatives.

Mr. Dunnachie: Will the Secretary of State explain his refusal to appoint a committee to investigate the local government changes in Scotland? Did he take the decision upon himself, or did he authorise Vance and Owen to come to Scotland and build safe Tory havens there?

Mr. Lang: If the hon. Gentleman contains his soul in patience he will shortly understand what we propose for Scotland.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Has my right hon. Friend received representations on local government reorganisation from all the parties, or is he still waiting for the Opposition's policies on that subject, as on so many others?

Mr. Lang: We have received a substantial number of representations on local government reform, from a broad range of sources. Some were positive and forward-looking, and we have taken those seriously into account. Others were less so, and they, of course, have been taken less seriously.

Mr. McAllion: When the Secretary of State meets representatives of COSLA, will he explain to them whether the Government intend to bring England and Wales into line with Scotland by making it illegal to disconnect domestic consumers from the water supply in England and Wales, or to bring Scotland into line with England and Wales by making it legal to disconnect domestic consumers in Scotland? If, as the right hon. Gentleman claims, this is a unitary Parliament ruling over a unitary British state, he cannot discriminate between citizens of that state on the basis of where they happen to live. What is the Government's intention?

Mr. Lang: Perhaps the reason why the hon. Gentleman is so careless about safeguarding the Union is that he does not realise that Union does not necessarily mean uniformity. One of the features of Scotland's position within the United Kingdom is our capacity to accommodate the diversity of Scottish interests and needs. I am not responsible for disconnections policy in England and Wales, and I would not presume to offer advice to my colleagues on the subject. With regard to Scotland, my answer remains what it has always been: I have no plans to make any changes there.

Mr. John Marshall: As a former Aberdeen city councillor, may I ask my right hon. Friend to make it clear to COSLA that many Conservative Members believe that the four Scottish cities should once again become all-purpose local authorities?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend makes a persuasive case, and, indeed, we are already committed to creating all-purpose local authorities, the details of which I look forward to announcing shortly.

Mr. Kirkwood: If the integrity of the current Borders region boundaries is breached by, for example, putting Berwickshire with East Lothian—causing local anger and outrage, especially in Berwickshire—will the Secretary of State give the House an idea of what level of public demonstration of discontent he is prepared to accept to make him change his cock-eyed proposals?

Mr. Lang: I hope that when our proposals are presented to the House and to the people of Scotland, they will be popular. I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the report in today's newspapers about the forthcoming proposals of the independent and impartial Parliamentary Boundary Commission. That is a matter for it and not for me.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: When the Secretary of State meets representatives of COSLA, especially those from Dumfries and Galloway, will he discuss possible improvements to the ferry facilities at Stranraer harbour?

Mr. Lang: I may not have the opportunity to place the question of harbour facilities at Stranraer on the agenda for the meeting on Friday, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that, as both the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Member of Parliament for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, I attach great importance to the improvement of facilities at the harbour in Stranraer.

Mr. McFall: One of the most important local authority functions is the police. COSLA and others have already expressed great concern about the wholesale changes to the police authorities and their boundaries that the Government propose. Will he acknowledge that the Sheehy proposals for performance-related pay could, in some instances, result in the police boosting their pay by arresting people for minor offences, which currently are dealt with by a sensible use of discretion? When he next meets representatives of COSLA, will he explain what practical steps the Government will take to ensure that such an unfortunate situation does not arise?

Mr. Lang: We shall have something to say about the future of police forces when we announce our proposals for the changes in local government. The Sheehy report is going out to consultation and the hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity, along with everybody else, to submit his thoughts during that consultative process.

Industrial Contamination

Q.3 **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider making an extra allocation of financial resources to Scottish local authorities to enable them to make safe sites contaminated by former industrial usage.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): Responsibility for dealing with contaminated land rests with the site owners. Local enterprise companies can assist with the reclamation of these sites and local authorities already receive funding through the revenue support grant for their expenditure on environmental services.

Mr. McAvoy: Is the Minister aware that in Cambuslang, Rutherglen and Toryglen in my constituency a number of sites are contaminated by chromium waste dumped by a long-gone chemical works? Despite appreciated assistance from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), regarding finance for making those sites safe, whether they are publicly or privately owned, there is no finance available totally to clear them and to make them safe. Will the Minister assure us that the matter will be considered at a meeting with myself and other constituency representatives to try to find ways in which we can secure finance to make those sites safe for the public?

Sir Hector Monro: I much appreciate the hon. Gentleman's involvement in the problem of chromium waste in his constituency and if I can help, I will gladly do so. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is a matter for the local enterprise company, which in this case is the Glasgow Development Agency, and it must decide what financial assistance it can provide. If a meeting will help, we must arrange one.

Dr. Godman: One tatty old building that has been contaminated by former industrial usage and neglect, well known to the Minister and myself, is the Gourock ropeworks building in Port Glasgow. Is that disgraceful old building to be conserved or demolished? Will the Minister make up his mind, because the Inverclyde district council simply does not have the wherewithal to pay for the conservation of the building? Why not play the game with the people of Port Glasgow and allow the building to be demolished?

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman knows that it is an important and listed building, so we must be careful about the steps that we take. I understand that the enterprise authority is considering the matter, and a decision may be made in the not-too-distant future. We cannot pull down such an important building without the most careful consideration.

Scottish Enterprise

4. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last had discussions with Scottish Enterprise on its outturn expenditure for 1992-93.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): My right hon. Friend and I have regular contact with Scottish Enterprise on a range of matters. No meeting has taken place to discuss outturn expenditure for 1992-93 as it was within the budget limit, but did not involve significant underspending.

Mr. Connarty: Has the Minister asked in the past, or will he ask in the future, for detailed figures about the amount spent by Scottish Enterprise and by the local enterprise companies on consultancies? Is he aware that when I criticised my local enterprise company for spending money on something that I thought was wrong, I had a flood of letters from businesses throughout Scotland saying that what disturbed them was that when they asked for money and assistance, they were sent a consultant? Those consultancies consist of what have been described as broken-down accountants, many of whom are former Scottish Development Agency employees.

There is now a serious question, which I hope the Minister will investigate, about exactly how much pork barrelling is going on. If it is not illegal, just how much is value for money? The business community is growing sick of consultants, who were once SDA employees, growing fat and not aiding the companies that look for assistance, but lining their own pockets from Scottish Enterprise funds.

Mr. Stewart: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's general allegation. There are facilities, which have been used, for audit investigations by Scottish Enterprise when there are allegations against local enterprise companies. However, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will continue to take a strong interest in the activities of local enterprise companies and that he will make representations to them. They are ultimately publicly accountable, and it is healthy that the hon. Gentleman and others take a real and close interest in their detailed activities.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) should come to my part of the world—Kincardine and Deeside. I hope that my hon. Friend will join me in commending the Kincardine and Deeside Enterprise Trust, which is part of Grampian Enterprise, for setting up open learning schemes aimed at self-employed managers and intended specifically to teach them small business management and business methods, and to deal with tourism. Is not that Scottish Enterprise working at its best, being flexible and aiming its activities to where they are required in a way that makes it possible for managers to participate?

Mr. Stewart: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Indeed, when I was in his part of the world recently, I was able to see something of the work that the enterprise trust and Grampian Enterprise were undertaking in open learning and in other ways, such as the skill seeker programme in which Grampian Enterprise has been in the lead. That is the essence of the local enterprise company network. Individual enterprise companies can have flexibility and can take initiatives to meet the needs of their own local areas.

Mr. Wallace: What percentage of Scottish Enterprise's budget is attributable to training? Given that the Minister has just explained to the hon. Member for Falkirk, East the importance that he attaches to public accountability, will he deplore the practice by some local enterprise companies of inserting contractual terms that prohibit any training provider from criticising the local enterprise company for any of the ways in which it handles the

budget? Surely the local enterprise companies, which are responsible for public money, should not seek to make themselves immune from public criticism.

Mr. Stewart: The local enterprise companies do not seek to make themselves immune from public criticism. They have to have meetings and they have to publish accounts. Ultimately, they are responsible, through Scottish Enterprise and the Secretary of State, to the House.

Mr. Gallie: Is my hon. Friend aware of allegations made by the Labour MEPs MacMahon and McCubbin that Scottish Enterprise has misused European social funds? The fact that they have made those allegations may have jeopardised future funding. Will my hon. Friend confirm whether there is any truth in the allegations? If he cannot confirm their truth, will he condemn the actions of those who have been elected to responsible places and yet have acted so contemptuously?

Mr. Stewart: Not only am I aware of the allegations, which received wide publicity, but I wrote to Mr. Hugh MacMahon, with copies to Mr. McCubbin and to hon. Members. I shall put the matter in a more neutral way than my hon. Friend has done. I believe that the two Members of the European Parliament were, at the very least, extremely, seriously and deliberately misled about the facts of the situation.

Mr. Worthington: The Minister said earlier that local enterprise companies are publicly accountable. That is nonsense. They are secret, self-serving societies which are inward-turned and do not have to account at all.

The Minister said that he was in favour of accountability. Performance tables and public reports have been imposed on other organisations. When will the Minister impose performance tables on local enterprise companies?

Mr. Stewart: The performance of LECs is critical in the determination by Scottish Enterprise of their budgets for future years. That process is comprehensive and rigorous.

Local Government Corruption

6. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to reduce corruption in local government in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: There are a number of forms of redress against corruption in local government, notably through the courts, the Commission for Local Authority Accounts in Scotland, the local government omudsman and the statutory powers available to my right hon. Friend. The Bill on local government reorganisation that my right hon. Friend intends to introduce will be an opportunity for consideration of the future framework within which local government operates.

Mr. Riddick: Does my hon. Friend think that the events surrounding Monklands district council—council jobs provided to relatives of Labour councillors, the council leader's rather dubious business activities with his own council and the disastrous £1 million a year loss on the Quadrant shopping centre—result from corruption alone, or merely from a mixture of incompetence and corruption?

Is my hon. Friend aware that the two Labour Members who represent that area have said nothing in the House about the shenanigans? Is he also aware of the embarrassment of the Leader of the Opposition who, at his recent constituency AGM, had to witness the expulsion of some of the Labour mafia who were involved? Does my hon. Friend agree that the whole situation——

Madam Speaker: Order. This is not a statement, but Question Time. The hon. Member has asked enough questions.

Mr. Stewart: I should have thought that the major piece of embarrassment of the Leader of the Opposition on that subject was when he was picketed outside his own constituency surgery by members of his own party. I do not think that that has ever happened to any other hon. Member.

Mr. Norman Hogg: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Minister has no responsibility——

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members ought to guard their language in the House. As "Erskine May" indicates, moderate language is the cornerstone and the hallmark of our parliamentary debates. I will not take a point of order at this juncture. I will simply remind the House that this is a civilised debating Chamber. We should conduct ourselves accordingly.

Mr. Stewart: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Government take seriously the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick). The people of Scotland continue to be astonished by the silence from the two hon. Members who represent the Monklands area in the House.

Mr. Home Robertson: Would not it be a most serious piece of corruption for Scottish local government to be carved up by the Government purely on the basis of the Government's political expediency? Will the Minister give an undertaking that no historic Scottish county will be carved up in the forthcoming review without the consent and support of the people in the area concerned?

Mr. Stewart: I note that that is another example of Scottish Labour Members being prepared to discuss anything except Monklands.

On the hon. Gentleman's specific point, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House earlier, the hon. Member will have to await the announcement that my right hon. Friend will make shortly.

Mr. Dickens: Whenever we discuss the allegations about Monklands district council, is it not apparent that the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) never reveals to the House that from 1975 he served as provost to Monklands district council?

Mr. Stewart: To be fair to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), it is a matter of public record that he was provost to that council. He does not hide that. But he certainly hides his opinion about what has been happening in that district council since his tenure as provost.

Sir David Steel: Is the Minister aware that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is busy promoting a policy of good governance throughout the world and that one of the principles involved is that the party in power should not seek to manipulate the constitutional or electoral rules to its advantage? Is the Minister aware that the Scottish

Office is in danger of being in breach of that policy if *The Scotsman* leak is anything to go by? Not since South Africa created Bophuthatswana out of 20 different bits of the map has there been such naked corruption.

Mr. Connarty: Answer the question.

Mr. Stewart: I am answering the question. I repudiate what the right hon. Gentleman has said. Such language does his considerable reputation no good whatever. The right hon. Gentleman will have to await the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am sure that when he sees and understands the details of the Government's proposals, he will be the first to withdraw his absurd allegations.

Rents to Mortgages

7. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the latest figures on sales under the rents-to-mortgages scheme in Scotland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): As at the end of June, there had been 765 sales under the pilot rent-to-mortgage scheme operated by Scottish Homes.

Mrs. Gorman: I am delighted at the growing success of that scheme in Scotland. Does my hon. Friend agree that it just shows that the people in Scotland are great supporters of that fundamental Conservative policy, which is the antithesis of the policy of the Labour party, which has always opposed the sale of council houses? Is my hon. Friend aware that the scheme was pioneered in my constituency, where we are joining in with the sales? Is he further aware that, following its success in Scotland, pioneered by the Conservatives, of course, the scheme will now be introduced in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I whole-heartedly agree with my hon. Friend. The scheme has been a great success. It will be an even greater success. It will create a wholly new market. My hon. Friend will be particularly interested to know that to date in Scotland 26·4 per cent. of council houses have been sold and that the figure for England is virtually identical—26·5 per cent. The rent-to-mortgage scheme will open up a whole new market. It will give a statutory right to those involved. I believe that that will be widely welcomed throughout Scotland.

Mr. Maxton: Instead of continuing his obsession with selling as many houses as possible, will the Minister tell the House what progress he is making in establishing mortgage-to-rent schemes rather than rent-to-mortgage schemes to allow people who, as a result of the Government's economic policies have been made redundant and are unable to continue with their mortgage payments can continue to live in the house which has become their home?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have no objection to mortgage-to-rent schemes where the local authority considers that they are practicable and that there is a priority for them. In both Clackmannan and Kyle and Carrick such schemes are in operation. I am in favour of them if the district council considers that local circumstances demand them. In Scotland, some 257,000 houses have been built since 1979. That is a considerable number. The funding for housing in Scotland is substantial.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Minister accept that at least in Gordon district in my constituency the council has been willing to adopt every conceivable means of providing homes to meet needs and has not argued with any of the various options on offer, yet it is still far from able to meet the demand for affordable houses in Gordon district? When will the Minister ensure that all the relevant agencies in Gordon can provide the houses that people need?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman's constituency suffers from the problems associated with success and a growing population. I know that he has been in touch with Scottish Homes. It is investing millions of pounds in his constituency. That should be an on-going process. I hope that the strategic agreement, which I understand has been formed with the local council, or is about to be, will prove to be extremely successful. All possibilities should be explored.

Mrs. Fyfe: Will the Minister confirm that, by the end of 1992, 24,000 council houses had been sold and were not replaced with housing for rent? Does he further agree that, as it is the better housing that goes, council tenants will soon be left with nothing but tenements and multi-stories in which to live? Did not the Scottish Office once again grossly overestimate the sales of council houses, knowing full well that the supplementary allocations would not be enough and thus would result in less money being spent on making council houses fit to live in? Does not all that give a good idea of what tenants can expect if the Government's gerrymandered boundaries become a reality?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Some 266,000 public sector houses have sold in Scotland. Each one of them has its own market value. They have sold throughout councils in Scotland. I can say also that the funds recovered have been spent on public sector housing in Scotland as a result and have greatly benefited the rest of the public sector housing. On supplementary allocations, we will not know the position until later this year. I will bear in mind the hon. Lady's constituency representations, and those from other constituencies in Scotland.

Local Government Reform

8. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what reassessment he has made of the Touche Ross report on local government reform.

Mr. Lang: We have taken account of the wide range of comments received on the Touche Ross report on local government reform. I intend to include our revised estimates of costs and savings in the White Paper setting out our local government reform proposals, which I hope to publish shortly.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Secretary of State give the House of Commons a clear, unambiguous assurance that no part of public expenditure in Scotland will be cut because of the transition costs of local government reform or its on-going costs? Do we have that clear assurance?

Mr. Lang: The transition costs of local government reform will have to be borne from the resources available to the Scottish Office block. However, as the figures that I shall publish in the forthcoming White Paper will show, the cost of transition will be recovered quickly as a result of the savings to be had from single-tier all-purpose authorities.

Mr. David Shaw: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that savings from local government reform will take place in a manner that will benefit the people of Scotland and the United Kingdom? Will he ensure that the incompetence and corruption of Monklands district council is squeezed dry by local government reform so that that council is in a better financial state and we stop the £1 million a year wasted on the Quadrant shopping centre development and the £3 million a year wasted on the leisure development, which is costing people in that area a considerable sum of money?

Mr. Lang: On the first part of my hon. Friend's question I am happy to give him the assurance that he seeks. On the second part, when the Government bring forward proposals for reform, he will be able to judge for himself whether his anxieties are met.

Mr. Hood: Has Touche Ross made any recommendations on the number of councillors who will be required under local government reform? When the Secretary of State presents his White Paper to the House, will it cover any recommendations on the number of councillors? Has that been addressed in the White Paper, and will we be able to discuss it?

Mr. Lang: Touche Ross did not make recommendations on the number of local authority councillors, although in preparing its report, it had to make a number of assumptions across a broad range about the number of officials who would be involved in certain areas of local government expenditure. On the question whether that matter will be addressed in the Government's forthcoming White Paper, I must ask the hon. Gentleman to contain his soul in patience.

Mr. Salmond: I listened carefully to the Secretary of State's earlier remarks. He was extremely careful not to deny the accuracy of *The Scotsman* leak. Does he not think that the gerrymandering of Scottish local government boundary lines is too high a price to pay for keeping a blue rose on the lapel of his hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart)? Does he not understand that, with 16 per cent. of the vote for the Tory party, it is geometrically impossible to draw lines in a way that guarantees safe havens for his party? Does he think that a Secretary of State who has failed on Ravenscraig, Rosyth and the Euro-seats and who is now gerrymandering Scottish local government is fit to occupy that high office?

Mr. Lang: I have already made it clear that the Government do not comment on allegedly leaked documents. Therefore, the rest of the hon. Gentleman's question falls.

Mr. John D. Taylor: As local authorities have a statutory requirement to advertise certain of their activities in the local newspapers, does the Secretary of State accept that he has failed in not taking action against Monklands district council, which campaigned against the local newspaper, and instead is awaiting the outcome of the Touche Ross report?

Mr. Lang: I have certain statutory powers, but they are limited. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that I have given close consideration to the matter and I continue to keep a close watch on it.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the Secretary of State accept that the Touche Ross figures to which he gave so much regard are fatally flawed and therefore make this whole exercise inappropriate? Will he accept that the House is sick and tired of his teasing at the Dispatch Box about when the White Paper is to be published? When will it be published? When will we know? Perhaps more importantly, will he accept that, given that this whole exercise is fatally flawed, he ought to do the decent thing, abandon it, and appoint an independent commission that can do justice to the whole of Scottish local government?

Mr. Lang: The Touche Ross report is far from being flawed. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities co-operated in the preparation of that report and all the signs from subsequent work by consultants for other local authorities and from other submissions to the Government show that the broad trend of the Touche Ross report is accurate. That report made a certain number of assumptions, which it had to do in the context of the work that it was carrying out. More detailed submissions have led to some of those assumptions being refined further, but the broad trend of the report remains as it was. If anyone is discredited on the question of the cost of local government reform, it is the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). We have not forgotten his belief, publicly stated without qualification, that the cost of local government reform would be £600 million. The hon. Gentleman is in for a shock, which for him will probably be a sad one.

Scottish Enterprise

9. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met Scottish Enterprise to discuss employment prospects in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend and I meet frequently the chairman and chief executive of Scottish Enterprise to discuss a wide range of issues, including economic prospects generally.

Mr. Graham: The Minister will realise that government by the Tories in Scotland has cost nearly 200,000 manufacturing jobs. We have seen the threatened loss of roughly 1,000 jobs in Rosyth and 450 jobs are to be lost in my constituency in the royal ordnance factory. The Government are dillying and dandering while thousands of young people are not receiving appropriate training or apprenticeships. All that we have seen is the continual decline in manufacturing industries in Scotland. Is it not time that the Government gave us hope by resigning and allowing the people of Scotland to get back to work? I am sick and tired of seeing my folk facing the dole. Is it not time that the Government faced the dole?

Mr. Stewart: Unemployment in the hon. Gentleman's constituency is 2,421, which is a decline of almost 1,500 over the past five years. I should have thought that even

the hon. Gentleman would welcome that. As to manufacturing, I simply point out to the hon. Gentleman, and to the hon. Member for Fyfe, Central (Mr. McLeish) who is muttering on the Front Bench in his usual way, that manufactured exports from Scotland are, on the most recent figures, at a record level.

Mr. Kynoch: Will my hon. Friend tell the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) that the percentage of the working population in Scotland in work compared with others in the European Community is second in the league table? Is that not more positive information as opposed to the doom and gloom that Opposition Members are spreading?

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Denmark is the only major European country with a better figure. Luxembourg, which of course is fairly small, also has a slightly better figure. Civilian employment in Scotland increased by 173,000 between March 1983 and March 1993. Those real figures reveal the nonsense of the constant doom and gloom from the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Wray: Will the Minister explain to the House the shocking state of affairs in relation to 16 and 17-year-olds? Since 1988, thousands more youngsters have become unemployed and out of training as a result of the Government's very unpopular policy of taking benefits away from those kids. Will the Government consider restoring benefits to 16 and 17-year-olds? Will the Minister also consider the discriminatory age-related benefit for 18 to 24-year-olds who do not get paid the same as 25-year-olds and who actually receive £8·55 less? Will the Minister agree to abolish that?

Mr. Stewart: This Government have brought in a guarantee for youth training which is being fully met. That guarantee is available in no other European country. That is the reality and it shows the Government's commitment to ensuring that young people acquire the skills and have the training for the jobs of the future.

Bilateral Trade

10. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to meet trade Ministers from overseas to discuss bilateral trade with businesses in the far east.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and I meet trade Ministers from the far east from time to time. Most recently my right hon. Friend has met the Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and a delegation of Taiwanese business men.

I propose to visit Japan and South Korea in the autumn.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that encouraging reply. Does the Scottish Office intend to target particular territories? My right hon. Friend has already mentioned South Korea and Japan. Does he also intend to target growing territories such as Hong Kong and Singapore?

Mr. Lang: I am happy to assure my hon. Friend that we are indeed keen to do that. Our targeting has been extremely successful. In the last year for which figures are known, exports to Japan rose by 10 per cent., to Hong Kong by one quarter and to Singapore by one third. Exports to South Korea have almost doubled. If the reports from Japan this afternoon are correct and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has secured from the Japanese Government dramatic tariff reductions on imported goods, that will be excellent news for Scottish industry.

Mr. Macdonald: Is the Secretary of State aware that the oil fabrication industry in Scotland faces increasing competition from south-east Asia yards and particularly from South Korean yards? British Petroleum has already awarded a major order covering the Forth field to a South Korean yard and Phillips is considering giving out another major order. Is the Secretary of State just going to leave that kind of situation to the free play of market forces? Does not he believe that it is the responsibility of the Government, and particularly of the Scottish Office, to ensure that the Scottish fabrication industry can compete effectively with South Korean yards? Has the right hon. Gentleman consulted his Energy colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry in an attempt to ensure that such orders continue to go to yards in Scotland and yards in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Lang: I certainly understand the importance of those yards to the economies of the areas where they are located. However, there can be no question of protecting manufacturing industry in this country from the competitive forces that blow around the world. The only way in which those yards can secure long-lasting employment and security is by being competitive and able to compete and beat the worldwide competition. It is increasingly encouraging that Scottish industry, because it has modernised and because it has invested in new technology, is now competitive and is beating off competition from around the world. Our export orders show the success that we are achieving.

Unemployment

11. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the most recent total of long-term unemployed people in Scotland; what plans he has to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: In April 1993, there were 86,591 people in Scotland who had been unemployed for 12 months or longer. That represents a rate of increase since April 1992 of about one third of that for Great Britain as a whole. More help than ever before is now available to long-term unemployed people in their efforts to return to work.

Mr. Marshall: Has the Minister absolutely no shame or anger at the tragic figures which, in the case of Glasgow, account for almost one in two of the unemployed? Does he not realise that many long-term unemployed have never had a job since they left school and may never obtain one? Does he not realise that we now have a second generation of long-term unemployed and that those scandalous figures are the biggest blight on the face of Scottish society today? Instead of cutting funding and training, when will the Government tackle that problem with the priority, urgency and resources that it so desperately requires?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is obviously not aware of the measures that were announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) in the Budget. The hon. Gentleman might have

mentioned that, in his own constituency, for example, the number of unemployed has dropped over the past five years from 6,968 to 4,723—a very substantial drop indeed. However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the long-term unemployed are a priority. Two out of three unemployed people go off the register within six months —they go back into the labour market. The Government have brought in a package of new measures such as learning for work, the local enterprise company challenge, the expansion of business start-ups and community action, all of which are directed specifically to help the problem of the long-term unemployed. Frankly, it does neither the long-term unemployed nor anyone else any good when Opposition Members do not recognise that the Government are tackling the problem and are devoting considerable resources to it.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Will the Minister acknowledge the specific and persistent difficulty of long-term unemployment in the highlands and islands? After the exchange that the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) had with the Secretary of State, will the Minister bear in mind the great concern that was expressed at a meeting earlier this week of Ross and Cromarty district council about the downturn in the fabrication sector, for example Highlands Fabricators at Nigg and McDermotts at Ardersler, and the huge impact that that is having on the region's economy in terms of the massive increase in unemployment? Would the Minister be willing later in the year to meet representatives of the various public agencies from the area to discuss difficulties that are becoming deeper by the week?

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister who is responsible for the highlands and islands are always willing to meet, as appropriate, representatives of the agencies concerned. I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to congratulate the Government on achieving objective 1 status for the highlands and islands. The whole House will want to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry on a great achievement for the highlands area.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Is the Minister not ashamed that some of those who are now categorised as long-term unemployed are 16 and 17-year-olds who, despite his claims, have not had a job since they left school? Six days after the Budget, Youth Aid advised the Government that 124,700 young people did not have a job or a training place and that 78 per cent. of them had no money. When will the Minister get his backside off his seat and do something about the real problem for young people in Scotland?

Mr. Stewart: Not all young people want a training place. *[Interruption.]* They may or may not want a training place. We hope that they do. I assure the hon. Gentleman that there are training places available for all young people who wish to have training places. Indeed, that is why we improved the quality of the training guarantee by setting time limits within which young people would be guaranteed to receive the offer of a place.

"Investing for Our Future"

13. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the submissions he received to the Scottish Office consultation paper "Investing for our Future" favoured a system of franchising; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: An analysis of responses to the consultation paper will be made available once a decision on the future structure of water and sewerage services is announced.

Mr. Welsh: The majority of Scots, including leading Conservatives, are totally opposed to any form of water privatisation. It is strange that not one Scottish Minister has defended any privatisation policy in Scotland. Will the privatisation of water simply be bundled in with equally unacceptable gerrymandering and destruction of Scotland's local government system? Will there be separate announcements or will the Minister simply present a single large insult to the Scottish people?

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait and see and contain himself for a few days, or even a week or two longer. He is a glutton for punishment on water. Month by month, he asked questions about water at the same time as his party and his leader made totally irresponsible statements aboout civil disobedience relative to water, and he should be ashamed of himself.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is undoubtedly anxious to find out about the number of submissions to make a political point. Will my hon. Friend share with the House the number of submissions that he has received that support the option of the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), which is for wilful acts of sabotage and violence throughout Scotland?

Sir Hector Monro: I have not had one letter supporting violence, so the SNP is on its own.

Mr. Donohoe: Will the Minister return to the original question and tell the House how many submissions he has received?

Sir Hector Monro: As I indicated in my original answer, once all the submissions have been analysed and the announcement has been made, they will be available in the Library.

Mr. McLeish: Is the Minister aware that top water analyst Robert Miller-Bakewell of Natwest Securities is advising his corporate clients that they can buy franchises in Scottish Water in early 1995? Is it not a scandal that financiers in the City are informed of these matters before either Parliament or the people concerned? Will he confirm that up to 20 per cent. of jobs will go; that 10 English companies, three Spanish companies and one American company will bid and that—*[Interruption.]* The Minister may not like what is being said but it is factual.

Will the Minister confirm that the Government have selected four business units as the model for reform? Is it not contempt of the House for the Government to behave in such a way? Can we have an apology for the mess that has been created? Will the Minister say when a statement will be made in the House?

Sir Hector Monro: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to apologise to Conservative Members for the irresponsible statements that he has made recently and a mass of statistics that mean nothing at all. I am not especially interested in the report from Natwest Securities. We will wait and see what happens when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announces what we intend to do.

Industry

14. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will next meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss Scottish industry.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend and I have frequent contacts with the Scottish Trades Union Congress on a range of matters concerning Scottish industry. We look forward to a continuing exchange of views.

Mr. Clarke: Will the Minister arrange a meeting with the STUC on the future of the coal industry in Scotland if and when privatisation takes place? The Scots are worried —I am sure that the country is also worried—that the premature closure of Frances colliery, with the potential loss of 1,000 jobs, is in the offing. I hope that the Minister will support that and the future of Monktonhall colliery in my constituency. Will he give a guarantee that such a meeting will take place and that the whole of the Scottish coalfield will be sold to a consortium of the people whom I represent?

Mr. Stewart: The whole House knows the hon. Gentleman's knowledge and expertise of the industry. He led a delegation to discuss proposals for a separate Scottish coalfield. I can certainly give him an assurance that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I, in addition to my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy, who has direct responsibility for these matters, will be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and others concerned to discuss the future.

So far as Frances colliery is concerned, it continues on a care and maintenance basis by British Coal at a cost to British Coal of £2 million per annum. The hon. Gentleman will know that consultations on the future of Frances are continuing between British Coal and the mining unions at present. If the option to offer the mine to the private sector is pursued, Frances will be advertised in due course and interest sought from independent mine operators.

Voluntary Organisations

15. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the value of grants to voluntary organisations from his Department in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the figure for 1978-79 at constant prices.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Grants paid to voluntary organisations by the Scottish Office in 1992-93 totalled £25·7 million compared with £11·9 million in 1978-79 at constant prices. That represents an increase of 116 per cent. in real terms.

Sir David Knox: That is an impressive increase. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a cost-effective form of public expenditure and that it should be increased wherever appropriate?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is extremely cost effective. We see voluntary organisations as an important third force co-operating with the Government in delivering a broad spectrum of services.

The House will expect me to congratulate my hon. Friend on his knighthood. He has been destined for distinction ever since he became chairman of the West Edinburgh Young Conservatives.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is with regret that I raise this serious point of order with you. It involves the hon. Members for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) as well as a Minister of the Crown, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart).

At a succession of Scottish Question Times, matters have been raised concerning Monklands district council. They have been raised mainly by the hon. Member for Dover, whom we can disregard because he is held in contempt on both sides of the House.

Oh. **Hon. Members:**

Madam Speaker: Order. I am listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but he must not paint a picturesque story. He must come to his point of order, with which I can then deal.

Mr. Hogg: I would find it difficult to paint a picturesque story about the hon. Member for Dover.

Madam Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman now come to the point of order that he is putting to me, as Speaker of this House?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Member for Dover and, this afternoon, the hon. Member for Colne Valley have made allegations of corruption against an individual in Monklands district council and against that authority. When the matter was initially raised by the hon. Member for Dover, the Secretary of State answered in general terms, saying that he had powers in statute permitting him to pursue any corruption that arose in any Scottish local authority.

This afternoon, that unsubstantiated allegation was used in an attempted smear against my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition and my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). Conservative Back Benchers have made a deliberate and contemptible attempt to implicate them in an alleged corruption. As the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Scottish Office have not identified that corruption or acted on their statutory powers, it is obvious that that corruption does not exist. If it exists, the Secretary of State must act on it. Instead, the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Eastwood, joined in that smearing ploy and behaved in a fashion that is inconsistent with what the Scottish people expect of a Minister.

If allegations of corruption are to be made in this House, and if attempts are to be made to smear a Privy Councillor—the Leader of the Opposition—and the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, we are entitled to believe that those matters will be properly looked into. However, if the Secretary of State will not do that——

Madam Speaker: Order. I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is it on the same matter?

Mr. Galloway: Yes, Madam Speaker. It deals with the associated question on the Order Paper tabled by the hon. Member for Colne Valley in which he explicitly uses the words

"corruption in local government in Scotland"

In the House—on the Order Paper—I too have accused someone of being corrupt. That was the late Robert Maxwell—I was ahead of the pack in doing so before he died—and he was indeed corrupt, as the world now knows. The difference is—[HON. MEMBERS: "Did you receive any of his money?"] No, I never received any of his money.

The difference is that I was ready to, and did, repeat my allegations outside the privilege of the House. The record will show in the morning that the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) referred to "dubious business deals" with his own council by the leader of the Monklands district authority—whom I do not know and have never met.

I do know, however, that that person is currently involved in litigation against at least one newspaper, which also made that allegation. The matter is sub judice, yet the allegation was casually repeated by the hon. Member for Colne Valley, both on the Order Paper and in his question.

There must be a role for you, Madam Speaker, in preventing Scottish Question Time from being used as a subterfuge to smear leading Members of the House of Commons and elected local authority members—against whom, as far as I know, the police have raised no complaint, and whose activities are not the subject of any legal action by the authorities who have the power to prosecute in the case of any impropriety. For a Minister to the Crown to be associated today, for the first time, with that smear is an absolute scandal, a disgrace and an abuse of the privileges of the House.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Pay your debts.

Mr. Riddick: Have you passed your driving test yet?

The hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) accused me of accusing the Leader of the Opposition of corruption—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, he did; the *Official Report* will show that.

I must make it clear that not once in my question did I accuse the Leader of the Opposition of corruption. I did, however, express a desire for him to make some comment about the corruption that has taken place in Monklands district council.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn) *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. Does the hon. Gentleman's point of order relate to this matter? I think that I can now deal with it. We have heard enough points of order; we are all aware of the problem.

Mr. Martin: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you know, I am a regular attender at Scottish Question Time.

Madam Speaker: So am I.

Mr. Martin: I regularly hear, particularly from the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), accusations concerning a local authority. Many of the people in that local authority are decent, hard-working people who do not have an opportunity to reply to allegations made in the House.

Would it not be better, and bring matters to a head, if you, Madam Speaker, were to advise the hon. Member for Dover to repeat the accusations outside the House? That would give the people of Monklands an opportunity to take the hon. Gentleman through the due legal process.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I have heard enough, and I think I can deal with the matter. As the House knows, I rule out of order at the time anything I hear that is out of order. I heard nothing that was out of order during Question Time, otherwise I would have taken action. I do, however, caution hon. Members that moderation is a characteristic of parliamentary language, and I must confess that I have not heard much moderation this afternoon. I ask all hon. Members to remember in future what "Erskine May" says about good temper and moderation being the characteristics of parliamentary language.

The sub judice rule, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), applies only if a case has been set down for hearing. I do not think that that has happened in this case.

We are now in July, and I remind all hon. Members that moderation and tolerance are what we require.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Scottish Question Time today was dominated by two topics: the reform of local government in Scotland, and water privatisation. When we asked questions about local government reform we were told to wait and see. Over a week ago there was a leak to a Scottish newspaper and the story has been running in Scotland for that time. When we asked questions about water privatisation we were also told to wait to see, but a NatWest securities publication suggests that there has been another leak from the Scottish Office.

Will you, Madam Speaker, rule on the increasingly common Scottish Office practice of making statements outside the House and not having the courtesy to make them in the House? It is treating the House with contempt.

Madam Speaker: The entire House knows that I feel that when any Department has a statement to make on a change of policy the House should be told in the first place.

BILL PRESENTED

Youth Services

Mr. Tony Lloyd, supported by Miss Joan Lestor, Mr. Bernie Grant, Mr. Alan Haselhurst, Mr. Don Foster, Mr. Robert Parry, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Harry Barnes and Mrs. Jane Kennedy, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to youth services in the community and participation by youth in community development; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 29 October 1993, and to be printed. [Bill 234.]

Right to Silence (Amendment)

3.40 pm

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to allow judges, magistrates and juries to draw an inference from a suspect's exercise of the right to silence.

I am grateful for this opportunity to present a Bill that would allow magistrates, judges and juries to draw an inference from a defendant's use of the right to silence. In ordinary life the way in which a person responds to an allegation made against him may be indicative of his guilt or innocence. In a criminal trial the situation is artificial since the right to silence means that an accused person need not respond at all, either when asked questions by the police or at his trial, and no adverse conclusion is allowed to be drawn from his silence. Is it not a mistake to have evolved a system in which too often the advice from the solicitor when he arrives, albeit quite properly given, can be to say nothing at all?

Jeremy Bentham put it succinctly when he wrote:

"If all criminals of every class had assembled and framed a system after their own wishes, is not this the first rule which they would have established for their security? Innocence never takes advantage of it; innocence claims the right of speaking, as guilt invokes the privilege of silence".

It is worth noting that Jeremy Bentham wrote those words in the 18th century, before the advent of legal aid, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, and a succession of Criminal Justice Acts which, however well meaning, in the eyes of many have weighted the scales of justice in favour of the defence.

This has been brought about by honest attempts to avoid certain well publicised miscarriages of justice. The balance should be restored and we should recognise that a guilty man walking free from a court is just as serious a miscarriage of justice as an innocent man being found guilty. In my view, the numbers of the former are greatly exceeded by the instances of the latter.

However strong my wish to go some way to restoring this balance through the Bill, I would not wish to move away from the central principle that the prosecution must prove its case and that it is not for the accused to prove his innocence. No man or woman should be forced to speak and nor should silence per se be treated as evidence of guilt. However, the Bill would provide for silence to be treated as corroborative evidence pointing to guilt.

I make no apology for saying that the Bill is primarily designed to free the hands of our police, men and women, as they go into battle on our behalf against a small number of hardened and habitual criminals who know how to work the system. If suspects can avoid having to explain themselves, it is not too difficult to see why over-zealous police officers might be tempted from time to time to invent evidence against someone who they believe is guilty or to place undue pressure to extract a confession which, of course, is admissible evidence at a trial.

The police service is charged with responsibility for investigating offences. In recent years, society has rightly placed increasing demands on the standards that it expects of our police in their detection of crime and in the bringing of safe and successful prosecutions. However, we have overlooked the fact that, if their duty is to investigate effectively, the police need to try to establish exactly what did or did not happen in the situation that led to the suspect's arrest.

[Mr. Michael Bates]

It is the view of many of our best police officers, such as Detective Sergeant Cole and Detective Constable Goodwill, who are based at Saltburn in my constituency and whose comments on the frustrations they have experienced on the front line of the battle against crime first inspired me to bring forward the Bill, that a significant number of suspects, by refusing to answer questions, seriously impede the efforts of the investigators to fulfil their function of establishing the facts of the case and, as a result, greatly increase the chances of miscarriages of justice.

It is also correct that there should be safeguards for suspects so that they are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities. First and foremost, I suggest that the caution should be amended to read, "Do you wish to make any explanation or answer? If you do not say anything, your failure to do so may be held against you at your trial. Anything you do say will be recorded immediately." That caution will be used in conjunction with the already extensive provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 which might be extended still further to allow suspects who are emotionally upset the opportunity to postpone an interview. Suspects may already ask for a second interview if they wish to react or modify anything said earlier.

Access to free legal advice is in itself a valuable safeguard, as is the requirement that investigative interviews be recorded under controlled conditions. It could be extended still further by the requirement that all interviews should be video recorded.

Any change in our system would require the development of careful rules as to the guidance the judge should give the jury, as is currently provided for in Northern Ireland where we have already given the court the right to draw inferences from a defendant's use of the right to silence in certain circumstances.

Before people get too carried away with the protection of the right to silence, we should recall that not only do the provisions of the Bill already exist and work well in one part of the United Kingdom—Northern Ireland—but the duty to disclose information and answer questions to bodies such as the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise has already been imposed by statute.

The Financial Services Act 1987 and the Companies Act 1985 give inspectors the power to compel a defendant to answer their questions, with failure to answer leading to a prosecution and resulting in up to six months' imprisonment. That such powers are at the disposal of the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise in economic crimes such as insolvency, bankruptcy and liquidations yet far lesser powers are denied the police investigating crimes such as murder and rape is surely a gaping hypocrisy.

In preparing the Bill for presentation before the House, I hoped that its purpose would be simply to endorse the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice. However, it was disappointing that, in a generally encouraging report, the Royal Commission felt able to go only halfway on this vital issue, proposing that a jury should be able to draw an inference from a defendant's use of the right to silence during trial, yet not when being interviewed at a police station.

As a result, the hard core of criminals who are wreaking havoc in our society and who know how to work the system to their advantage remain free to abuse the right to silence. Therefore, the need for the Bill is greater than ever before, and I commend it to the House.

3.48 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I rise to oppose the Bill. I am surprised that the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates) decided to go ahead with it, given the clear guidance from the Royal Commission yesterday which saw no case for changing the law on the right to silence in pre-trial procedures.

The House should remember why the Royal Commission was set up. The first argument was alarm at a small number of serious miscarriages of justice and the failure of senior judges and police officers to address the problems. History will recall that a small group of lawyers, judges and senior police officers, by repeated attempts to cover up miscarriages of justice, caused major problems for the legal system, doing the police a great disservice.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to criticise a judge?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): The hon. Member is speaking very generally.

Mr. Bennett: I am well aware that, if I wanted to criticise a judge by name, I would have to do it by motion. I can assure the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) that, as has just been shown, as long as I refer simply to judges, I am perfectly in order. I stress that that small group of people did the criminal justice system in this country a great disservice.

The second reason for the inquiry was the rising tide of crime. It is clear that when the Royal Commission was taking evidence, a small group of people, possibly some of those who had brought the system into disrepute, together with the Director of Public Prosecutions and one or two others, set about trying to change the agenda from the rising level of crime and the miscarriages of justice.

They were trying to suggest that there is a different problem in this country, and that we should be concerned not about the 200 or 300 people who may wrongly be in prison, but that emphasis should be placed on the idea that there were many guilty people who walk free from the courts. In fact, there is no evidence for that. The real problem is that the majority of guilty people are never brought before the courts. That is the most important point that we should address.

The idea that we should remove the right to trial by jury, introduce proposals for plea bargaining and end the right to silence is extremely damaging. I am sorry that the Royal Commission went any way towards that. We should get back firmly to the basic principle that the right to silence has been an important part of the British legal system for many years. That principle was fought for by people such as John Lilburn, a leveller, back in the Stuart period. With the abolition of the star chamber court, it was beginning to be enshrined in British law by about 1641 and was finally enshrined in English law in 1848. We should be proud of the right to silence and we should protect it.

The problem is that, in recent years, the emphasis has been to encourage the police to spend all their time questioning suspects and nothing like as much time trying to catch people, especially trying to catch them

red-handed. The emphasis has been on questioning, and not on trying to obtain collaborative evidence. That is extremely worrying.

The problems of questioning are well illustrated in the House every day at Question Time. One builds up frustration and confrontation is created. The more we encourage the police to emphasise questioning, the more likely we are to produce miscarriages of justice. People are persuaded that they must answer and that can be dangerous. Ministers at the Dispatch Box do not have a right to silence, but they appear to exercise the right not to answer the questions and Opposition Members get more and more angry.

It is important that we try to get away from the pressure to produce confessions and that we accept that, sadly, if there is too much pressure, we get false confessions. Police officers say that if innocent people have not committed a crime, they have nothing to hide, so why should they not answer questions? We are all aware that on many occasions people do not want to answer questions, not because they have committed a crime, but because it may be embarrassing to someone else to reveal exactly what they were doing. That may not be particularly honest, but it is not criminal. So we should not force people to have to disclose to a police officer what they were doing when they may have been doing something perfectly innocent.

We know that if we put pressure on people to say what they were doing, they assume that they have to answer. If hon. Members think back to what they were doing a week or a fortnight ago, they will remember some things very accurately. However, on many occasions they will not be able to remember accurately and the correct answer to give to a police officer is, "I cannot remember what I was doing." If the prosecution is allowed to draw an inference from the fact that someone's memory is not good, that will count against the accused person just as much as if he had committed a misdemeanour. A good officer knows that if someone says, "I cannot remember," it may be a much more truthful answer than that of someone who can slickly describe exactly what he was doing.

The Bill would be extremely damaging. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh suggested that we should be very concerned about guilty people being acquitted. I agree. But I do not put that on a par with the conviction of innocent people, which is a double offence because an innocent person has been convicted but the guilty person has gone free.

We should not narrow the rights of the individual but should ensure that more criminals are caught. I appeal to the House to throw out the Bill at this early stage and to make it quite clear that we want to keep the constitutional right to silence.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes, 68, Noes 121.

Division No. 322] **[3.55 pm**

AYES

Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bowden, Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Colvin, Michael
Couchman, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Fry, Peter
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Howell, Sir Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, Sir James
Lidington, David
Maginnis, Ken
Mills, Iain
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Rathbone, Tim
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Speed, Sir Keith
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Stern, Michael
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Thomason, Roy
Trimble, David
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whittingdale, John

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Stephen and
Mr. James Clappison.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Bayley, Hugh
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Clapham, Michael
Coffey, Ann
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*

Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stott, Roger
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Cohen and
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

Question accordingly negatived.

Orders of the Day

European Parliamentary Elections Bill

Considered in Committee. [Progress, 6 July]

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

Clause 2

INITIAL DRAWING UP OF THE NEW CONSTITUENCIES

4.6 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I beg to move amendment No. 23, in page 2, line 24, at end add—

'(7) The Committees shall have regard to Paragraph 5A of Schedule 2 to the 1978 Act before determining their final report to the Secretary of State.'

This amendment concerns the issue of a public inquiry as part of the process of redrawing the European parliamentary boundaries. On Second Reading the major concern on both sides of the House was the absence of a proper time or mechanism for a public inquiry. Public inquiries, as we know, are the usual procedure when redrawing either the Westminster or the European boundaries. The purpose of the amendment is to raise the subject of the power to hold an inquiry. The means may be open to debate, but the amendment promotes discussion as to whether there should be, and whether it is feasible to have, a time for proper public inquiries.

The other cause for concern on Second Reading was that a special committee would redraw the boundaries, rather than the Boundary Commission. The Government, however, moved a considerable way to allay fears about the nature of the committee. They have undertaken to appoint boundary commissioners where possible, or, if they are appointing new people to serve on the special committee to draw up the boundaries, to appoint committee members on the same terms, and after similar consultation with other parties, as boundary commissioners.

The Government have also undertaken that the committee should have the same secretariat and staff as the Boundary Commission and that its independence should be guaranteed. So, as the Minister said when replying to the Second Reading debate, it will be the Boundary Commission in all but name.

One objection has been catered for, but the powers of the committee will still not include the power to hold a proper public inquiry. The history of the matter is as follows. In December 1978, the first boundaries were drawn up for direct European parliamentary elections. It is true that there was no inquiry then; that was the only other time when there has been no timetable for a public inquiry when parliamentary boundaries have been redrawn. However, exceptional circumstances gave rise to that exceptional state of affairs.

First, the process necessarily had to be carried out at the last minute because there had been tremendous disagreement in the House, and the procedure and the timetable came at the end of what I understand was an acrimonious debate about whether there should be direct elections to the European Parliament at all. Secondly, at that time all the boundaries had to be drawn for the first

time. We were dealing not with six additional seats, as we are here, but with all the European seats, for which boundary inquires would have had to be held. Everything was being done for the first time, so the administrative and procedural difficulties were necessarily all the greater.

Thirdly, the European Parliament had less power then than now—*[Interruption.]* The Home Secretary does not seem to consider that a matter of consequence, but I think that it is. The more power the European Parliament has the more important it is to maintain a proper procedure for drawing up the boundaries. Finally, the Home Secretary of the day gave a firm promise that the process that had excluded the possibility of holding public inquiries would never happen again.

Now let us move forward to March 1984, when the boundaries were changed again before the June 1984 elections. Many more boundaries were altered then than must be altered now. Having done some research on the subject, I can say that even though the timetable was held back until March 1984, about 10 inquiries were held, nine in England and one in Wales, as I understand—perhaps the Home Secretary will comment on that later. Although the timetable are pressing, 10 inquiries were still held, and I understand that 10 is about the maximum number that would have to be held now.

I agree that it was unsatisfactory that the process had to wait until March 1984, but at least it was proved then that such a time scale is not entirely impossible, and we are now considering a more favourable time scale. I also point out to the Home Secretary that, at the conclusion of the process in March 1984, about half the boundaries that had been the subject of a public inquiry were changed, so the inquiries made a difference to the outcome.

Furthermore, moving to the other part of the history of the matter, it is right to say that the timetable is so pressing now only because of the delay in introducing the Bill. As I said on Second Reading, the moment that it was announced following the European summit that six extra seats were to be allocated, we immediately asked the Home Secretary of the day what the procedure for drawing the boundaries would be.

The question was constantly raised from that time onwards, yet the Government are now relying on their own delay as a reason for defeating what would otherwise be the normal process for drawing the boundaries. That delay has stretched over many more months than was necessary. Therefore, if there is any possibility of securing sufficient time for a public inquiry to be held, the onus is all the heavier on the Government to try to achieve that.

Of course, the present Home Secretary was not responsible for the delay and I understand his problem. As, by the means that I have already explained, he has guaranteed the independence of the Boundary Commission, I do not challenge his good faith; I assume that he genuinely believes that public inquiries cannot be held in the time available. However, I do not think that the House would consider it right merely to accept the right hon. and learned Gentleman's assertion that the timetable does not allow for public inquiries. Rightly, people would like that proposition to be tested and shown to be right before accepting it.

In normal circumstances, as I believe that the Home Secretary concedes, public inquiries should and would be held. Therefore, only if he can show that the circumstances are wholly exceptional and exclude the practical possibility of a public inquiry will he have proved that one should not be held. To test the assertion that that is not a feasible proposition, we must compare the differing time scales that have been drawn up by the Home Office and by the Opposition. It is worth explaining how those time differences occur so that we can test whether it is feasible to have a public inquiry in the way in which we suggest.

4.15 pm

In essence, the Home Office time scale says that, in the event of a public inquiry, the process of boundary redistribution could not be completed until the end of January—earlier than March 1994, but I accept that it would be wholly exceptional to go that far. Using the Opposition time scale, including a public inquiry, the process would end in mid-December. In effect, there is a seven-week difference between the Home Office calculation and the Opposition calculation. I shall explain where that seven-week difference arises.

The timetables of the Home Office and the Opposition are the same up to week five of the process of boundary redistribution—up to the publication in early August of the provisional recommendations. In normal circumstances, there is then a statutory requirement to provide at least four weeks for representations and objections to be made. However, that period falls during the summer, so it is not unreasonable to allow a longer time for representations to be heard; so we have allowed six weeks, whereas the Home Office has allowed seven.

I cannot see why six weeks is not enough. On our time scale, the final date for representations would stretch well into late September and I cannot see why that is too onerous a burden to carry. I must stress throughout that the final time scale adopted would be agreed by all parties. Therefore, it would ill behove parties making representations to complain that they had not had enough time. That area is where the Opposition proposal loses one week.

Both the Home Office and the Opposition allow one week to consider representations, so the time scales match on that issue. Depending on the representations received, if the trigger of 500 protesting electors occurs, a public inquiry should be held. The decision to call a public inquiry depends on the representations, so when the committee meets to consider and decide on the representations, it will then be in a position to know whether to hold a public inquiry or not.

The Opposition time scale allows a further week for the committee to complete the administrative process of issuing the notice of the inquiry, but the Home Office allows two weeks. Again, there is one week's difference between the time scales suggested. I cannot understand why, when it is decided that an inquiry is needed, it cannot be called straight away.

The main gap occurs in the notice given for the public inquiry. We allow four weeks and the Government allow six weeks. I cannot understand for the life of me why that notice cannot be given in four weeks. Four weeks' notice of a public inquiry seems to be easily long enough and I cannot believe that, for the sake of an extra two weeks, it is worth jeopardising the whole process of a public inquiry. If all parties agree that that is a fair and reasonable notice of time, it seems to be fair enough. I agree, however, that for Westminster seats, the period of notice is normally six weeks, not four, but in the exceptional circumstances of this case, it would not be unreasonable if we were all to agree that it should be four weeks rather than six.

That leaves a four-week gap between the Home Office and Opposition time scales. If the process is completed one month later on the Home Office scale, it will go beyond Christmas, taking an additional three weeks, making seven weeks in all.

I appreciate that the details are difficult to follow. However, I have been through the matter carefully and genuinely to see whether our time scale was so unreasonable that it would mean that public inquiries were impossible. I am totally convinced that the time scale is possible if we decide that it is necessary. If, as I believe, public inquiries are an important part of the process and make a difference, if it can be done, it should be done, and I believe that I have shown by our time scale that it could be done.

One final objection is then given. It is said, not unreasonably, that there might be an unforeseen event affecting the holding of the public inquiry. The commissioner might fall ill or the council building in which the inquiry was to be held might become unavailable. There could be all sorts of reasons why, in the particular case of a particular inquiry, it became impossible to meet the timetable. As I understand it, of the 10 inquiries in 1984, not one was postponed.

However, let us assume for the purposes of argument that postponement was possible due to an unforeseen event. Even on our time scale, that could be allowed for. By early December, we have completed the process, so it allows an extra couple of weeks to run up to the Christmas period. Let us suppose that one or two inquiries went into January. I cannot believe that that is of such massive importance to the ability to fight the European elections effectively that it justifies vitiating the entire exercise of public inquiries for all the seats.

I do not overstate the case because I do not accuse the Home Secretary of malice. I simply say that the Home Office has been obstinate. I do not believe that under the proposed time scale it would be impossible to fulfil the requirement for a public inquiry. The amendment is phrased in general terms. We say that we should simply "have regard" to the paragraph in the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 which allows for a public inquiry.

I do not stand by the precise terms of a detailed amendment. However, I do say that we should uphold the principle that public inquiries are an integral part of redrawing constituency boundaries, either for Westminster or for the European Parliament. It is only in the most exceptional circumstances that we should accept that public inquiries should be excluded. The onus is on the Home Office to show that public inquiries should be excluded. It has failed to do so and in the absence of its ability to convince us that public inquiries are unnecessary, the House should support the amendment and should make the Home Office face up to its responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I rise at this early stage in the debate to make clear the Government's position on the matter. The amendment seeks to draw the constituency committees' attention to the requirements of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 concerning the holding of public inquiries.

As I explained to the House on Second Reading, I want the committees to follow as closely as possible the procedures of the Boundary Commissions. That is why, as the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) conceded, we have sought—and, I hope, will largely succeed—in terms of the composition of the committees for which provision is made in the Bill, to appoint boundary commissioners where it is possible and where it is not, to follow procedures that mirror closely those that we should follow if we were appointing boundary commissioners.

I share with the Committee the latest information on the issue because it demonstrates the extent to which we are serious in our desire to follow those procedures wherever we can. Both the Boundary Commission members for Wales have agreed to take on the task and to serve on the committee for Wales. Although at present no deputy chairman has been appointed for the Welsh Boundary Commission, a nominee has now been agreed with the leaders of the parties.

I expect my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor to make an announcement on the matter shortly. The judge who has been nominated has agreed to be chairman of the committee. I expect the position in Wales to be that all three members of the committee will be members of the Boundary Commission for Wales.

For England, progress has not been quite as satisfactory. The deputy chairman of the Boundary Commission for England is too committed to other duties to take on the task. One of the other members has said to me that he is willing to take part as long as the review is completed by Christmas. The other member is willing in principle, but wants to know more about what is involved and especially about the outcome of our deliberations today before making a firm commitment.

We will be making progress in England also. I hope and expect to appoint at least one member of the Boundary Commission for England, and perferably two, as members of the committee. But that, as will be apparent from what I have said, depends on the outcome of our deliberations today. If the Government were obliged, as a result of the Committee's deliberations, to hold a public inquiry, at least one and possibly two members of the Boundary Commission for England would be unable to become members of the committee.

I have dealt with the composition of the committees and I have demonstrated the Government's desire to follow the procedures of the Boundary Commission as closely as possible. I should like to adopt procedures that would mirror those of the Boundary Commission in other respects.

The one respect in which I feel obliged to ask the committees to depart from those procedures is the holding of public inquiries. There will still be a full opportunity for individuals to make their views known to the committees, and for those views to be taken fully into account. There will be a full opportunity for the committees to modify their original recommendations and proposals in the light of those views.

However, one element of the Boundary Commissions' normal procedures that would be absent would be the holding of public inquiries. The reason for that absence is simply that I do not believe that we could guarantee that the procedures would be concluded in the time available if public inquiries were held.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Is it correct that, once a public inquiry has begun, it is entirely up to that inquiry how long it continues to hear evidence and deliberate? Am

I right in saying that there is an open-ended commitment once an inquiry has been set up, or is there some way of limiting the length of the inquiry?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend has asked a question which goes to the heart of the matter. In a very real sense, a public inquiry is an open-ended process. Of course, the chairman of the inquiry has a certain limited discretion to rule repetitious representations out of order. But there is no limit to the ingenuity—I know from my experience in such matters—with which those who are determined to make representations to public inquiries frame them in a way that differs to some extent from similar representations that may have been heard earlier in that inquiry.

It is difficult and, in the end, impossible to put a time limit on a public inquiry. My hon. Friend is right to say that a public inquiry is an open-ended process.

Mr. Blair: I am sure that the Home Secretary would not wish unduly to build up the point made by the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe). Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us of any individual inquiries that have lasted more than one or two weeks?

Mr. Howard: It is commonly known that public inquiries—although not necessarily in the subject that we are discussing—that were expected to last for a matter of days have frequently lasted for a matter of months. The same procedure could apply in the matters that we are discussing.

If the hon. Member for Sedgefield suggests that we can totally exclude the possibility of something happening in the future because it has not happened in precisely that way in the past, that seems to be an eccentric way of dealing with matters.

We have a serious question to deal with. It turns on whether we are prepared to run risks. I put the matter before the Committee not on the basis that it is absolutely and utterly impossible that public inquiries could be held within what is regarded by all hon. Members as a desirable time scale. We might be lucky. It might be possible. Everything might run like clockwork. The inquiries might not need to be held or, if they did, they might be completed in a short time.

It is not the Government's position that the procedures that are urged on us are necessarily and definitely impossible to achieve. However, we cannot be certain that the procedures would be achieved. Indeed, the better view that I have is that they would not be achieved. I freely concede that that involves an element of judgment. But it does not require an element of judgment to recognise that, whatever view one takes of the matter, one must accept the possibility that the process will not be concluded within the relevant time scale and that, as a consequence, Britain will be unable to take up our extra seats in the European Parliament.

That recognition is independent of judgment. That is what the hon. Member for Sedgefield and his right hon. and hon. Friends have to face and have refused to face. That is the bottom line which has to inform our deliberations.

4.30 pm

Mr. Blair: I agree that one must make a sensible judgment of the risk, but let us make the matter absolutely clear. As I understand it, there is no difference between us, on our time scales, about the likely run of the public inquiry. So the point made by the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) is not valid. Other things may elongate the inquiry, but deliberate delay is not one of them.

It may well be the case that public inquiries of a general nature such as planning inquiries are supposed to last days but last months. But I can think of no justification for imagining that constituency boundary inquiries will run beyond the time that they have always run.

Mr. Howard: I am astonished at the innocence of the hon. Gentleman. He is right to say that we agree on the likely duration of the public inquiries. That is not the point. The point is that what we regard as the likely duration may not, in the event, turn out to be the actual duration.

It does not strike me as outside the realms of possibility that we might face a sustained and deliberate attempt to obstruct and delay the whole process. We might well face a concerted attempt——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): From that lot behind me.

Mr. Howard: I do not join my hon. Friend in identifying any particular source, but it is perfectly possible to envisage a sustained and deliberate attempt to obstruct and delay the process. We would then be unable to complete the procedures within the time available.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): First, can the Secretary of State cite any example of a Boundary Commission public inquiry that lasted longer than the time frame that my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) identified? Secondly, given that the procedure that the Government have put before us is entirely novel, why is it not possible to include in it a limit on the length of time that the public inquiry could take?

Mr. Howard: I have dealt with the first question. It was precisely identical to that asked by the hon. Member for Sedgefield, and I answered it.

Mr. Blair: The right hon. and learned Gentleman did not.

Mr. Howard: I answered the question fully. I told the Committee that, if the hon. Gentleman was prepared to proceed on the basis that, because something had not happened in exactly the same way in the past, one could safely assume that it would never happen in the future, his approach to the decision-making process struck me as eccentric.

In answer to the second question, I am not aware of any attempt that has been made to set a time limit on the public inquiry process. It would lead to great difficulties in practice. The hon. Member for Sedgefield has suggested something different. He suggests putting a time limit on the whole process, not merely on the public inquiry, and requiring public inquiries, if they are held, to be completed within that overall time limit. That gives rise to different difficulties, which I am perfectly prepared to deal with if I am pressed to do so.

Before I began to accept interventions, I was about to deal with the amendment. We know what it purports to achieve, but it does not achieve it. Although its defect is capable of being remedied, it is important that I explain.

The amendment says:

[Mr. Howard]

"The Committee shall have regard to Paragraph 5A of Schedule 2 to the 1978 Act."

It is not easy to see what the term "have regard to" means in that context. Sub-paragraph (1) is an optional provision about local inquiries. Sub-paragraph (2) is a mandatory provision, which triggers local inquiries if demanded by 500 electors or a local authority. Sub-paragraph (3) gives a Boundary Commission discretion to hold further local inquiries.

We know that the hon. Gentleman does not intend the third of those provisions, but in so far as we understand what he seeks to achieve, as he has explained it this afternoon, I have to tell him that his amendment would not achieve it.

Let me deal with the timetable that the hon. Gentleman has advanced. On the whole, he has summarised accurately and fairly. I do not take issue with the difference between his timetable and the one that I think more likely. On the basis of the judgment that I have reached and the advice that I have given, my view is that his timetable is unrealistic.

One has to give proper time to allow for representations objecting to the committees' proposals. It is only fair to give local authorities proper opportunity to meet to discuss the proposals and submit them to the committees. It would be difficult for local authorities to achieve that during August. Therefore, we must allow them sufficient time in September.

The time that the hon. Gentleman's timetable allows is too short. If public inquiries were to be held, that would take much longer. That point was made to me by the English boundary commissioners, who believe that the hon. Gentleman's timetable which involves finishing the task with public inquiries by 9 December, is unrealistic. It would be impossible to do justice to the task in the time proposed. In their experience—they are the repository of experience in these matters—the inquiries tend to add substantially to the length of the process.

First, the committee has to consider carefully whether an inquiry is warranted; secondly, it has to give adequate notice of the inquiry to enable people to prepare the information that they wish to represent. That takes us a week behind the hon. Gentleman's timetable. That is based on the judgment that the process will take not fewer than nine weeks overall: two weeks for the committees to decide whether inquiries are needed; four weeks for publicising them; and three weeks for conducting all the inquiries. The practice of the Boundary Commission is to organise public inquiries some months in advance to allow people wishing to attend to prepare themselves properly.

Even within those nine weeks, the setting up of inquiries is not a simple task. Finding a suitable venue can present considerable difficulties. Finding a senior and appropriately qualified lawyer to preside at the hearing is not necessarily easy. Currently, all the assistant commissioners who are used for Boundary Commission inquiries are heavily committed Queen's Counsel or other senior barristers. There needs to be at least a further two weeks beyond what the hon. Gentleman allows in order to give them adequate notice, for their briefing material to be prepared and for them to study and absorb it.

In addition to the nine weeks required for setting up and conducting the inquiries, it will take considerable time for the committee to consider and act on the reports of the inquiries. We need to allow for the likelihood that up to 10 inquiries would be needed. The hon. Gentleman's timetable allows only two weeks for the preparation of reports on the inquiries.

It has to be remembered that the people who preside at the inquiries are not employed full-time. They have to fulfil other professional commitments, as well as preparing the detailed reports. When the committees consider the reports, they will need to take into account a number of factors, to study the transcripts and to evaluate the representations received. The hon. Gentleman's timetable allows only two weeks for that process, and that is not adequate.

Bearing in mind the number of inquiries envisaged, at least another three weeks would be required beyond the time set by the hon. Gentleman to allow the committee members to cope with the volume of work that would be generated. Such judgments have led me to the conclusion that the timetable put forward by the hon. Gentleman is unrealistic. I accept that those are matters of judgment. However, none of the differences makes any allowance for the delays and other inhibiting factors that would be beyond the control of either the members of the committee or the Government.

It does not require any great imagination or ingenuity to identify circumstances that would knock the process completely off course. The sudden illness of a committee member or someone appointed to conduct the inquiry would lead to considerable delay. As I said earlier, an inquiry might be prolonged as a result of a deluge of oral representations, whether or not they were part of a concerted and orchestrated campaign. A venue might suddenly no longer be available, for all sorts of reasons. Venues of the necessary kind are not easy to find at short notice. That, again, would lead to considerable delay.

Mr. Blair: One can hypothesise situations in which time scales become impossible—if the Secretary of State were right, virtually any time scale would be impossible to adhere to because of the unforeseen events that might occur. Even if we were to add six weeks on to our time scale, with the worst hypothesis for one or two inquiries, it would take the process to late January. I appreciate that those are matters of judgment and I hope that I am not being unreasonable, but, with the greatest of respect, I cannot understand the judgment that leads the Secretary of State to believe that that is wholly impossible.

Mr. Howard: I have clearly set out my position. The difference between us is some seven weeks. The difficulty that I face is that factors such as those that I have exemplified are not susceptible to any control. It simply is not possible to set a limit on the extent to which they may prolong the process. The hon. Gentleman was right when he said that that is the case with any timetable. That is why we have to ensure that we have sufficient leeway to give us the scope to make the assessment that the risk is acceptable.

The essential difference between the hon. Gentleman and me is that he speaks—I am not making a simple debating point—from the Opposition Benches and I speak from the Government Benches. I would have responsibility for the process. I have the responsibility for looking at it carefully and ensuring that it is not vulnerable to unforeseen contingencies that could knock the whole process off course.

That is why it is not unreasonable for the hon. Gentleman, sitting where he is, to deal with the matter in terms of likelihoods and predictable events and cutting corners here and there. However, sitting where I sit, I have to build into the process sufficient leeway and a sufficient margin to give me some assurance that we shall achieve a result that is desired on all sides.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: My right hon. and learned Friend spoke of a result that is desired on all sides. I am not sure that all hon. Members on the Government Benches regard that as a desirable result. Is it not highly probable that, if people can so orchestrate events that they take much longer in the House, if they were given the opportunity to do so in the country at large, we never would get the results in time for elections?

Mr. Howard: I am not certain how entirely helpful is the parallel that my hon. Friend draws, so I hope that she will forgive me if I do not follow her down that road. It is clear that we would be running substantial, and unacceptable, risks.

Mr. Hoon: I have listened to the Home Secretary describing his great weight of responsibility. Given the timetable resulting from the Bill, were those matters in the collective mind of Home Office Ministers for the long period that we have had to wait for the Bill to be presented to the House? The Home Secretary makes a persuasive case about accepting his responsibilities, but were they not the same during the eight months that we waited before the Bill was presented?

4.45 pm

Mr. Howard: Yes, of course those matters were in the collective mind of the Home Office and of others elsewhere during that period. I cannot pretend that they were uppermost in my mind, but they were under consideration. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have faced an exceptionally heavy legislative burden during this Session. For that reason, it has not been possible to bring the proposals to the House before now.

The timetable that I have placed before the Committee is not one which I have drawn up unaided. It has been drawn up by my officials, in consultation with the Boundary Commission. They have taken into account the time that each of the stages in the procedure can realistically be expected to take

I sympathise with the sentiments behind the amendment. If I thought it possible to achieve the objective that the amendment sets out, without involving an unacceptable risk to the timetable of the process, I should be much more minded than I am to translate my sympathy into action, but I have a responsibility to ensure that the new constituencies are in place in good time for next year's European parliamentary elections. We could not achieve that without taking an undue and unacceptable risk if we were to accept the holding of public inquiries. For that reason, I invite the Committee to reject the amendment.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I listened with care and interest to the Home Secretary's exposition of his difference with the official Opposition over the amendment. It seemed to boil down to a difference of seven weeks. As many more than seven weeks have elapsed since the problem came to public attention, he cannot be absolved of responsibility for the imbroglio in which we find ourselves. As he spoke, I was reminded of the Empress Maria-Theresa's attitude to the partition of Poland—the more he wept for the demise of democracy, the more he demanded by way of subtraction from democratic procedures.

We are arguing not just about seven weeks, but about an important principle and issue of natural justice. That principle is summarised in the phrase—no doubt well known to him as a lawyer—"audi alteram partem", meaning that it is appropriate to hear both viewpoints. If all viewpoints are not openly expressed before the Boundary Commission, or this substitute for a commission which he dreamt up, the public cannot be satisfied that proper considerations have been taken into account during the process, or that justice has been done. The Home Secretary's suggestion that he is anxious to stick as far as possible to the Boundary Commission's procedures is a somewhat threadbare assertion if the core of that procedure, the public inquiry, is dispensed with.

It was argued on Second Reading, although not by the Home Secretary today, that this procedure is not wholly unprecedented because a somewhat truncated procedure was accepted by Parliament in 1978 on the recommendation of the then Government. I do not need to go into the historical precedent and the reasons for it. However, it is right to note that, in these matters, precedent is often invoked.

Mr. Howard: Could the hon. Gentleman's reluctance to go into the reasons for that decision have anything to do with the fact that he is the only hon. Member in the Chamber at the moment who was a member of the Government who took that decision?

Mr. Maclennan: It could, but it does not. The historical record would seem remote from today's debate. Although I have a considerable historical interest in what happened on that first occasion when we made arrangements for the election of Members to the European Parliament, it would be wearisome for the Committee if I were to elaborate upon what happened.

The point that I want to make is that precedent is invoked in such matters. It is clear in retrospect that it was unfortunate that that precedent was established then because the Government have prayed it in aid as the reason for proceeding as they have today, just as I fear that they may pray in aid in future the precedent of the measure before us to dispense with what many people would regard as a key part of the process of the fair distribution of seats.

It is not as though this situation is wholly unique. We can anticipate that, in future, there will be alterations in the number of seats consequent upon alterations in the size of the European Community if Scandinavian and eastern European applicants are admitted to the Community. If that happens, we can anticipate that there will be alterations in the composition of the European Parliament. There can be no confident prediction that that will occur at a time which makes it easy for the Government of the day to fit in with the timetable of the Boundary Commission.

In dispensing with the Boundary Commission's procedures, we are setting a dangerous precedent, which can be ameliorated only in the way suggested by the hon.

[Mr. Maclennan]

Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) if we are to avoid a sense of injustice following the process which the Bill encapsulates.

I listened to what the Home Secretary said about his inability to guarantee the conclusion of the procedures if the public inquiry process is included. I am bound to say that his suggested reasons for delay were far-fetched to the point of fancy. It would not be difficult to empower the boundary commissioners—or the committee chairmen as proposed in the Bill—to take steps, in the event of emergencies of the kind adumbrated by the Home Secretary, which would truncate the procedures or ensure that the results were available by a given date. In my opinion, it would be possible to do that in a way that would make it proof against judicial review.

If there was a will, there would be a way. It must be said that the Home Secretary has, from the beginning, made it plain that he had no will or stomach for ensuring that the carve-up of seats was seen to be fair among all parts of the countries affected. From what the Home Secretary has said, it has been almost impossible to divine the serious objections to the proposed timetable.

The Home Secretary said that he has heard from some boundary commissioners that they would find the timetable tight and that it does not conform with previous practice. However, we are not dealing with a situation which can be fitted in nicely with the timetables to which boundary commissioners have worked in the past.

I noted what the Home Secretary said about the fact that some of those who would be participating as counsel in the inquiries are engaged on a part-time basis. It is not entirely clear why that should be an insuperable or even a difficult obstacle. We are not talking about the situation in which there are, by the Home Secretary's own admission, a vast number of inquiries. He suggested that there might be 10. If one cared enough about the democratic process it would be perfectly possible to retain the services of those part-time participants here and now and dispense with them as it became clear that their services were not required.

Many of the professional people whom the Home Secretary referred would regard it as a normal part of their public service to be engaged and not to do it for pin money. I venture to suggest that the Home Secretary has exaggerated that problem unconvincingly.

I hope that the Committee will have heard the careful way in which the hon. Member for Sedgefield spelt out his proposals. The timetable that he adumbrated is realistic and fair and allows ample time at each of its stages for proper consideration of the proposals by individual members of the public, local authorities and others. If that timetable were implemented, it would be possible to include in the Bill provisions for a public inquiry which would ameliorate provisions which are otherwise quite unacceptable.

The Home Secretary said that the amendment was not drafted so as to achieve its purpose. However, that is almost invariably the case when amendments are drafted by the Opposition or minority parties which do not have the benefit of parliamentary counsel advice. The purpose of the amendment is clear beyond any doubt. If further refinements are required, the Government have at their resources skilled draftsmen who are perfectly capable of helping Parliament in that respect.

If the proposal of the hon. Member for Sedgefield, which my right hon. and hon. Friends and I and many hon. Members on all sides of the Committee support, is accepted, it would be sensible to write in a measure which is not specifically alluded to in paragraph 5A of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 which the amendment seeks to import into the Bill. That is a power for the boundary commissioners or their chairmen to dispense with or timetable a particular part of a proposal, or to manage the procedures of the commission so as to achieve the objective of concluding the process by the date which is generally agreed to be desirable. I understand that the Government wish that process to be concluded by the end of January or perhaps the end of the year. It would certainly be desirable to achieve that process by the end of the year and I have already indicated that view to the Home Office. We are at one on that matter.

5 pm

In the circumstances, giving the chairmen of the committees, as they are called in the Bill—they are not the Boundary Commission—the duty to present the report by that time would ensure that their role could be discharged without the threat of judicial review invalidating any step in the procedure or making it practically impossible to hold the inquiries at such a key part of the process. Therefore, I have great pleasure in supporting amendment No. 23 and I hope that the whole Committee will think it right to do so.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): The beginning of the debate was almost an uplifting occasion, with the match between the Dispatch Box eloquence of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and the forensic skills of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. None the less, there is some unhappiness because there is no doubt that the absence of a public inquiry is inevitably a factor which vitiates the procedures for the prospective European parliamentary elections.

I should like to be rather more pedestrian and reflect on some of the grubby ways of politics. It is not the fault of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that we find ourselves in this position. We are in this position because a decision, I believe, was taken by the Government that the work of the Boundary Commission on our Westminster constituencies should precede all other considerations.

If one could summon from the murky depths of Cabinet committees and drag into the daylight blinking Ministers who had taken the decision, one would find that they were all among the most communautaire element of the Cabinet. What does that demonstrate? It demonstrates that, when it comes down to domestic consideration against European commitment, domestic consideration wins, and not just by a nose.

I make that good-natured observation because it clears the ground from a certain amount of what otherwise might be make-believe.

It is obviously regrettable that there cannot be public inquiries, but I place some hope upon what my right hon. and learned Friend has asserted about the representations that may take place after the recommendations have been published. I say that in the peculiar context of the review,

it being about the European constituencies and not about the reviews with which we are naturally more familiar and which relate to the Westminster Parliament. Although the Westminster Parliament experiences the most extraordinary consequences and the most unexpected and unwelcome upheavals in boundary designation, there is a very significant factor, which is that council districts may be cannibalised to produce a relatively static parliamentary situation. Great flexibility is available to those who draw the Westminster boundaries to ensure to some extent that there is maximum continuity.

No such factor operates in respect of the European constituencies. No Westminster constituency can be cannibalised to try to bring about greater continuity and stability in the European electoral map. One move, I believe, could have more knock-on consequences right across the European electoral map than we have possibly hitherto considered. If that is true, the possible dislocation or redrafting as a result of the adhesion of the four, five or six extra seats could mean a substantial redrafting of the European seats.

I put that in the context of a very large question mark because I cannot in any sense anticipate the findings of the boundaries committee. However, the very fact that one cannot break up one constituency and allocate it to neighbouring European constituencies deprives us of one factor of bringing about greater stability than would otherwise be the case. That is self-evident, and it means that one has to accept, certainly as a possibility, far greater upheaval from this seemingly relatively simple alteration to our representation in Strasbourg than perhaps we have hitherto assumed. If that is the case, the opportunity for representation, for appeal and for reconsideration is much more powerful.

Clearly, that is a matter that my right hon. and learned Friend will have considered, but it reinforces the point that there must be maximum opportunities for those who are affected to be able to appeal against whatever decision is made. Whether that can be conveyed to those who will administer the process—and that is in itself sufficient—or whether it will necessitate adjustment in the Bill, I know not, but I would like my right hon. and learned Friend to reassure me on that point.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has dealt in detail with several practicalities for a timetable for public hearings. I begin by examining one aspect of what I hope are the principles involved, particularly against the background of other provisions in the Bill. I invite hon. Members to read the Bill as a whole and then say whether, on balance, they consider that the approach that the Government are recommending is one that we in this country are either used to or expect from a Government dealing with the sensitive issue of the redrawing of boundaries—something that has been regarded as above and beyond party political considerations and has brought great credit to this country for the way in which such issues are resolved.

Read as a whole, the Bill contains an extraordinary set of provisions which, taken together, could be viewed as deeply disturbing. They could be described by someone in the Public Gallery, with recent experience of a totalitarian country, as the product of that kind of approach. I do not say that I would use that expression. Someone who lived in the former Soviet Union might look at the provisions with a somewhat jaundiced eye.

In case Conservative Members consider that I am overstating the case, I invite them to consider the Bill and use the modern term for what we call the Secretary of State or the Home Secretary—"Minister of the Interior". That is, instead of the comforting descriptions that we use—Secretary of State or Home Secretary, to which no one in this country would take exception—we might use the expression "Minister of the Interior". That would produce a different interpretation, particularly of the schedule.

If the "Minister of the Interior" were responsible for the appointment of the members of the various committees and their staff and, in turn, responsible for their terms and conditions and determining their pay, we would be looking at the proposals much more suspiciously. If he were then able to make modifications to the proposals without necessarily referring to a member of the committee—and, indeed, he was able to make further incidental or consequential provisions—we would have some doubts about whether that was the sort of system that we expected from a democratic Government in a democratic society. That is one aspect of the schedule and the way in which the committees are composed.

We would be more disturbed if the provisions were unable to be challenged legally. That is the sort of approach that we expect in totalitarian societies. In such societies, we would expect the Government to introduce proposals that could not be subject to any sort of legal challenge. Of course, that is precisely what we find in the schedule—the recommendations of the committees cannot be challenged in the courts. We have discussed that matter and I listened to the Minister's explanation. His explanation was less than satisfactory, if I can put it that way. In addition, the Bill provides for the committees to be established in advance of Royal Assent. Clause 2(6) provides for the work of the committees to be retrospectively validated.

I mention those points simply to show how someone who perhaps does not clearly understand the intention and motivation of the Government, which I am sure is fair-minded and reasonable, with regard to the proposals might read the Bill and say that it does not have the hallmark of fairness that we would expect in Britain, which is associated with the sensitive subject of the drawing of boundaries.

I mention all of those points not to depart from the amendment but to emphasise a simple point of principle. If the Government say that there is no validity whatever in the argument, a simple way of resolving the problem would be to accept the idea that there should be public involvement in the process, as proposed in the amendment.

There should be proper public consultation and hearings of the sort that we would expect if this were a matter for the boundary commissioners, or a procedure that the Home Secretary described as being "as close as possible to the procedure adopted by the boundary commissioners". The reason for my long introduction is simply to put the matter in the context of the Bill.

The amendment, however it is interpreted, would permit a clear refutation of the argument that somehow or other the Government are being unfair, partial and not necessarily adhering to the spirit of the redrawing of boundaries which has been a characteristic of the House and its work for some considerable time.

I turn to the Home Secretary's arguments about the timetable. I hope that he will forgive me for saying that his

[Mr. Hoon]

argument was a little slippery with regard to the justification for the Government's difficulties. The Government have known for some eight months that they had to introduce these proposals. I listened carefully to the arguments advanced in terms of the Home Secretary's responsibility to ensure that the procedure is conducted properly and there is not the opportunity for people to disrupt the process and make it last much longer than any conceivable timetable will allow.

Those are perfectly reasonable arguments, and I can understand the Government's fear. However, that needs to be balanced against the fact that the Government have known for some eight months that they had to introduce this Bill. The Home Secretary's arguments would be much more acceptable, and certainly more understandable, if there had been greater urgency on the part of the Government.

It is hard for me to accept—I sat through most days and nights of the Maastricht process—that there are not three days of parliamentary time for the Bill, even allowing for the time that was taken to deal with the Maastricht Bill, and assuming that as many as three days are necessary to complete all of the relevant stages. That argument is a little difficult to accept against that background.

5.15 pm

The argument is more difficult to accept when the Home Secretary shifts his position slightly and slips from one justification to another. He began by saying that it was difficult to follow the various stages that would be required within a reasonable time and then concluded by saying that one of the real difficulties was that the process could be open-ended if people took advantage of the opportunity to frustrate the work of the public inquiries.

I know that the Home Secretary, in a previous incarnation, has had considerable experience of public inquiries. Clearly, some public inquiries have stretched for a considerable time—and much longer than originally envisaged. However, I cannot think of a Boundary Commission public inquiry that has lasted an inordinate amount of time, nor one that has been abused in that way.

Let us assume that, in some part of the country, people took it into their heads to prolong the work of a public inquiry. The Home Secretary knows better than I—and probably better than any other hon. Member—how public inquiries are organised and run, and how those who are responsible for taking evidence organise the work.

With that practical understanding of the process, he knows better than anyone else that whoever is responsible for the organisation of a public inquiry could at the outset set out the opportunities that people would have to give evidence, the time limits that he expected and, if necessary, the sort of sittings that could be arranged if there was any deliberate organised attempt to prolong the proceedings for longer than the timetable proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

The Home Secretary knows that the people who are appointed to organise public inquiries are not usually those who will be intimidated by the organised disruption of business. Effectively, he is saying that an organised filibuster might make such public inquiries take longer than to next June, which is clearly the date that we are concerned about. Even if a public hearing ran into May, it would still be possible to hold public inquiries and allow us to reach a conclusion. I simply invite the Home Secretary to examine that aspect.

The Home Secretary is saying that the Government want the process to be completed towards the end of November, rather than towards the end of December or January, whichever timetable is adopted. As he fairly said, that is a matter of judgment. It is a matter of exercising our minds about what is appropriate. In that context, I simply invite him to consider this question: what difference will that make in practice?

Let us assume that the process is completed by the end of November—I understand that that is roughly the Government's intended timetable. That would mean that, over the Christmas holiday period of late December to early January, we would all know the nature of the European constituency boundaries. That does not seem to add unduly to the advantage that the political parties may gain from the knowledge of the precise organisation of the European constituencies at that stage. It seems to make little difference to the candidates standing in those elections whether the changed boundaries are published in late November, ready for Christmas and the new year, or at the end of December or January.

Having stood in two such elections, I recognise the advantage to the candidates of knowing as early as possible the nature of the boundaries. I do not argue against that and I understand why the Government want them to be published as soon as possible. However, as the Government have waited for eight months, it is difficult to accept that eight more weeks will make a big difference to European constituency organisation and election campaigns fought by the candidates.

Although the constituencies will not be finalised, most candidates will have a good idea of the nature of the constituencies in which they will be campaigning. Hon. Members are as familiar with that process as anyone else. Once the Boundary Commission has produced its proposals, notwithstanding the possibility of a public inquiry, everyone has an idea what the constituencies will be like once the elections take place. That is what we are arguing in terms of the European constituencies.

The committees will make their proposals in August. Whether or not there are procedures for public consultation, those proposals will be known to everyone. The opportunities for changing them will be relatively limited, because, for the time being, most European constituencies contain some eight parliamentary constituencies. The rules will be the same as in the past, whereby entire parliamentary constituencies must fit within European constituency boundaries.

In those circumstances, the possibilities of change will not be so great that candidates will be unduly and adversely affected by a delay of eight weeks in the process, given the fact that we have already waited eight months. It is therefore a little difficult to accept the argument about the timetable.

In the context of a Bill that raises questions in people's minds about the integrity and objectivity of the process of redrawing boundaries, I hope that the Government will accept the amendment, so that the Bill can proceed smoothly with widespread acceptance in the House.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): I hope that the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) will forgive me if I do not follow his argument precisely, although he was correct

to remind the House that we should not take our democratic practices for granted. It would be easy to do so as, because we have become accustomed to them, we feel that they can be bent or adjusted according to the exigencies of developing circumstances.

I refer to the interesting words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen). I do not share his suspicion of ministerial actions but believe that Ministers have given deep thought to the requirements of these elections, as they do to those of domestic elections. They have planned the process carefully, bearing in mind the outcome that they wish to achieve—fair boundaries for fair elections, which will result in as fair an outcome as possible, representing a variety of political opinions from throughout the country.

Although I regard the Bill with less suspicion than my right hon. Friend, I share with him some qualms about the possibility, although not the probability, of the cannibalisation of Westminster constituencies to make up tidy European parliamentary constituencies. There would be less redrawing of existing seats and less upheaval if a different form of elections were used in the future.

Mr. Biffen: A Westminster seat cannot be cannibalised in the context of European elections. That point was put to me recently by a Member of the European Parliament.

Mr. Rathbone: I thank my right hon. Friend for that clarification and reassurance. I hope to be able to provide a little more reassurance in a moment.

To achieve what the House and the Government want to achieve requires considerable study and the maximum opportunity for those concerned, at both the receiving and planning ends, to expose their thoughts and have them questioned.

The opening remarks of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary gave some reassurance. He described the committee, as it is to be called, that is to be set up for Wales and made up of commissioners. However, there are some serious difficulties in identifying proven commission members for the committee for England. Even if that turned out to the best, it seems to show that there may be a requirement for even greater supervision and review of their conclusions than would normally be the case for a Westminster constituency.

I shall not be tempted to reiterate all the timing problems, as both sides of the argument have been put clearly. However, I conjecture with the House about how our decisions today could affect actions in the future, particularly if at some time in the future a pan-European system of elections were adopted and applied to this country, as it would be applied to all other countries in the European Community. For example, if the additional member system were adopted for this process, the plans that we are now making would affect what was considered then.

I share with hon. Members on both sides of the House a belief that it is a pity that the Government have risked missing the opportunity to adopt the additional member system, because it would be sensible to adopt a system designed for additional members when we are discussing the allocation of additional members. It seems to fit so beautifully tidily and might even let my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary off the hook if it were adopted. There is no difficulty in Wales because Wales is being treated as a single constituency anyway, but it would require a drawing of constituency boundaries in England to establish the best system, which is regional representation for the five additional seats that are to be given to England.

The basis for that system lies in our economic regions, although there are eight of those so they would have to be adjusted to fit the five seats. There would have to be combinations of areas such as north, Yorkshire and Humberside, north-west and east midlands, east Anglia and east midlands, north-west and the west midlands, the south-west, and the south-east. I shall not attempt at this stage to set out a prescription for that, and there is nothing sacrosanct in any of those divisions.

It would be easy to set up the new Euro-constituencies for an additional member within the constraints so clearly outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North. With that possibility in mind, I consider it all the more important that a clear system is set up now, and that we do not create further precedents for the establishment of constituency boundaries in the way that the Government have outlined.

5.30 pm

This is not blue sky dreaming; it is not an impossibility. It is possible that the new requirement will come to pass. It is not a new fad. Our electoral system has developed over the centuries: we have made quantitative reforms, such as broadening the franchise so that men and women have equal voting rights; the voting age was lowered recently and, even more recently, people on holiday or living abroad were allowed to vote. We are not unused to changing our electoral circumstances and methods.

We have even been innovative in terms of qualitative improvements, as can be seen in the electoral arrangements for the European Parliament that have been made in Northern Ireland. Those arrangements establish a better representation of the various divisions in Northern Ireland.

Steps towards further reforms—whether unilaterally by the United Kingdom Government or as part of a pan-European activity—are not inconceivable. There are well-established criteria for such developments.

We want the British system to maintain the current firmly rooted democratic practice of a close relationship between representatives and their constituencies. That would mean a continuation of the current first-past-the-post system of elections for the European Parliament. Subsequently, to allow for national unity and representation of minorities—especially nationally based minorities—additional Members would be added.

The additional seats would encourage broadly based national parties to gain representation in areas where they have sizeable support, although they do not have a majority. There are two very good examples in Scotland, which were raised in the House only yesterday. The Liberal Democrats and the Conservative party in Scotland do not have proportionate representation in the European Parliament. We want to maintain in this country—as we always have—a simple system, as opposed to the complicated systems of other European countries.

Those points underline, yet again, the possibility—the probability, perhaps—of the adoption of the additional Member system, particularly where additional Members are already being established. That would both increase proportionality and maintain single-Member constituency representation.

It may seem as peculiar for a Conservative to adopt this line today as it seemed yesterday for a hon. Member for a Sussex constituency to be concerned about representation in Scotland, at the other end of the United Kingdom, but it is not as peculiar as it might seem at first. Some change to the electoral system for the European Parliament is inevitable, sooner or later. It would be in British interests, and the Government's interests, to adopt the system best suited to our present and future, and to give the lead and promote it as the best system for Europe. If we do not do that now, we will inevitably have to do it in the future, at a time when political pressures may be much greater.

If we adopted the system now, we would give a good British and Conservative lead to the rest of Europe. We would establish a paternity for reform, which I would be only too pleased to see as part of the action and initiative of my party, Parliament and the country. We would, in the process, show our commitment to constitutional propriety.

I am not being disloyal to the present Government or the present system—although I think that the system could stand improvement—by putting forward these suggestions. In the past, the Tory party has been committed to protecting individual rights and individual responsibilities, and I think that has been at the core of many of the comments made by hon. Members on both sides of the House. We are certainly committed to supporting properly founded constitutional democracy, and that is one of the themes that I have tried to follow.

There is no doubt that the ownership of an equally valid vote—along with the opportunity to cast it effectively—is the essence of freedom and the cornerstone of national confidence, without which we will never recreate and conserve a firmly founded United Kingdom. The fact that precedents have been set in the past suggests that we should eschew the temptation to set a further precedent now, which might be detrimental in the future. It is important to remember that young people will have more to enjoy or endure in the future than most of us—certainly more than people of my own generation.

It is with those questions in mind that I express the hope that Ministers will reconsider the question of public hearings in regard to the drawing of European constituencies. Wider ramifications will be involved in the drawing of those constituencies, not just for now but in the future as Europe, and our position in it, increases.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): I listened carefully to the remarks of the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) and I agree with a great deal of what he said. I shall make three or four brief comments, one of which has doubtless been made many times during the debate.

Although this is a very short Bill and the debates have not been massively attended, it is an extremely important Bill; not to put it too pompously, it is part of the fabric of our democracy. It may be only a small part, but it is an extremely important one. I think that we should change the system of our democracy, or any part of it, only with great care and deliberation. That is not an automatically conservative approach, but an approach based on common sense.

The structure of boundaries is a small part of a democracy, but we in this Parliament are increasingly in the habit of sending observers to elections in other parts of the world, either from this Parliament directly or through the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association or the United Nations. I strongly support that. The intention is to determine whether elections are free and fair, and we must indulge in the exercise with some modesty.

Mr. Rathbone: One other body through which that is done is the Council of Europe.

Mr. Grocott: That is right and in all cases, whatever the auspices, the objective is simple but vital in countries such as Angola and Nigeria, to name but two where the exercise was recently carried out. It has been a revealing experience for many of us because it has told us something about our own democracy. Anyone with some humility and intelligence who examines how things are done in other democracies will start to ask questions about how effectively we operate our own democracy. It is right to ask such questions because many aspects of our democracy bear closer scrutiny. So as not to be ruled out of order, I shall mention just two.

It is most peculiar that in our democreacy the strictest control, based on individual constituencies, is exercised on what candidates can spend. The obvious reason for that is to stop people buying votes. However, there is no control whatever of national expenditure, although we all know that when it comes to the crunch in a general election national considerations primarily determine the outcome. Some hon. Members, of whom I am not one because I have lost elections on several occasions, think that the outcome is solely due to the talents of the candidate. However, most of us are honest enough to admit that it has much more to do with national considerations.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): My hon. Friend speaks about general election expenses. Does he agree that money spent in Britain on general elections should be raised here and that money raised overseas should play no part?

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying wide of the amendment.

Mr. Grocott: I am not certain whether my hon. Friend refers to a current example, but I am sure that the principle he has enunciated is right.

My modest observation is that many aspects of our democracy do not stand up in comparison with some other democracies. The other obvious example relates to the first item that we look at when testing whether elections abroad are free and fair—the dissemination of information. People who observe general elections in this country should apply the test of whether there is fairness among the different news outlets in the explanation of party manifestos and objectives. They would be hard pressed to say that it is fair.

Another matter that has emerged, if it has not emerged before from observations of overseas elections, is that our democracy is extremely complicated and includes legislation such as the Bill. Free and fair elections cannot just be achieved on the day by checking that the right people take part. It is about the machinery that is established in the run-up to the election and that can extend over many years. That is what we are debating and it is central to a first-past-the-post system, which I strongly favour and hope that we shall retain for a long time.

There is nothing more central to such a system than the determination of parliamentary boundaries. Although the boundary commissioners will never admit it, the

determination of such boundaries has strong political ramifications as well as all the usual arguments about community of interest.

We should be cautious and acknowledge that when the process is interfered with, for whatever reason, it runs risks. Why are the Government interfering in this normal part of our democratic process? Is it because it has not worked in the past? Like many hon. Members, I have been involved for many years in parliamentary and Boundary Commission inquiries. The system works fairly well and it does not take long.

In Shropshire, the preliminary proposals were presented in September, the inquiry took place earlier this year and the final report is expected quite soon. That is a fairly leisurely pace, but it gave everyone the opportunity to express their views. The public inquiry was relaxed and good and it was a small but essential part of our democratic machinery. There is no reason for tampering with it because there is no suggestion that the procedure is at fault.

5.45 pm

Democracy is a fragile flower. We have to be careful how we tamper with it and we must be especially careful when it is tampered with unilaterally. I was persuaded by some of the speeches by Conservative Members. Is it a good idea for the Government to present such a Bill when concerns have been expressed, especially about the amendment, and to push it through? Presumably the Government will use their majority to do that unilaterally and without the sort of consultation that one would normally expect on such a Bill.

The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), who is my parliamentary neighbour, asked in his usual gentle teasing style what happened after Cabinet committees had operated and Ministers blinked in the light of day. Perhaps I can take his inquiry further. We all know the genesis for the Boundary Commission acceleration nationally, which has been followed by the European Boundary Commission. It is because the Conservative party, mistakenly I am happy to say, believes the national newspapers which say that changes in boundaries will give the party a net gain of 25 to 30 seats. I have never believed that for a moment and history is a little on my side.

There was great agitation about the Boundary Commission recommendation before the 1974 election, which took place in the 1970-74 Parliament. I was not here at the time, but I remember that the newspapers strongly supported the then Conservative Government, no doubt on the ground that when the new boundaries came into operation they would deliver a Conservative victory in February 1974. What happened was unique in British parliamentary history. In the election, Labour did not get as many votes as the Conservatives did, but it won more seats. That is what matters and it resulted in that splendid Labour Government from 1974 to 1979.

The Home Secretary smiles. He was not here at the time. If he had been it would have been a valuable part of his political education. He could have enjoyed with us our legislation to protect workers and to abolish tied cottages and could have witnessed the move towards fairness in education. I fear that I would be out of order if I went further, but I am sure that you, Mr. Lofthouse, are enjoying this as much as I am.

That belief by the newspapers was based on the false premise that a boundary redistribution was always an advantage for the Conservative party. There is bad news for the Conservatives almost by the month. Although I can speak only of areas that I know best, it is predictable that seats will go in city centres. But they will be re-established in the suburbs and the more rural areas as people, many of whom I am happy to say are Labour voters, move to the suburbs and rural areas.

I confidently look forward to Labour Members being returned in many of the seats that have been recommended so far. That will happen at the next general election, and the sooner the better. It is based on a false premise. Labour Members, being altruistic, will not try to rush through boundary changes because we know that they are to our advantage; we believe that they should be based on established democratic procedures which include essentially a proper public inquiry at which everyone who is likely to be affected can make their views known.

It is easy for a Government with a majority, albeit a small one, to say, "This is in our political interests so we will get it through, and it is tough if you are in opposition." It is in the nature of political life and happens often in regard to various pieces of legislation, but it is particularly bad and dangerous when it involves the machinery of our democracy. We tend to be a little pompous about it, particularly in relation to other countries, but it has been established with considerable difficulty and numerous parliamentary battles over a long period.

I urge the House to see the common sense of my hon. Friend's amendment and to ensure that proper democratic public inquiries take place for the European elections.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde):

In principle, we are absolutely correct to support the amendment, as we are in danger of threatening our entire democratic process by removing the public inquiry from any boundary change, especially in Europe.

We are in the throes of discussing local government boundary changes in Scotland. The people of Scotland are not happy with the present lack of consultation. The Government are continually destroying people's rights to be heard and to make democratic observations in the right and proper place and on the right and proper platform.

I remember one of the first public inquiries in which I took part. I am not an academic; I have never professed to be an academic. I have seen how Ministers and Members of Parliament operate in the House of Commons. When they meet someone who asks a complicated question, they say, "Write me a letter," and they never receive that letter. That is the biggest put-off they can give anybody. How many people out there can write letters to inquiries?

We should consider the rights of our constituents to examine boundary changes. Anyone living in any constituency has the right to be heard. We are not talking about people's right to write an elaborate letter and put everything that they feel into that letter. Many of our constituents do not have the skill to write letters putting their objections. They need the right to a public inquiry so that they can articulate their views, perhaps better than they can write.

My name is not Jeffrey Archer; I am Tommy Graham, a Member of Parliament who came up through the ranks and went to a comprehensive school. I did not go to any fancy university or public school. I had an elementary

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

education and I have worked at it all my life. I still do not write 50 or 60-page letters. That is not my style; it is not how I operate, nor is it my academic upbringing.

We insult millions of people by not allowing them to take part in the democratic process of a public inquiry. It is an insult to destroy their right to be heard. In a democracy, it is important that we never short-circuit; when we do, we end up with dictators, bad legislation and shoddy workmanship. The Government should never take away people's right to be heard. They cannot expect everyone to sit down and write out their objections.

I represent a constituency which epitomises the solid working-class in Britain. Most people in my constituency do not have work, perhaps as a result of Government policies. I have spoken to folk about many things, and I have fallen into the same trap—*[Interruption.]* If any hon. Member wishes to ask a question, I am happy to give way.

When folk have come to my surgery with their problems and I have had a big surgery with 20 or 30 folk waiting, I have said, "Maybe you could go home and write to me." I got a blank look, and then I saw the pain that I caused. Now I never ask folk to do that before asking, "Are you all right at letter writing? Do you have any difficulties? If you wish to dictate a letter, we will sit down and work it out."

A public inquiry is a vehicle for vocal expression and that is crucial to democracy. I will continue to elaborate my point so that the Minister will be absolutely clear as to what I am saying. We all know that there are frail, elderly people who may be suffering from some mental or physical problem or an illness that does not allow them to sit down and write an elaborate letter. I do not always ask my constituents to write letters; I give them help and assistance to articulate their views so that they can sign a statement saying exactly what they want and pass it on to the Government.

The Government are now short-circuiting democracy by setting up committees whose members will say that people can write with their representations. However, Mrs. McDonald, a housewife without academic experience, may still wish to make representations about boundaries.

In a famous case in Scotland, a woman took her case to the European Court and won. I see the wee smile on the Minister's face and I am delighted to see that he has some humour. She articulated her case and the court put it on paper.

My demand is not short-circuiting democracy; the Government have short-circuited all kinds of democracy. They do not listen to people. Another way of turning a deaf ear is to make people write.

I plead with the Minister to support our amendment, as it is sensible. If the Government do not support it, they will be getting into the realms of political chicanery and letting the Boundary Commission get away with it. I notice that you are listening closely, Mr. Lofthouse, and I shall stick rigidly to the amendment. The point I am making is relevant to the amendment. It is also relevant to local government in Scotland as the Boundary Commission there will be able to act in the way I have mentioned.

All the boundaries start at distict council level. The wards are made into regional council sets which then are made into parliamentary seats which are made into European seats. Aspects of local government make it important that the whole process is followed through.

There is no way in which anyone could be denied the right to argue about the geographical location of boundaries in local government. There is no way in which we would accept that we do not have a right to a public inquiry to articulate our arguments about parliamentary boundaries. We would go loopy loo in here if we were denied that right. So why should we accept a situation in which the issue of the European boundaries will not be allowed a full public debate?

Whether they can write letters or not, people have the democratic right to be heard. Everyone has a right to speak and to be listended to, and I hope that the Government will allow them to do that.

6 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I apologise for not being present during the Front-Bench speeches. I was asked to comment on the welcome decision of the court to require the Home Secretary to review again the issue of a posthumous pardon for Derek Bentley. I and many others have campaigned for that, so naturally I had to give it some priority. I am pleased that the Home Secretary is here. I hope that he examines the case carefully, because he knows that there is a well of opinion on the side of reviewing the case and granting a posthumous pardon. I will not go further down that road, but that is why I was not able to be present.

I want to comment on the question of public inquiries because it is important. I happen to be a victim of boundary changes. I realise that we are talking about European seats—EC seats. We use the word "European" too sloppily. Europe is a continent and the word should not be used when referring to a group of 12 trading states that are forming an inward-looking block. The issue of public inquiries relates to every decision about a constituency, whether it is a parliamentary seat or the larger—half a million—EC seat. Public inquiries often represent keenly fought arguments and invoke strong feelings in relation to disputes over a decision by a committee about whether an area should be excluded or included.

For nine and a half years I was the Member of Parliament for Keighley. There was a strong argument about whether an area called Ilkley should be included in that constituency. It was widely regarded as an overwhelmingly Conservative area and, since I had a majority of 75, the question whether that area should be included was examined with some concern.

We argued that Bingley should be included. We suggested that, not only on the ground of political advantage, although that is a motivating factor in many people's concern, but because it was a better unit. It was closer to the centre of Keighley and would have made a much more effective political and representative unit, more able to be represented by a Member of Parliament than the seat that was finally decided upon. In those circumstances, Mr. Lofthouse, I am sure that you realise that there were heated debates.

These Common Market seats are difficult and unwieldy. They consist of half a million people at the very least. With that size, it is difficult for people to feel any sort of identity with the person who represents them. The

first-past-the-post system is much more likely to give a sense of identification than the various conundrums that surround proportional representation. Proportional representation is one way of divorcing any sense of identity between the electorate and the representative.

That being the case, the first-past-the-post system is more likely to produce arguments about seats, because individuals are involved. That is one of the reasons why we should have a public inquiry to resolve the committee's recommendations. People representing the areas involved may wish to have some say in the decision on an EEC constituency.

Mr. Rathbone: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's comments about proportional representation and the first-past-the-post system. If he had been in the Chamber earlier, he would have heard what I had to say. I am sorry that he was not here, but I am sure that he was busy elsewhere.

The hon. Gentleman's blanket condemnation of proportional representative systems does not apply to all those systems. For instance, it does not apply to the additional member system, which maintains constituency representation and has members in addition. So that there is both proportionality and representation of individual constituencies.

Mr. Cryer: I know that that system was adopted in western Germany and, subsequently, in Germany. It is entirely unsatisfactory because, for example, in Germany 50 per cent. of the members are decided by the additional member system and takes that number of people out of contact with constituencies. In the context of this amendment, it would mean less local feel and the question of public inquiries would not be so important.

The additional member system also places an additional weapon in the hands of the central party apparatchiks. The dissidents of a party are perforce limited to the possibility of being selected in a reduced number of seats where they can be elected and have some independence in the body to which they are elected. The additional members are chosen by virtue of their loyalty or even subservience to the party.

I spent five years in the EC. One of the difficulties involved in dealing with the other parties representing member states in the EC is trying to obtain comments from them. They have to clear everything with central office or the central party apparatchiks. If they do not do so, they are in danger of making a statement that will place them not at No. 10 in the list of additional members, but at No. 1,010. If the Labour party had an additional member system, there are several people who would be a long way down the list. Mercifully, we do not have such a system.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I was in the European Parliament for twice as long as the hon. Gentleman. I can confirm everything that he has said. In 1984, Mr. Chirac, the leader of the Gaullists, went to a number of people who had been distinguished Members of the European Parliament in the previous five years and said, "You have annoyed me. You will not even be No. 81 on the Gaullist list." The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) is quite right because we saw in the European Parliament how that power is misused.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying rather wide of the subject of inquiries. It would be welcome if we were to return to it.

Mr. Cryer: Under a system in which individuals represent constituencies, the question of public inquiries is more important because the issues are more keenly felt. In Holland, the EC pays considerable expenses directly to political parties. If an inquirer applies for information or comments on a case, it is sent to the party and the case is allocated to a Member of the European Parliament on the list. That means that the issue becomes an amorphous blur rather than a Member taking it up on behalf of constituents and building up, he hopes, a certain following. That is difficult to do in a constituency of half a million people, but at least the individual representing the constituency will have the chance to do so.

For example, I took up the case of 200 Sheffield steelworkers who, after they were made redundant, were not given money for retraining that was due to them under the treaty of Paris because Commissioner Manuel Marin was using them as a pawn in negotiations with the Government of the day. I had to lead a campaign to get those workers the money. Those steelworkers would say, "We do not accept the recommendations of the Boundary Commission because they would cut us out of the constituency. We are delighted and satisfied with the representation that we have had and we do not want to be part of the EC constituency."

Under the first-past-the-post system, constituents can say to their Member of Parliament, "What on earth are you doing about this issue?" That is not possible under a list system, because Members are bothered only about staying on the list, which, by and large, is decided not by the electorate but by party apparatchiks. I am opposed to the list system and to proportional representation because the relationship between the member and the constituency is important.

As an MEP, I represented Sheffield steelworkers and tried to get some changes out of Manuel Marin, who was supposed to be a socialist commissioner but who would not recognise socialism if he had it sprayed on his eyeballs; he certainly did not care about Sheffield steelworkers. Under the amendment, if people felt that the Boundary Commission or the proposed committee was mistaken, they could write a letter of complaint or be represented at a public inquiry.

Being represented at a public inquiry is fairly daunting, but there is almost always somebody who will represent a group of people who will have the opportunity to air their views. A public inquiry generates more publicity. Local newspapers attend public inquiries and, if a matter is hotly contested, representatives of local radio and television sometimes turn up, which generates more publicity for the issues that are being enjoined. That is patently a more democratic process, because it is open and an inspector makes recommendations.

6.15 pm

There is a view that the proposed committees are not entirely satisfactory. The Bill is being rushed through. We know that boundary commissioners are appointed by the Government, but they try to gain a reputation for independence. Are the Government establishing committees that will support them or at least that are complacent

and do not have an objective thought? It may be wrong to make that assertion, but it would be easier to discount if the amendment proposing a public inquiry were accepted.

A public inquiry is an open process and it would act as a stop-gap against an allegation that the committees that are being set up fairly rapidly might make a decision politically in favour of the governing party. Every Boundary Commission proposal is accused of being lickspittle subservience to the governing party.

That may be true—on balance, I think that it is untrue—but in Keighley the view then and now was that the commission favoured the Government and handed Keighley on a plate to the Conservative party. Many people simply do not believe the claim that the boundary commissioner was absolutely neutral and that everything was above aboard—and that was with a public inquiry. What will they say about a system that does not offer a stop-gap, whereby people can present their view? Even if people do not accept the decision, at least they will have had the opportunity of putting their point of view to the inspector or presenting papers. It is a much better and more open system than a decision taken in writing behind closed doors.

If the Minister wants to avoid the taint of the accusation of political partiality and prejudice——

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Peter Lloyd): It did not happen in Keighley.

Mr. Cryer: We had an open public inquiry in Keighley and people's criticisms, at least on that score, were set at rest. But the fact that people still regard it as gerrymandering shows that prejudice lingers long and that without an inquiry it would linger longer and more fervently. Therefore, would not it be a good idea for the Secretary of State to say, "In order to ensure that the grounds for criticism of political prejudice are absolutely minuscule, the back-stop of a public inquiry has been incorporated and, moreover, we accepted a Labour party amendment in the House of Commons to ensure that we showed beyond peradventure that good will and impartiality are being incorporated in legislation." That is quite important because people should know that decisions of committees are as open and straightforward as possible.

I do not believe that the expense of five extra MEPs is worthwhile, and if the amendment brought the whole thing tumbling down I would not be terribly worried. If, for example, the legislation were not passed and if, as a consequence, no extra people were sent to Strasbourg or the committee rooms at rue Belliard in Brussels or sent on odd journeys to Luxembourg in the labyrinthine consultation process, I would not shed a single tear. In fact, I would cheer, because we would save the taxpayer some money, so much of which is flooding into the silly common agricultural policy which is never improved or changed but merely costs more money. At the same time, I should be able to consider whether the legislation, if it is to be passed, can at least be improved. Although I am opposed to the concept, it might as well be amended and improved.

The Labour party's amendment would mean that a public inquiry would be held. It would be an improvement because it would remove any taint of partiality from the committees, which would be important for them in the carrying out of their function. They would be able to argue that, although one may disagree with the appointments, the Government at least accepted a Labour party amendment and that the legislation has, to some extent, been subject to improvements from both parties and must therefore have a degree of impartiality. If people disagreed with the committee's decisions, there could be a public inquiry.

I should have thought that the Home Secretary would find it difficult to resist such a formula. However, he does some nasty things from time to time, so he may be able to resist it—signing exclusion orders was one especially unjust and nasty thing that he did recently, so I do not have much hope that he will consider the amendment in the spirit of good will and impartiality in order to get the best electoral arrangements in the creation of the additional seats.

The democratic processes apply equally to all parties, and we should obtain the best and fairest system possible. I should have thought that a public inquiry would be an advantage.

The Minister might argue that everything is being done in a frightful hurry because this hurried and lunatic system was set by the Common Market and we must follow suit and establish the new seats. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) said, public inquiries can be incorporated into a time scale to allow for decisions to be made and recommendations for Orders in Council sent to the House. A public inquiry would be included if there were any controversy, which is the only circumstance in which it is likely to be relevant. It is not a great possibility, but we should nevertheless legislate for it.

I am not very much in favour of the legislation, but, as I have offered such a reasonable amount of support for a reasonable amendment, I hope that the Home Secretary will be reasonable in return and will accept the amendment, because it would be a plus for the democratic system.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: I am grateful for the opportunity to support the amendment. I suppose that one of the good things to come out of the Maastricht treaty is the fact that we are being allocated six extra seats in the European Parliament. I presume that it is because of the unification of Germany, and the subsequent increase in population, that Wales is to have a further seat and England another five. We debated Scotland's position yesterday, and I believe that it would have been fairer if Scotland had received an extra seat and if England had received four of the extra six.

The amendment asks for a public inquiry to decide the new Euro-constituency boundaries so that the public have the opportunity to make known their views. Like the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone), I should have preferred it if the six seats had gone to additional Members under a system of proportionality. I am strongly in favour of electoral reform. I noted that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) received tremendous support from Conservative Members, which must be a cause of severe embarrassment to him. It reaffirmed my conviction that we need electoral reform.

Mr. Cryer: I guarantee that at the next election every Labour candidate, including my hon. Friend, will be saying that Labour can win under the first-past-the-post system.

Mr. Williams: My hon. Friend is answering the wrong question. His answer was right, but it was to a different question; that question will be posed in 1996, and I am sure that he has the right answer.

The question we must ask is whether our electoral system is fair, especially to the minority parties. When we have lived through the four Governments that we have, we must ask whether the system works in the best interests of the British people, of my hon. Friend's constituents and of mine. I am sure that we need electoral reform, and I thought that it was part of our agreement to join the European Community that proportionality would in due course be introduced in our elections to the European Parliament. That is an opportunity to introduce an element of proportionality.

As I understand it, the Government have known about the six extra seats since the Edinburgh summit in November last year. What have the Government been doing in the past six or eight months? Why have they not introduced the relevant legislation or set up the committees to establish the new boundaries? The lack of such legislation is a problem for the Conservative and Labour parties because they do not know exactly where the constituencies will be for the elections in June next year. It also removes the possibility of a public inquiry into the new Euro-constituency boundaries.

I am delighted that Wales is to receive an extra seat and that our existing four seats will be increased to five. It will give the Welsh people a louder voice in European affairs, but there are considerable problems in drawing the new constituency. I had hoped that the Boundary Commission would opt for minimum change and hold as many as possible of the Westminster constituencies within the three Euro-constituency boundaries. Broadly speaking, one constituency is Newport-based, one is Cardiff-based and one is Swansea-based, but there is a problem with the other two.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I must correct my right hon. Friend. It is quite wrong to say that the South East Wales constituency is Newport-based. As the ex-Member of the European Parliament for South East Wales, I can tell him that nine of the parliamentary constituencies covered by that seat were in the coal mining valleys rather than in Newport.

Mr. Williams: I stand corrected and bow to the superior knowledge of the former MEP for South West Wales. I must add that I am delighted with the new candidate selected for that seat and wish her well in the coming election. I am sure that we shall win the largest majority in Britain in that seat. I agree that I was using shorthand when I said that the constituency was Newport-based. What I meant was Gwent, but—as my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) says—the population of Gwent is heavily concentrated in the industrial valleys.

My area, Dyfed, is currently combined with West Glamorgan in the South West Wales European constituency. I hope that the Boundary Commission will reject one of the options put forward, which is that Dyfed should join Gwynedd, in which case my Member of the European Parliament would lose half his constituency, which would be split in two. Then there would be a constituency of western Wales, composed of north-west and south-west Wales in one slab.

Mr. Rogers: My hon. Friend is right to express fears about what might happen in south-west Wales. In the 1973 reorganisation of local government, the Conservatives gerrymandered the county council and split up Glamorgan, thinking that they would take control of South Glamorgan. They were shocked immediately afterwards to find that the Labour party won the seat and has been in power ever since, but it was blatant gerrymandering.

In south-west Wales we are afraid of a Tory carve-up so that the Tories can get a seat in Wales, because they have been rejected. We feel that there ought to be a public inquiry so that the gerrymandering of the Home Secretary—who happens to come from Llanelli—can at least be seen to be translucent.

6.30 pm

Mr. Williams: I shall move on to that very point. Public inquiries are vital for the new Euro-constituencies, and I am sure that if there were a public inquiry mechanism, the possibility of a Dyfed-Gwynedd seat would never arise and we would stick to something more like Dyfed-Powys or Dyfed-Powys-West Glamorgan.

As I understand it, generally 70 per cent. of public inquiries about boundary changes result in substantial alterations, so it is a travesty to dispense with that mechanism.

Mr. John Marshall: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that in 1983-84, when there was a large number of inquiries into proposed Euro-boundaries, the figure of 70 per cent. did not hold good?

Mr. Williams: I was not aware of that, but the adjustments at that time were generally quite small. For example, in my area eight constituencies increased to nine to form the new Euro-seat. It was just a case of slipping one across. But generally in boundary changes, as I understand it, 70 per cent. of public inquiries lead to alterations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South mentioned the involvement of the general public and the need to give them an opportunity to air their views openly, not in writing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) pointed out, people want to attend public inquiries and give their evidence orally. That opportunity helps to consolidate in people's minds the importance of the Euro-constituencies.

It is a cause for great regret that in every Euro-election the turnout in Britain has been far lower than in any other European country. I cannot remember, but I think it was less than 60 per cent. last time.

I certainly remember the first Euro-elections, in 1979, which came within a month of general election. I think that I was one of the hardest workers—or one of the hard workers—in my Euro-constituency in that election. The turnout was something like 33 or 36 per cent. nationally, but in our area it was the highest in Britain. Turnout in Euro-elections is poor, and if the electorate are denied the opportunity of a public inquiry, it is tantamount to a slap in the face. People will think, "It does not matter much to the Government anyway, so why should it matter to me? Why should I vote when the time comes?"

Public inquiries are necessary, and I hope that the Government will accept our amendment.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I appreciate that time is pressing and will keep my remarks brief.

Let me take hon. Members back to the Maastricht treaty, because the amendment goes right to the heart of the problems and anxieties that some of us had about the treaty, against which I voted consistently from Second Reading.

I was not so worried about the future of Europe, or whether we had a place in Europe, as I was about the fact that we were being swept along on a road towards federalism and conducting our affairs for the convenience of Europe.

In essence, my worries were borne out by the way in which this Bill deals with public inquiries. The Government assured us that subsidiarity would be one of the main advantages of the Maastricht treaty. There was plenty of discussion, as we know, about the definition of subsidiarity, but the main interpretation was that we would be able to conduct our affairs in the United Kingdom in the way that we had always done, which reassured the sceptics, like myself, who knew that we would probably lose the battle.

This Bill is one of the first major pieces of business to be introduced since we discussed the Maastricht issue. What does it do? It sweeps away our traditional method of selecting boundaries and introduces an entirely new system.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): My hon. Friend says that the Bill introduces an entirely new system. May I remind him that in 1978, under the previous Labour Government, the initial boundaries were drawn up for the European elections without public inquiries?

Mr. Allason: That is certainly the case, but we were assured that it would never happen again. We are now being asked to change our system, and it seems that it pulls the rug from under the argument about subsidiarity. This would have been the ideal opportunity for the Government to say to those of us who are opposed to the Maastricht treaty, "Listen; here is an example of how subsidiarity works. We are using the European model, but we are adapting it to our conventions." The convention in this country has always been that an unpartisan and unbiased Boundary Commission considers boundaries and holds public inquiries.

Why do we hold public inquiries? It is not for any cosmetic purpose, but so that the man of the Clapham omnibus can believe that he has a fair crack of the whip. It means that he has a forum to which he can go to express his view about a boundary. Even if he fails and his argument is rejected, at least he has had his day in court.

That is the British way; it is about the man in the street having the right of freedom of speech and being able to express his views to the commissioner in a public forum. He may prevail, but, even if his argument is rejected, he will leave that forum knowing that he has had a fair crack of the whip. He may be disappointed, but when he goes home at night he can put his head on his pillow and sleep soundly because he is satisfied that he has seen justice done.

What alternative are the Government proposing? They are saying that there is not time for a public inquiry, that it is inconvenient and, furthermore, that instead there will be a committee that will not sit openly. It will receive representations from the general public, but how will they know what deliberations took place? Will they, as I suspect, receive in reply a form letter saying, "Thank you very much indeed for your representations, which have been taken into account. Goodbye." That is not what I call democracy, and it will not enable any citizen of this country to believe that he has had a fair crack of the whip.

The Boundary Commission is part of the foundation of democracy in this country, and when we consider its history, and the history of the way in which constituencies have been drawn up, it is obvious that the drawing of a line in one place or in another, or the inclusion or exclusion of a ward, can make an enormous difference. When such deliberations are conducted in secret, and the public cannot have a fair say, I believe that that undermines the whole system. It certainly gives ammunition to people who believe that decisions are made in smoke-filled rooms, without any account being taken of views that may have been expressed in writing to the committee.

Many of us have considerable worries about Europe. We are worried about the principle of majority voting, and we have seen commitments being made to majority voting on such important issues as defence, security and foreign policy. We have had assurances from the Government about the implications of Maastricht for those important issues, which are matters of United Kingdom sovereignty.

My worry is that, on the first occasion when the Government could have made a commitment to the people of this country and demonstrated exactly what subsidiarity means in reality, they are taking the exact opposite course and saying, "Oh dear, we have an important commitment to Europe. We cannot change the June deadline. It would appear to be administratively inconvenient to have a public inquiry or to conduct some kind of investigation by November." That seems to me to strike right at the heart of the Maastricht treaty, and to highlight the worries that many Conservative Members have about its future, and about the path towards which the Government are leading us. Accordingly, I urge my hon. Friends to support the amendment.

Mr. John Marshall: I shall detain the House only briefly. Having served in the European Parliament, as has the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), and having taken a close personal interest in the boundaries proposed in 1983, which were eventually determined in 1984, I know a little bit about the problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) talked about subsidiarity. I should have thought that the Bill was a wonderful example of subsidiarity. We are the only country in the European Community with a first-past-the-post system; long may it remain. I know that, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary says, things are moving our way on that issue, as on so many others.

It is somewhat ironic that one of the reasons for the Bill and the procedure outlined in it is the fact that the Government's legislative programme was bogged down when a number of Members refused to vote on procedural motions earlier this year. It seems rum that the very people who refused to vote on the procedural motions on Maastricht are now complaining about lack of time. If they had been more co-operative then, who knows what might have happened? They could have had the Boundary Commission. They could have had both. We might even have been on holiday by now, so we can blame them for that, too.

6.45 pm

What happened in 1983-84 was that, although the Boundary Commission made proposals in July 1983, they were not finally determined by the House of Commons until March 1984. The system of public inquiries is time consuming, so it was a long time before the decisions were finalised. We do not have that time now. We have only a short time, which is why I believe that the Government were right to make the present proposal. The fact that there will not be public inquiries does not mean that the original proposals will not be changed. In 1978, the proposals for London and Liverpool were changed as a result of representations, so there can be change even if there are no public inquiries.

Mr. Hoon: Of course boundaries can be changed, but one of the people who can change them is the Home Secretary. Is the hon. Gentleman content with that provision?

Mr. Marshall: The Home Secretary has always had that power, and I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend will use the powers that he has been given far more dispassionately than did Lord Callaghan before the 1970 election. I find it appalling that a member of the Labour party should talk about gerrymandering, when what Lord Callaghan did then was the worst example of gerrymandering in the history of this country.

I am somewhat surprised that some hon. Members seem to believe that members of the general public are anxious to attend public inquiries, to give evidence and to be cross-examined by slick barristers—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I did not say that all barristers were slick, I said that some were slick. Some are honourable—and some are right honourable. I believe that many members of the general public are happier if they can make their representations in writing, because they are intimidated by public inquiries, so they will find the procedures in the Bill most satisfactory.

Mr. Howard: I rise for the sole and specific purpose of giving my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) the assurance that I believe he sought. In the process set out in the Bill full account will certainly be taken of the knock-on effects to which my right hon. Friend referred, and full opportunity will be given to people who wish to make representations about those effects, to have those representations taken into account and to try to persuade the committees to amend their original recommendations for those reasons.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I thank the Home Secretary for his speech. Innocent and naive as I readily admit that I am in the ways of the House, I had hopes on Second Reading that we might be able to find some common ground with the Home Secretary and his colleagues—common ground even broader than that which we found, although I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for the assurances that he gave the House at that point. I thought that we would be able to reach common ground on the public inquiries, but it appears that we have not been able to achieve that. Perhaps I was naive in thinking that we would. None the less, I am disappointed——

Mr. Rogers: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Allen: I shall give way shortly.

I am disappointed that common ground concerning a fundamental right in this country—the right to contest elections on honest boundaries, and on boundaries that are not only honest but are seen to be honest, because the correct process has been carried out—no longer appears to exist.

Now I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda.

Mr. Rogers: I was about to ask my hon. Friend whether, when he looked at the Home Secretary and the massed ranks on the Conservative Benches, he realised that he would not get any fairness from them. The Conservative party is trying to improve its position in the European Parliament. It was annihilated at the European elections. Surely my hon. Friend does not expect fairness; surely he does not expect the Conservatives to support his proposals.

Mr. Allen: Again, I must admit my innocence in such matters—in contrast, perhaps, with the cynicism of my hon. Friend. I had hoped that, provided that we presented a rational case, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) did in great detail and with great care, we might be able to win over the Home Secretary and his Minister of State. The main reason for my hope was that we in the House must above all always be on our guard against any erosion of our democratic process.

No one pretends that the Home Secretary will leave the Chamber and fiddle boundaries for the European elections. I do not believe that that is his intention. However, our approach has been to convince the Home Secretary that the process must at all points be above reproach. It is a process that we have enjoyed in Britain—certainly it applies to parliamentary elections and recently to European elections—for some 50 years. I hope that the Secretary of State is happy to concede that the precedent being set is unfortunate and one that he would never wish to see repeated.

The Home Secretary said that the reason was that we have had a lack of time properly to conduct the process. There are reasons for that, which I shall mention later. We all agree that there has been a lack of time. Will the Home Secretary reassure us that there is no intention to use the change as a precedent for future boundary redistribution at European level or even at parliamentary or local government level? That answer would help set the right tone and tenor for the debate and vote.

Mr. Howard: There is certainly no intention to use that as a precedent for the future. I cannot anticipate the various circumstances that may arise, but certainly there is no intention to use it as a precedent. Circumstances that may arise will have to be dealt with on their merits.

Mr. Allen: The next problem that we face is that the proposals appear to be a matter of administrative convenience. Perhaps officials felt that this was the best way in which to progress. I appreciate that the Home Secretary assumed his post only a few weeks ago and cannot be held personally responsible for the delay that occurred before then. None the less, officials no doubt put it to him that such a course was the only way out of the situation in which the Government had got themselves. Again, the Government have decided to place administrative convenience above a fundamental pillar of our democracy.

[Mr. Allen]

I am reminded a little of the statement made by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont—that we have a Government who may well be in office, but who on occasions are actually not in power.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: A minute ago, my hon. Friend said that the Government's action could be a precedent for the European boundaries. There is the exact danger of that happening in Wales, where we shall consider the Bill—perhaps in the autumn or in 12 months' time—on local government reorganisation that will set up around 21 new unitary authorities. Wales will also undergo boundary commission changes in constituency boundaries that will have to take into account the boundaries of those unitary authorities.

In 1995, we could well find ourselves right up against the deadline of a pending general election. The Government could argue that there was no time for proper public inquiries into Boundary Commission decisions in Wales and that the process would have to be speeded up. That would indeed be a sad precedent.

Mr. Allen: It is unfortunate that the building blocks of our parliamentary constituency boundaries—the local government boundaries and, ultimately our European boundaries—are, in a sense, being subverted by the way in which the Local Government Boundary Commission is going about its work. For the first time, there has been a political input, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen has pointed out. Once those building blocks and the ward and polling district boundaries are amended, and not in a way that demands cross-party support, a knock-on process begins into parliamentary seats and then further into European parliamentary seats. That has always been alien to our democratic tradition.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield talked of how we might view the Bill if the phrase "the Minister of the Interior" were used in an old-fashioned eastern European sense. We would read the Bill differently in that context. My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin gave us his experience of observing the processes of developing democracies in Africa and Asia where people would give their right arms to have an impartial and fair boundaries commission of the sort we have enjoyed for so long in this country.

We press for fair and free elections abroad. It is only here in Ruritania that the process is being thrown into reverse by the Boundary Commissions being done away with. Let us be clear about the Bill. It does away with Boundary Commissions in the European context. It abolishes the right to a public inquiry which the British people have enjoyed for many years. Clause 2 will abolish the right to be heard and the right of effective appeal, as my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) explained so well.

Mr. John Marshall: The hon. Gentleman says that the Bill reduces the right to be heard and mentions his hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde. No one will ever reduce his right to be heard.

Far more importantly, will the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) accept that the Bill does not reduce the right of individuals to make representations? In the same way, individuals made representations in 1978 about the proposed boundaries, and they were able by those representations to change them. There is no reason to believe that under the Bill, the original proposals will have some sort of imprimatur as a result of which they cannot be changed. The hon. Gentleman misleads the House and potential objectors when he implies that they will not have the right to be heard. They will have that right.

Mr. Allen: The hon. Gentleman misses the point a little. I readily concede that individual members of the public will be able to make representations to the committees. There is no question about that, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman agrees. What will be missing is the right for those representations to be heard in a full public hearing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde pointed out that there are many people who do not wish to make written representations or who are incapable of making such representations effectively. As the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) said, I should not like to oppose my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde if I confronted him at a public inquiry. He could certainly defend himself, as many members of the public can.

In the previous round, there were 10 European boundary inquiries and five overturned provisional recommendations as a result of listening to people. People will no longer have that right.

Mr. Hoon: Will my hon. Friend ask the hon. Member for Hendon, South whether he will make representations at public inquiries into the boundary commission's recommendations about his constituency?

Mr. Allen: I do not wish to intrude on private grief. I hope that the hon. Member for Hendon, South finds a suitable place for his talents if he loses his current place.

Mr. Greg Knight (Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household): The House of Lords.

Mr. Allen: The House of Lords has been suggested. Unfortunately, that is out of my hands.

The Home Secretary tells us that we have a boundary commission in all but name. That may be true in terms of the composition of the new committees. Again, I am happy to place on record our thanks for his assurances about the composition of the new committees and for the news he gave us today about the individuals concerned. That is a reassurance. However, it cannot be said that the powers of the new committees will be identical to the powers that the Boundary Commissions once had, and certainly that is true in respect of public inquiries. Why?

The reason is entirely the Government's delay and incompetence in introducing the Bill. That in turn was caused by their fear of the Maastricht rebels. We shall see later tonight and perhaps in a minute or so whether that fear is justified.

The Home Secretary made an interesting intervention this afternoon. He said that there was a difference of only seven weeks between his view on the timetable and the view that the Opposition have expressed for a few weeks in our negotiations with the Home Office. If that is the case, I must ask the obvious question. Why was the Bill not introduced seven weeks ago? That would have permitted a full Boundary Commission with a public inquiry process.

The Home Secretary was not personally to blame, as he was not in that post seven weeks ago. But I hope that he will ask his officials in the Home Office why on earth a full

and proper Bill was not brought forward seven weeks ago. The difference of seven weeks is not the problem with the Bill and with the amendments—it is the 32 weeks that the Government wasted between the Edinburgh summit and the introduction of the Bill.

7 pm

The Opposition have set out a clear timetable in which the full process that the Home Secretary wants, plus the public inquiry that the Opposition want, can both be met. That is possible, and I hope that those in the other place will examine the timetable. If we fail tonight, I hope that their Lordships make the necessary amendments so that British democracy can retain the full right of public inquiry that we have enjoyed for so long.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 57, Noes 298.

Division No. 323] **[7.pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Kilfoyle and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*

Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Brown and
Mr. Andrew MacKay.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I did not take part in the earlier debate because I thought it important, rather than simply concentrating on the substance of the amendment, to identify the major weaknesses in the whole of clause 2.

Those of us who have taken part in a Boundary Commission inquiry, be it for a Westminster or European seat, will know that those matters are extraordinarily complex. They are open to enormous potential conflict of evidence and they are often a recipe for confusion.

Hon. Members should know that my participation in such Boundary Commission inquiries was as an unpaid amateur. As there are a large number of professionals in the Committee this evening—from the busy activity on the Treasury Benches, it looks as though they will all wish to speak on the clause—I should make it clear that I have never accepted a penny in recompense for my appearances on those occasions. As the Home Secretary made his name at planning inquiries as a planning silk, it will be well known on both sides of the House, whether by lawyers or those who have taken part in a more amateur capacity, that the way in which the committees under clause 2 are intending to proceed will not obviate the need for detailed and careful scrutiny of complex issues.

My experience of a Boundary Commission inquiry into a European seat was in July 1988, when the assistant commissioner of the Boundary Commission came to Bodmin and undertook a public inquiry into the future delineation of the Cornwall and Plymouth Euro-seat. A substantial case was put to him for a separate Cornish seat, some of which appears in an excellent book, "The Making of Modern Cornwall". I do not intend to read the whole book to you this evening, Mr. Lofthouse, although some Conservative Members would like me to do so as they could then go off and have a leisurely dinner and come back rather later.

When that public inquiry took place, there were detailed submissions about the nature of the combined seat of Cornwall and Plymouth with the intention to make it a more sensible seat, delineated by the natural boundary of the River Tamar.

You, Mr. Lofthouse, may not be fully acquainted with the geography of the far south-west of Britain, but I believe you will know that Cornwall is surrounded by water on three sides. Therefore, it is a comparatively easy seat to set boundaries to on three sides. The difficulty is to identify what should happen on the other side. The inquiry to which I have referred was concerned simply with the submission about that other side. However, the problem in most Euro-constituencies in this country will be far more complex, as there may be three or more lines to draw.

As the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) and the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) said, the knock-on effect of some of these decisions will be substantial. However, in the inquiry to which I have referred, we were concerned to show that, although the population might not amount to the normal average for other parts of England, quite separate from Cornwall, the particular historical and geographical identity of Cornwall was such that it made very good sense to have a separate constituency. It would be as big in population terms as others in the European Community and as big as some of those in the north of Scotland.

Cornwall has a special identity and a great history. We have heard this evening from representatives from other Celtic kingdoms in the United Kingdom. Cornwall is the oldest of the Celtic kingdoms, so history was on our side. In "The Making of Modern Cornwall" the substance of the case made by Cornwall county council, which will demonstrate my thesis that these are very complex arguments, was put in the following terms:

> "Such feelings of loyalty are of a very different order from most counties in England. Indeed, Cornwall is almost an island with natural boundaries fixed by the coastline. It is largely isolated from the rest of the country. It has a strong separate identity with its own history, traditions, customs, language and (to some degree) law and institutions. Many of these attributes are firmly rooted in its Celtic past. It seems anomalous that such a community should not have its own separate voice in the European Parliament."

It will not surprise you, Mr. Lofthouse, to learn that, being Celts, those of us represented at the inquiry to which I have referred made a very eloquent case for a separate Cornish constituency.

I hope that those on the Treasury Bench will take my next point to heart. The assistant commissioner at the Boundary Commission was able to balance the strength of the argument against other arguments, including the argument that the employment draw of Plymouth was so important to parts of Cornwall that it formed a natural linkage.

We know from the earlier debate that representations will be circumscribed simply to written representations. Although representations are important, the real value lies in hearing those representations, testing them and being able to put counter representations in their place.

It is significant that, with all his experience and expertise, the assistant commissioner, when summing up the case in his report, said:

> "It is to be recalled also that together with the County Council of Cornwall, the views from other democratically elected bodies were virtually unanimous in their opposition. In the result my view is that there is a strong likelihood that the sentiments expressed at the Inquiry upon matters of history, culture, language and other emblems of 'separateness' would be shared by enough people in Cornwall to make this 'geographical consideration' a consideration of weight."

The assistant commissioner was able to weigh that consideration in that inquiry. I assume that, by a narrow margin, he concluded that the balance was against a separate Cornish constituency because the population in those terms and at that time was substantially lower than the average for other parts of the United Kingdom.

However, the problem remains and it will be even more stark in the forthcoming exercise. The population of Cornwall is now much closer to the average for other parts of the United Kingdom. What should be done? Should the present constituency remain? That will have to be considered by the committee and no doubt some people will argue for that very strongly. However, there will be a very strong case for arguing that collecting all three existing Plymouth constituencies and keeping them with Cornwall is irrational, because it takes us way over the national average.

Should one Westminster constituency in Plymouth be detached from that combined constituency? It would surely be extraordinary if that were to happen, and it would fly against all the assurances given by the Home Secretary and the Minister of State that, on the whole, cities will be kept together where possible within the new boundaries.

An alternative is that Plymouth should look eastwards and be the centre of a new parliamentary constituency. That might make some sense. However, would it be possible for Cornwall alone to match up to the population requirements? Another possibility would be to add west Devon and north Devon to Cornwall. That would present major opportunities for my party, but I set such partisan considerations aside, as you would expect, Mr. Lofthouse. However, there would be some sense to that connection, as

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

there would be a more sensible identity of interests, a commonality of interests between the rural areas of west and north Devon with those in Cornwall.

I hope that the Home Secretary or the Minister of State will respond to the point that the complexity of those considerations in that single example, where Cornwall is a relatively easy case to determine, will be mirrored time and again throughout England.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Does my hon. Friend agree that, while in respect of several constituencies an entire county may form the major part of a constituency —and I am thinking of my constituency in particular— odd Westminster parliamentary constituencies may also be added on which may come from several different counties? Does my hon. Friend agree that that will confuse the electorate greatly? Does he accept that considerable consideration will have to be given to decide whether that is a sensible way to combine Westminster parliamentary constituencies into European parliamentary constituencies?

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; he is entirely right. The original Act to which the Bill refers was, most confusingly, not entitled the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978. It was originally entitled the European Assembly Elections Act 1978, but it was subsequently renamed. Paragraph 9 of schedule 2 is relevant to our discussions and it was misunderstood by the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) in the earlier debate. Therefore, for simplicity's sake, I will quote that paragraph:

"In Great Britain—

(a) each Assembly constituency shall consist of an area that includes two or more parliamentary constituencies; and

(b) no parliamentary constituency shall be included partly in one Assembly constituency and partly in another."

Paragraph 10 states:

"The electorate of any Assembly constituency in Great Britain shall be as near the electoral quota as is reasonably practicable having regard, where appropriate, to special geographical considerations."

In response to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), may I say that it is by no means clear whether geographical considerations mean county boundaries as at present defined, or whether they are county boundaries as they may be defined after the rolling programme of the Local Government Commission has made major changes to the boundary geography of England and Wales. We heard a few minutes ago that the process is already in action in Wales and it is by no means clear from the Bill whether proper regard will be taken of those changes.

I would like to refer to the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North as the right hon. Member for Oswestry. I gather that he would refer to himself in that way as well. The names that will be given to constituencies will give rise to yet another argument that will be adduced during the process. The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North referred to the massive "upheaval" that will be caused by trying to slot in the additional seats in this way. How will this be achieved? What criteria will be used? Will the committees major on identity of interest?

I know that *Hansard* cannot see a map, but for aide-memoire purposes—I do not know all the boundaries well—I have brought a map with me. Let me demonstrate my point with one or two simple examples.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman is out of order in using a map.

7.30 pm

Mr. Tyler: If I may refer to the text, it stands on all fours with my notes. I will not show the map to anybody; it is simply to remind me of the very difficult configuration of some boundaries. I shall refer to the names.

For example, there is the Wight and Hampshire East European constituency, which goes from Aldershot, which I have always regarded as an area of outer London, down to the southern tip of the Isle of Wight, which of course is a very long way from London—a most extraordinary shape. If somebody were to look at that constituency in a committee, he might take the view that there was some identity of interest among the good burghers of Aldershot, who have always made certain that they were represented in the House of Commons by a man of independent views. Whether that is then found to be the case all the way down through Hampshire East, through Havant, Fareham, Gosport, Portsmouth and across Spithead and the Solent to the Isle of Wight is far from clear. In those committees, somebody will make the point that there is no identity of interest, and then somebody will come up with a different proposition.

I could choose examples from all around the United Kingdom. There will not be just one simple proposition and then a statement of opposition. There will be proposition, modification, and consequences for next door, and there will be people whose political careers hang on those decisions.

To take one more example, in Dorset there is a constituency called Dorset East and Hampshire West, which includes several present Westminster constituencies, covering North Dorset, Weymouth, Portland, Purbeck, Poole, Bournemouth, East and Bournemouth, West, Dorset, East, Christchurch, New Forest and Romsey, as I read the map. It is extremely complicated. As Christchurch is in the middle, it is politically sensitive. Each of the propositions put to those committees will meet a counter-proposition by people whose livelihoods depend on the way in which the decision goes.

Without a public inquiry, as was made perfectly clear, it will take longer to look at all the representations and see how they interlock. With the assurances that were given by the Government, clearly it is not the Government's view that there will be a proposition which will be a fait accompli. We have been given all sorts of assurances that that will not be the case. There will be a proper opportunity to look at identity of interest, national boundaries, consistency, continuity and conterminous boundaries with local authorities and Westminster parliamentary constituencies.

That is a moving target. Although phase 1 of the local government review is now in place but open to objection, there are two, three, four and five still to come in England. There is a long process of change ahead of us. In Wales, as I have mentioned, the process is under way. Without a proper opportunity for scrutiny and challenge, and

without an opportunity to see the representations made by others, there clearly will not be any consensus of acceptance. That is why clause 2 is so defective.

The difficulty that the Government will create for itself, the Boundary Commission and the European Parliament is huge. The Home Secretary has airily dismissed concerns about finding people of appropriate talent and experience and people who can give their time. As I said, I am not a lawyer, and I certainly do not aspire to the fees that the Home Secretary used to obtain when he was at the Bar, but clearly the people who will have to adjudicate without coming to a public inquiry will be people of great stature and experience. They will have to clear the decks of all their other commitments, and we all know how expensive that can be. The commitment of time will be great and the costs will be huge.

Representations, if they are not considered with due care, will of course be open to challenge. There will be legal challenges by some means or another, even if it is to the courts, but presumably there will be access to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

Mr. Hoon: Before the hon. Gentleman develops his argument about legal challenge, he needs to look a little more carefully at the Bill, because it precludes legal challenges.

Mr. Tyler: From legal advice that I have been given, I understand that the Bill precludes some successful legal challenges. I do not think that that means that there will not be attempts to do so. I have not yet had a clear answer. I hope that the Minister of State, Home Office, will tell us whether those committees, as creatures and agents of central Government, will be open to the scrutiny of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. If so, as we all know from our experience as Members of Parliament, delays could be legion.

Had the Home Secretary been prepared to accept the feasibility of public inquiries, that problem could have been removed. That would have been the opportunity to ensure that there was proper discussion which was not open to this objection. The hon. Member for Ashfield is also a lawyer, so I must be careful about what I say about lawyers. However, there is also an opportunity to go to the European Court if it is thought that, by some means or other, the administration of the process does not fulfil the needs of natural justice.

We have heard much about timetables. Why do we have this clause at all? The legislation could have been introduced within a matter of days of the agreement at the Edinburgh summit. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) mentioned that we have been forced to discuss a period of seven weeks. Seven months ago, the legislation could have been before us. Then there might have been a reason for pursuing the recommendations and adding on the opportunity for a public inquiry, but there is no excuse now. It is quite absurd.

One of the Euro-sceptics, the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), suggested that there was a connection with the Maastricht process. That is not true. This matter has nothing to do with the Maastricht process. It is a direct result of the Edinburgh summit. There was no need to await the outcome of the Maastricht discussions in the House of Commons or in the other place.

Of course, this absurd farrago could have been avoided if we had opted for the simple additionality principle which the hon. Member for Lewes sensibly put forward earlier. We need not have had this complicated Bill, or the complications of this clause, if the Government had simply accepted that we could leave the existing Euro-constituencies intact without all this performance and simply apportioned the six new seats on a basis that would bring us into line, in some measure, with proportionality and make sure that our representation in the European Parliament actually reflected the views and the party loyalties of the people of this country.

Liberal Democrats oppose the Bill on principle, and we will do so until the last stage this evening, but on clause 2 in particular we believe that the Government have effectively argued themselves into a corner. They have said that this is the only way——

Mr. Rendel: I am amazed to hear what my hon. Friend is saying. I believe that, a while ago, the Government claimed that they wanted to make Great Britain the centre of Europe, in spirit if not geographically. I suppose that not even this Government would claim that, geographically, they could make the United Kingdom the centre of Europe. I thought that, in doing so, they intended to give a lead.

As I understand it, there is prior agreement that the European Parliament will be elected under a system of proportional representation which is to be agreed among all countries. Is my hon. Friend therefore saying that the Government's attempt to give a lead in Europe in this matter is in fact to make ours the only country which is not going along with that prior agreement? If so, I am amazed that the Government are working in this way, apparently against their decision to make Great Britain the heart of Europe.

Mr. Tyler: My hon. Friend has slightly prejudged a section of my speech, which I shall come to in a moment. He missed an interesting speech earlier in which the hon. Member for Lewes made exactly the point to which my hon. Friend has referred, that sooner or later—I suspect that it will be sooner—the Government and their curiously retrograde Labour supporters must accept a form of representation in the European Parliament that reflects the proportion of support in this country.

Mr. Hoon: Lest there is any danger of the Committee being misled on this point, may I point out that the treaty of Rome requires a uniform electoral procedure. There is no mention whatever of proportionality in the treaty. I concede that every country other than the United Kingdom has some measure of proportionality in its system, but there is no consistency about any of those systems. Therefore, it is misleading to suggest that anything in the treaty requires the United Kingdom to have a proportional system. It is arguable that every other country could adopt the same system as that of the United Kingdom and still be consistent with the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Tyler: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's intervention, because he is still a Member of the European Parliament and would have been there when the vote on this issue was taken on 11 March. I noted that a number of his colleagues in the Labour group in the European Parliament firmly voted with the majority for the adoption of the De Gucht report. I cannot do a quick calculation, but there was a fair number. Incidentally, I noted that there were three members of the Conservative group. By

[Mr. Tyler]

the time the hon. Gentleman ceases to be a Member of the European Parliament, the system will be improved by becoming more representative.

It is our view that clause 2 is a tragically missed opportunity for precisely the reasons that the hon. Member for Lewes set out. It was the opportunity to move forward without any dislocation of the existing relationship between MEPs and their constituents to a system that, while not meeting all the requirements of the treaty of Rome or the debate that took place in the European Parliament in March, nevertheless would put us on course for that better system.

We need not have any of the gerrymandering that has been referred to this evening. We could have moved in that direction. That is why we believe that clause 2 should not be supported this evening and that we should go for a better system. There is time to do so because, as I said, we would support the simple system advanced by the hon. Member for Lewes as a sensible interim transitional stage.

Clearly, the Government are totally underestimating the scale of the problems that they will let loose on the new committees by adopting clause 2. The clause is extremely unclear about the rules that will govern the drawing up of boundaries. It is unclear whether the three-person review will redraw all of the boundaries to equalise the size of the European constituencies—excepting Scotland, which is outside the redrawing process to which we are referring—or the committees will simply attempt to fit in the new seats with minimal disruption. That could be difficult to decide in some circumstances, and the consequences could be immense.

I was in Brussels 10 days ago. Undoubtedly, it will be difficult for Brussels to identify the appropriate areas for various forms of grant support if we muck around with both the local authority boundaries and the European constituency boundaries not in a sensible, co-ordinated way but in a dislocated way. It will be extremely difficult for Brussels to know what is going on in this country, and we may lose more than we have in the past of the financial support that we should be receiving.

7.45 pm

As the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North said, there will be dangerous and difficult domino effects all the way up the country as a result of this exercise. For example, if the committees—as would be right in terms of priorities—started in the far south-west, came to sit in the area that I know so well and said, "We must make a change here," the consequences would be immense as they moved up through the country until they eventually ended up somewhere to the north of Berwick-upon-Tweed. It will be extremely difficult to identify precisely how that should be handled.

The full opportunity to assess the knock-on effects to which the Home Secretary referred in the previous debate cannot possibly be undertaken by the committees. How can they undertake that assessment? It is extremely difficult to imagine how it would be done, even if it were done with the full Boundary Commission doing a proper series of inquiries. It would be impossible to do it by written representation in secret.

That raises another important question. Previous reviews have always maintained that the equalisation of the population size of the European boundaries—this was the case in the interim European constituency review in 1988-89—was the dominant factor in determining boundaries. But, as we all know, if the European parliamentary constituencies committees, undertaking their responsibilities as established by clause 2, are to stick to the dictum of equalising the size of the European constituencies, there is a big question about what will happen when the boundaries have to be redrawn after the next review of the Westminster parliamentary constituencies.

It is an extremely complex series of arguments. The jigsaw will keep moving. Some hon. Members may remember—indeed, Dame Janet, you may remember this from your schoolteaching days—that wonderful jigsaw that we all used to have with the individual counties coloured differently. Those counties did not seem to change from generation to generation. We could see the ones that our fathers and mothers used when they were at school. However, that has not been the case recently. The constant change of boundaries has meant that the consequences have spilled over into consideration of the boundaries for Westminster parliamentary constituencies and now Euro parliamentary constituencies.

Mr. Rendel: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way on a third occasion, because he may not be aware of the difficulties that were caused at the recent Newbury by-election by the different boundaries—of which I am very aware. Recently, the county boundaries in our area changed. In some cases, only two houses moved across a county boundary, which caused a completely different polling arrangement to be made for those two houses. In one case, people were voting in a Hampshire county council election on the same day as they were voting in the Newbury parliamentary by-election with a completely different set of boundaries.

That sort of complication adds not only to the difficulties of the electors in those cases but immeasurably to the cost of running elections of that sort because special arrangements have to be made for a small number of elections simply because not all of the boundaries are changed at the same time.

Mr. Tyler: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The partial redrawing of the boundaries for so many different purposes is causing the most immense additional administrative and cost consequences. This will be a considerable addition to the complications of the committees appointed by the Home Secretary.

In clause 2, it is difficult to see whether this is intended to be a partial redrawing of boundaries to fit in the six new seats or a full-scale review of the whole of the pattern of European constituencies throughout the United Kingdom. It is not the whole of the United Kingdom—I wish it were—but only England and Wales.

The last four lines of the explanatory memorandum to the Bill are absolutely critical. I quote:

"The effect of clause 2(5) is that Orders in Council made under the provisions of the Bill will in due course be superseded by Orders in Council made following the next reports of the Boundary Commissions under the 1978 Act."

This will never stop—it will go on and on. This is the most extraordinary attempt by the Home Secretary to cut a long process short. Those committees are a short cut. Otherwise, it is an attempt to persuade us that this is but another salami cut at how we order boundary revisions.

The United Kingdom has been in the European Community since 1973. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury and the hon. Member for Lewes said earlier, the Government also signed article 138(3) of the treaty of Rome, which provides:

"The European Parliament shall draw up proposals for elections by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedure in all Member States. The Council shall, acting unanimously, lay down the appropriate provisions, which it shall recommend to Member States for adoption in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements."

We all know that member states use different systems, but they all have a standard principle, which is to try to approximate to proportionality. Denmark, Greece, Spain, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Portugal use national list systems; Belgium and Italy use regional list systems; Germany uses a mixture of both; and Ireland uses the single transferable vote. The United Kingdom is the odd one out. It elects using two different systems. Let us not forget that the Government decided in their wisdom that a single transferable vote system was appropriate for Northern Ireland.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Let us not forget, either, that that is not relevant to the clause under consideration.

Mr. Tyler: That you, Dame Janet. However, you will soon see how relevant that point is. The principal Act to which the clause refers also deals with Northern Ireland, which is why I mention it. Clause 2 will make it even more evident that Britain is making no attempt to move towards a system that represents effectively the proportions of support of the different groups in our electorate. That is why such curious calculations are being made and Members are discussing how chopping off a little here and putting on a little there would be to the party advantage in a particular constituency under the first-past-the-post system. That does not happen under the systems adopted by other countries.

The clause would distort not only the political representation of this country in the European Parliament but the political balance of the whole European Parliament, and would weaken its authority as a truly representative assembly.

The Government's excuse for not adopting their part of the bargain is, and has always been, that the European Parliament has not taken a clear lead on that issue.

Mr. Hoon *indicated assent.*

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) is nodding in agreement. By adopting the De Gucht report by 207 votes to 80 in March, the European Parliament has thrown the decision back into the British Government's lap. Only the British veto prevents an advance. The Belgian presidency, which has just started, has put the issue at the top of its six-month agenda, so clearly a major advance will be made.

Mr. Hoon: These matters must be placed on the record accurately. Some years ago the European Parliament drew up a proposal for a uniform system and put it to the Council, which has never responded to that proposal. The De Gucht proposal may be misleading the hon. Gentleman, as it does not provide for a uniform procedure. If the Liberal Democrat party advocates a uniform procedure based on the treaty, it needs to explain how it will persuade the Irish to adopt the system used in France, for example. Considerable difficulties exist on the continent, too, with the different systems. The Belgian system, for instance, is geared towards the linguistic difficulties there. There is no agreement on the continent about what uniform system should be employed.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. Before the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) continues, I must warn him against pursuing these general arguments in this clause stand part debate. The clause does not deal with those arguments, and I cannot allow that strain of argument to continue.

Mr. Tyler: I accept your guidance, Dame Janet. Suffice it to say that, in the context of clause 2, it is surprising that the Labour party has not followed the advice of its own report by Lord Plant on that issue.

Mr. Allen: I cannot let the hon. Gentleman's throwaway remark pass without comment. The Labour party's position will be decided at our annual conference in the normal democratic way. The Plant committee was established some time ago and reported recently. Professor Plant's proposals for the European Parliament involve a regional list system, which is, as the hon. Gentleman knows, a proportional system. The Leader of the Labour party has made his views plain on that matter, but it will be for the Labour party conference to decide on it in October. The hon. Gentleman should reserve his judgment, as we must in the democratic process.

Mr. Tyler: It is sad that we must all wait for the Labour party conference before we can deal with the Bill.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. We do not have to wait for the Labour party conference. We can deal with matters here and now.

Mr. Tyler: I am delighted to hear that, Dame Janet. This would have to be one of my longer speeches if I had to keep talking until October.

The kernel of the problem is simply that the Bill provides an opportunity to simplify the process and to move towards a position that we shall have to accept. The hon. Member for Lewes was right to say that we must accept it eventually. Why not take the bull by the horns and adopt a sensible attitude now?

Writing in *The Guardian* on 26 June, Martin Kettle said:

"What an ideal opportunity for the opposition parties to act together in a practical democratic cause in defence of good principle and clean process against a Government whose reputation for probity has all but evaporated. Will it happen? Well, what do you think?"

The answer is that we must wait until October.

Mr. Allen: We do not have to wait until October. If Mr. Kettle of *The Guardian* had been present in the Chamber last night, he would have seen whether a consensus among the Opposition parties was likely. The manner in which the Liberal Democrat party behaved last night was no credit to the parliamentary process.

Mr. Tyler: It will be interesting to see whether the hon. Member for Nottingham, North, and his great ranks of supporters who should be here to follow him into the Lobby tonight, will vote with us against the Bill on this clause and on Third Reading.

[Mr. Tyler]

Clause 2 should have at least set down a system for distributing the six extra seats as a "top-up" reservoir to increase proportionality between the votes cast and the seats won—a sort of rudimentary addition to the one member, one vote system.

The hon. Member for Lewes, with his long experience in the House of Commons, put the matter much better than me and was perfectly right to do so. He said that it would not have been perfect—nobody can achieve perfection in one fell swoop—but it would have been a great step forward and would have made it possible for the Government to show that they have democratic credentials and intend to be, in the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury, at the heart of Europe in every sense. If that change had been made, it might have been the thin end of the wedge, which some of the dinosaurs in both the larger parties fear.

Removing clause 2 would not leave a great vacuum, because we could immediately move to the solution that I have been propounding. That would have been a real advantage to the Government, without the need for this complicated Bill or for setting up gerrymandering committees, which have been the subject of so much criticism on both sides of the Committee. Existing members of the European Parliament, representing existing constituencies, would then know that their boundaries would not be changed out of all recognition. The hon. Member for Ashfield has a personal interest in this matter.

Mr. Hoon: No, I have not.

Mr. Tyler: There is no reason why proportionality could not have been introduced in the Bill, in time for the 1994 elections, through the adoption of wider geographical areas based on existing Euro-constituency boundaries and the use of either regional lists or single transferable vote. After full consultation, a proper system could then have been in place by 1999.

On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I invite the House to vote against the motion that the clause should stand part of the Bill. I hope that the House will vote against the Bill on Third Reading.

8 pm

Mr. Hoon: I do not intend to speak for nearly as long as the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler).

I should be grateful if the Minister could explain the purpose and effect of clause 2(6), which states:

"Any appointment made or other thing done by or in relation to a Committee at the time before the passing of this Act shall be regarded as valid if it would have been valid at that time, had this Act then been in force."

Why is it necessary to have such retrospective legislation in an Act of Parliament?

I hope I am not becoming cynical as a result of reading and rereading the Bill, but it can be necessary only if the Government have already appointed people to those committees, and if, to some extent, they are already carrying on their work and taking decisions.

Mr. Maclennan: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in the Committee earlier today, but the Home Secretary not only told us of his intention to make the appointments before the Bill is passed, but informed us that certain individuals had been consulted and had indicated their readiness to serve. Their names were not given, but they are clearly identifiable.

Mr. Hoon: I was in the Committee earlier and heard the Home Secretary speak. According to my recollection, he said that certain individuals had been approached and had indicated their willingness to serve. I do not recall his saying that they had been appointed. It follows that, under the terms of the Bill, if they had been appointed, they would expect to be paid for their services. I am sure that the Minister can deal with this shortly, and can tell us whether they have been appointed and are to be paid before the Act is passed.

It follows from that analysis of what has occured that the parliamentary process is being at least short-circuited if decisions are already being taken. If they are not, there is no need for this provision. I hope that the Committee will agree that it is a rather curious provision, which should not be necessary.

If the appointments are to be made as a consequence of the passing of the Bill, I cannot see any necessity for the appointments to be made before Royal Assent. I recognise that the Home Office may wish to ascertain whether individuals are available and willing to serve, but there is no reason why they should be appointed before the legislation is passed. If they have not been appointed and there are no preparatory works under way in pursuit of the legislation, I cannot see why clause 2 (6) is necessary.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Like the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), I was astonished to find clause 2(6) in the Bill. I recall very clearly that when I first came to this place, some time ago, I was firmly told that we had to guard at all times against retrospective legislation. I remember several causes celebres in the late 1960s on this issue. Usually it was accidental retrospective legislation, but this is a blatant piece of retrospective legislation. The House is being invited to pass lines 21 to 24 on page 2 of the Bill, which state:

"Any appointment made or other thing done by or in relation to a Committee at a time before the passing of this Act shall be regarded as valid if it would have been valid at that time, had this Act then been in force."

I have never seen a more blatant piece of retrospective legislation.

The hon. Member for Ashfield has asked for an explanation and if the Minister cannot justify it, he should at least have the good sense to ensure that this offensive clause is removed when the Bill proceeds to another place —although, as my hon. Friend said, we shall attempt to remove the clause this evening.

The main reason why I believe it is important that we make a stand against the clause is that there is a feeling that the Government, after so long in office, are developing an unhealthy form of parliamentary arrogance. You would rule me out of order, Dame Janet, if I were to discourse about what has been happening north of the border with local government boundaries. No doubt the House will be occupied with that in the next day or two, but it is all part of a picture that the Government do what they like, regardless of the inconvenience to communities, regardless of the cost and regardless of the disruption to the normal electoral procedures, which have been long established and accepted by successive Governments.

I make no secret of the fact that, when the Edinburgh summit concluded that there would be six extra seats, I went to see a number of Ministers to put to them the proposition that the sensible way to deal with the matter —although, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said, it was the official view of my party that all the seats should be elected by some form of proportional representation—was to leave the present Members of the European Parliament undisturbed in their single-Member seats throughout Britain, but to create six additional seats elected on a proportional or regional system. It struck me as a heaven-sent opportunity.

Part of my argument—which my hon. Friend modestly did not mention—is blatantly party political. It is indefensible that, in the forum of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, a party such as the Liberal Democrats in Britain—which in recent elections has gained from 18 to 25 per cent. of the popular vote, and in European elections have twice gained upwards of 20 per cent.—should be wholly unrepresented. As a matter of natural justice, that cannot be right.

Our electoral system distorts the balance of the political parties in that Chamber. As others have pointed out, it is quite natural that the other member states which have proportional systems find that the British system not only imposes a distorted delegation of 81 Members on the European Parliament, but, as we have seen in practice from European elections, imposes it at whatever happens to be the political climate at the time when the European election is held. At one time there will be a disproportionately heavy Labour majority because the elections are held at a time when a Conservative Government are unpopular, and at another it will be the other way round. That is an arbitrary way of messing up what is supposed to be a democratic assembly.

Mr. Rendel: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, although we are one of the only parties within the European Liberal Democrat group not represented in the European Parliament, we are one of the best supported in our own country? That makes the situation even more absurd.

Sir David Steel: My hon. Friend is right.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. There cannot be a full-blown debate on proportional representation on the basis of the clause. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will bear that in mind.

Sir David Steel: As always, Dame Janet, you are absolutely correct. My argument is simply that, unless we remove clause 2 from the Bill, we cannot open the door to the proposal that I have put to the Government and on which I should like to elaborate.

The argument is not only that we are unrepresented, but that the Liberal Democratic group in the European Parliament is short of its largest democratic element. That cannot be justified by anyone because it is not natural justice. I put these arguments in my usual moderate and persuasive fashion to Ministers. At first sight, because the proposition was completely new to them——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: What would have happened if Lord Owen or another member of the SDP had managed to get into the European Parliament and Liberals had also been elected? How could they have possibly been in the same party?

Sir David Steel: The answer to that is quite simple. We had an alliance in each of the last three European elections, so there would have been no problem at all. The hon. Lady's question is hypothetical because nobody was elected from either party. The hon. Lady is testing your patience, Dame Janet, because we are going wide of the clause to which I am trying to speak. The Liberals, the Liberal Democrats as presently constituted, the old Liberal party before the SDP was formed and the alliance between the two had a substantial body of popular support in each of the European elections. That support was larger than that of many of the parties presently in the European Parliament, but we are wholly unrepresented.

The hon. Lady may think that that is perfectly all right, that it is tough, too bad. However, most people, and especially those in the other European democracies, think it is a scandal that we should export our distortion. What we do here is up to us: a distorted House of Commons is our decision. I regret that, but what right have we to import that distortion into the Parliament at Strasbourg?

Ministers listened politely to my arguments, as they always do, and went into their various huddles to ponder the matter. When the decision that is graphically spelt out in clause 2 for the appointment of these extraordinary new committees was announced, one wondered why such a reasonable proposition had been rejected. The only argument that I could find was that this might be the thin end of a wedge.

We are asked to believe that the nation will be so excited by the possibility that six Members of the European Parliament will be elected by proportional representation that the whole edifice of our electoral system will collapse. Is that a measure of the Government's confidence in our electoral system? It is a ludicrous proposition. There is no connection at all between the general argument for changes in the electoral system in this place and the modest proposal that the Government refuse to accept. Instead, they are leading us through the legislative minefield of clause 2. That is quite indefensible.

We oppose the clause because it goes against all the established principles and the long-established democratic and independent procedures of Boundary Commissions. That is the fundamental objection to the clause.

Mr. Rendel *rose*——

Sir David Steel: My hon. Friend is agitating again. I shall happily give way to him.

Mr. Rendel: My right hon. Friend may be slightly misleading the Committee by suggesting that this might be the thin end of a wedge. That must be wrong: Northern Ireland is already the thin end of the wedge.

Sir David Steel: That is true, but it is the Government who argue that it is the thin end of the wedge. I do not. This "terrible infection" of proportional representation does not appear to have spread across the Irish sea, and I have no reason to think that it will spread anywhere else. I had moved on from that issue and was about to outline the other objections to the clause.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Can the right hon. Gentleman tell the Committee of any two proportional representation systems on the continent that are the same? My understanding is that they are all different.

8.15 pm

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman moves to his next point.

Sir David Steel: In deference to you, Dame Janet, I shall do that, but I may touch on that matter later.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Delicately.

Sir David Steel: I shall deal with it very delicately and I will not be led astray by the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). Thank you for your protection, Dame Janet.

The clause creates the wholly artificial machinery of the European parliamentary constituency committees. Those committees are not adequately accountable. There is no provision in the clause for any form of public inquiry or consultation. When I was party leader I used to be involved in appointments to the Boundary Commission. The public do not generally realise that there is a secure and safe system for such appointments. We may complain from time to time about the Boundary Commission and its judgments, but the boundary commissioners are appointed in consultation with party leaders to make sure that they are genuinely independent of the Government of the day. That fundamental protection which has always been part of our system is to be swept aside by the clause, because the appointments are to be made directly by the Secretary of State.

Insufficient time has been allowed for carrying out a thorough review. More than that—here I return to the point eloquently made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall—clause 2 is a tragically missed opportunity because it was a ready-made, established possibility of introducing a fair system of voting, at least for the six seats.

The Government underestimate the scale of the problems that will arise from the clause, which leaves many questions unanswered. It is extremely unclear about the rules that the committees are to follow in drawing up the boundaries. It is also unclear whether the three-person review will redraw all the boundaries to equalise the size of the Euro-constituencies or whether it will attempt to fit in the new seats with minimal disruption. Perhaps the Minister will explain how it will work.

Will bits be fitted into what my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall rightly described as the jigsaw with minimal disruption, or, as has always been done in the past, will an equalisation rule be applied to the size of European constituencies? That was the dominant factor in determining boundaries in the 1989 interim European constituency review. If the new European parliamentary constituency committees established by the clause stick to the dictum of equalising the size of the Euro-seats, why does the Bill reveal that the boundary commissioners will redraw the boundaries again when they have finished the parliamentary review?

My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall made a good case for trying to get some form of cohesive approach to local government reorganisation, parliamentary constituency boundaries and European Parliament constituency boundaries. To have different lines on the map of the kingdom for all three purposes is immensely confusing. It diminishes the nature of individual communities and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) illustrated in his intervention, it will be extremely costly to administer.

The disruption caused by such a second review, especially as the clause contains no provision for local inquiries and consultation, will not be welcomed by most of the sitting Members of the European Parliament or by local political parties. We need to know more about the ground rules for the operation of these purely appointed committees. Is it a partial redrawing of boundaries to fit in the six new seats, or is it a full-scale review to equalise the size of the European constituencies?

My comments are based on the lines of the explanatory memorandum. I am never quite sure whether it is in order to refer to the explanatory memorandum, but it states:

"The effect of clause 2(5) is that Orders in Council made under the provisions of the Bill will in due course be superseded by Orders in Council made following the next reports of the Boundary Commissions under the 1978 Act".

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall argued, we have been in the Community since 1973 and when we signed the treaty of Rome we also signed up to article 138.3.

Here I take issue with the hon. Member for Ashfield. I have always interpreted article 138 as saying that

"the European Parliament shall draw up proposals for elections by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedure in all Member States".

However, that phrase is not necessarily the same in law as a uniform system. I would argue that there is quite a lot of scope for flexibility so long as the principles of a uniform procedure are followed.

The fact that we are the only member state that fails to have any form of proportionality is a direct contravention of article 138.3 of the treaty of Rome.

The hon. Member for Lancaster asked me earlier about the different systems of proportionality. One could argue that Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Portugal have roughly the same system by using national lists.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Very roughly.

Sir David Steel: Some countries use regional lists. I was a candidate in Europe——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The right hon. Gentleman looked the wrong way on the road in Rome.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Lady is very well aware that seated interventions are to be deplored. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not dwell again on proportionality, bearing in mind my warning on the last occasion.

Sir David Steel: I thank you, Dame Janet, for your protection against being led astray by the hon. Lady.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I was sitting here doing nothing.

Sir David Steel: I was just about to give the Committee the benefit of my experience as a candidate under a regional list system, but I suspect, Dame Janet, that I might be trying your patience a little were I to dwell too long on that issue.

I am familiar with different systems which are perfectly usuable and which are common not throughout the Community, but certainly in more than one country.

Mr. Tyler: I wonder whether my right hon. Friend recalls the excellent system that was promoted by the Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government, which took additionality and would work extremely well within the confines of the Bill? We could remove clause 2 and put in place the Hansard Society system, which produced additionality on the basis of single-Member constituencies and those who had reached a certain level of support. That system was not open to the objections of party lists to which hon. Members have referred. It was a British version of some of the other systems and had the merit of meeting the requirement to which my right hon. Friend referred, but at the same time gave it that British flavour which maintained the connection between individual constituencies and their representatives.

Sir David Steel: Not only was that a proposal from the Hansard Society, but the author of the De Gucht report, which was approved by the European Parliament, tried to make it as hard as possible for the British Government to reject it. The recommendations in that report allow two thirds of the British MEPs to continue to be elected by first past the post. One cannot say that it is a wholesale derogation from what we in Britain have been used to; they leaned over backwards to provide a system that was consistent with article 138 of the treaty of Rome, yet would meet British feelings and associations——

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. My requirements are rather less. I am concerned only that we stick to clause 2.

Sir David Steel: On the contrary, I am trying to get rid of clause 2 to replace it with something superior.

I have come to the end of my argument. Before the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) leaps to the Dispatch Box, no speech is complete unless we have had lastly, finally and in conclusion, and I have reached only lastly.

I end on a serious plea to the Government. I believe that the advantages to the Government in terms of simplicity of legislation and democratic accountability would have been not to proceed with clause 2 but to have gone for the system of adding the six seats in a manner which would be more widely acceptable to the population of Britain, the European Parliament and certainly to members of the Committee.

Mr. Allen: Is the hon. Gentleman giving way, or has he reached finally, lastly and in conclusion? I should like to address some remarks to their Lordships, who may soon receive the Bill, and also to clause 2.

It falls to me to address my remarks to clause 2 and to remain in order on the very evening that you, Dame Janet, have been extremely liberal in your approach, so for once I will not stray from the clause under discussion; I have missed my chance. However, I want to put one or two things on record to assist the debate that may take place in the other place on clause 2.

This afternoon the Home Secretary talked about the seven-week difference between the timetable put forward by the Opposition—a timetable that would accommodate public inquiries—and the timetable that the Government themselves put forward in respect of the conclusion of the process of review and inquiry. Apparently, the seven-week gap has caused the whole project to founder because it has led to the need to have the Bill which is before us tonight.

In order to assist the debate here and in the other place, I should like to make it plain how we feel. In place of clause 2, there could be a timetable acceptable to just about everybody if they were willing to consider it rationally.

We would start with Second Reading which was on 30 June; on 2 July there would be consultation over the committees' membership; on 9 July confirmation of committees' membership and on 23 July the committees would determine provisional recommendations. The publication of provisional recommendations would be on 5 August and the final date for representations to the committees would be 19 September. The committees would consider those recommendations on 24 September. Notice of any public inquiries would be on 30 September and public inquiries themselves would be between 25 and 19 October. The assistant commissioners' reports could be submitted by 12 November; committees would determine final recommendations on 26 November and the publication of final recommendations would be on 9 December; therefore, the reports would go to the Home Secretary on 9 December.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Allen: If the hon. Lady will let me finish this point.

I have listed a timetable which could accommodate a public inquiry. The Government's proposals do not allow for that eventuality, but if goodwill were evident from the Government and, hopefully, in the other place, even now as the Bill goes to the other place, we could create a system by which a public inquiry of the sort with which we are all familiar could take place.

Dame Elaine Kellet-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman is an incorrigible optimist. He has been present during many debates in the House when people have talked on and on, and having talked on and on, they have talked on and on again. His schedule has public inquiries between 25 and 29 October. How on earth will he persuade public inquiries, faced with people such as those who have been talking in the House and many of their supporters outside, to conclude on 29 October?

Mr. Allen: Let us be clear: we are talking not about planning inquiries, which can take months, but about inquiries into boundaries. Most conclude within a day, and the top whack is about a day and a half. There is a tradition of a disciplined approach.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: They are not disciplined.

8.30 pm

Mr. Allen: Public inquiries on boundaries conclude promptly and with great discipline. The Home Office timetable is similar to ours in respect of the time it allows for a public inquiry.

We have a public inquiry so that people can talk and express their opinion, particularly where they feel that their interests as electors are at stake. The timetable makes no provision for revised recommendations. That would be difficult given the timetable constraints. However, provisional recommendations, objections, variations and counter-proposals would be subject to full and proper scrutiny and cross-examination at a public inquiry. The

[Mr. Allen]

committee's secretariat could easily make provisional bookings and arrangements for public inquiries at an early stage.

Dame Elaine Kellet-Bowman: With some logic, the hon. Gentleman is supposing that all the people concerned want these elections to take place. Unfortunately, some people do not want them and will do everything they can to obstruct them, to the point where we might find ourselves moving to the next European Parliament without extra seats, because there will have been no election.

Mr. Allen: Indeed. I do not wish to make a partisan point, but the biggest delay has been the 32-week delay since the Edinburgh conference. It has taken that long to bring the Bill before the House. Even on the Home Secretary's logic, had seven of those weeks been used to bring forward this Bill, we would be discussing a Bill not on European parliamentary constituency committees, but on a Boundary Commission, empowered to have public inquiries and do the job properly. The hon. Lady should exercise some care in attributing blame for delay.

The wording of our amendment, which has now been defeated, provided scope for the committees to "have regard to Paragraph 5A of Schedule 2 to the 1978 Act". Thus, they would not be bound to hold a public inquiry on an objection from a principal local authority or more than 500 electors if it appeared that the objection was frivolous or if no viable counter-proposal or variation was being suggested. Our timetable is not designed to promote public inquiries, but simply to allow them where there is a genuine need. Let us not forget that we are talking about a maximum of 10 public inquiries for England and one for the other nations of the United Kingdom.

A meeting between the new committees on appointment with representatives of those political parties represented in Parliament for the respective part of the United Kingdom could take place. They could discuss the timetable, advance notice to parties, the format of public inquiries and, within England, any scope for considering the review within defined regional areas for the purposes of provisional recommendations and inquiries.

I shall make a final point for their Lordships who may discuss this at a later stage. If the wording of the amendment is the problem, there would be no objection to the Government using their own wording or to any Member of the other place tabling an appropriately worded amendment. That would be a useful job for the second Chamber to perform.

We believe that, even when the Bill goes to the second Chamber, if there is good will from the Government, there will still be time to allow a full public inquiry of the sort that we have been used to in this country for 50 years in our parliamentary elections and for the last two European elections. Despite the fact that we, in this House, have not taken the opportunity to assist the Government towards a sensible timetable, I hope that their Lordships will take that opportunity when it arises in the near future.

Mr. Maclennan: Throughout these debates, the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) has made it plain that the Labour party takes the view that a conventional approach to the allocation of new seats to the European Parliament would be possible and practical. What I have not heard so clearly is whether it would regard that as desirable. In an earlier intervention, the hon. Member drew attention to the advice that his party had received, and the support for that advice offered by Lord Plant and given by the leader of the Labour party, that what is proposed in the Bill should be supplanted by another system of election. It seems that the only impediment to the hon. Gentleman saying that clearly from the Front Bench is that the Labour party has not taken a formal decision in conference on the issue.

Mr. Allen: If it will help the hon. Gentleman, I should be pleased to put the position as clearly as I can. The Plant commission, established by the Labour party to look into electoral systems, proposed, as one of its many recommendations, a system of proportional representation—the regional list system—for the European Parliament. Its report said:

"Such a system could be introduced by an incoming Labour Government for the 1999 elections at the earliest."

That report was sent to our national executive committee. On 19 May the leader of the Labour party stated:

"The Committee concludes that different elected bodies can be chosen by different electoral systems. That is a view which I share and I support the proposals made both for a reformed Second Chamber and the European Parliament. The proposal on the European Parliament sensibly recommends consistency of voting for the one election that we share with other members of the European Community."

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that a final and binding decision for any political party has to be taken through the appropriate channels. The Labour party's annual conference will make that decision in October. Thereafter, our policy may be different. However, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will consider the context in which those comments have been made.

Mr. Maclennan: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for seeking to clarify the position. We can take it from what he said that his objections to the line that has been consistently set by my right hon. and hon. Friends throughout the debates is not one with which he takes issue. He has explained that he thinks that it is practical to build into the existing Bill a conventional approach to the election of Members of the European Parliament, following historical practice.

In a detailed way, he has set out the timetable that would enable that to take place. He has not set his face against the alternative proposal in place of clause 2, which has been advocated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), in respect of its practicality or its principle. I believe that the Labour party may——

Mr. Allen: If my party is to commit itself to a different policy, it must be done according to the appropriate means that we have devised. In the interim, however, it would be unusual if we were to adopt a dog's breakfast of a system that is largely first past the post, with six seats elected under a different system bolted on to it. If we are to change the system, it must be done properly and, we hope, with a wider consensus, even across the Chamber, about future elections, particularly the one in 1999. It would be premature to make changes now, and it would result in confusion, which would not assist the hon. Gentleman's case.

Mr. Maclennan: The House will recall what the Home Secretary said about how he viewed these matters. The

De Gucht agreement, which united parties across the Community, including some British Conservatives, proposed a uniform system of proportional representation, leaving it free to member states to adopt their preferred option. The Home Secretary said that he intended to exercise a veto on that consensus—a decision that we found quite shocking and which must lead us to doubt whether it is reasonable to look to the Government to make progress in a consensual way. There has been no evidence that the Government have sought consensus.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North has been reaching out to the Government, trying to see whether there is common ground on which the Labour party can stand with the Government——

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I hope that I shall not have to give a further warning about using the clause as a platform for debating wider issues than should be dealt with under the clause stand part debate.

Mr. Maclennan: I am extremely grateful for your advice, Dame Janet. When I spoke at some length on clause 1 stand part, I am happy to say that I was not once subject to any advice. I hope I will not cause you to have to intervene again.

My reasons for opposing clause 2 are intimately linked with what will replace it if we are successful in deleting it. That, I believe, is procedurally appropriate to delineate and I do not wish to animadvert to matters that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale and my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall discussed with such lucidity, commanding the support of the Benches behind and around them. It would be supererogation for me to seek to surpass their eloquence.

We must recognise that this extraordinary clause is not in the traditions of best British democratic practice, but some may argue that, when making constitutional innovations there is no need to seek consensus. In fact, I suppose, historically it is true that many of our constitutional changes have been introduced in the teeth of the most fierce opposition—the Ballot Act 1872, the widening of the franchise and other matters.

Let us be in no doubt that clause 2 is a major constitutional innovation. Many people outside take the view that it is undesirable to take such a step without the consent of all political parties in the House, yet that is what the Government are asking us to do. They are asking us to accept the unilateral imposition of a system of delineation that is untraditional and clearly flawed in that it does not allow for proper argument on the appropriate boundaries.

8.45 pm

Mr. Allen: I wish to reinforce the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. Were we in September or October, looking to European elections in June 1994, clearly it might be necessary, having wasted more weeks, to obtain some cross-party support for an emergency procedure that might even forgo public inquiries. I should have thought that, in those circumstances, all parties would be understanding, but in the current circumstances that does not apply because there is still time to institute a proper timetable with a full public inquiry. That is still on offer to the Government, which may explain their reluctance to promote the scheme.

Mr. Maclennan: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support.

The Home Secretary announced, before hearing any of the arguments, that he took the view that we should have a system for the delineation of seats that would impose a constitutional novelty on the country. He tried to explain to us that he thought it should be regarded as comparable to the Boundary Commission. The debate since then, little of which the Home Secretary has heard, has shown how far removed from the normal Boundary Commission procedure these set-up committees are. He talked about Boundary Commission membership being by agreement. Where is the agreement? Far from there being any agreement, we learn that this procedure will be imposed retrospectively under clause 2(6).

I do not want to prolong the debate. I regard the clause as a constitutional enormity that the House should reject out of hand, and I hope that the upper House will take on board the strength of feeling that has been expressed by Opposition Members and a number of Conservative Members. There has been an overwhelming wish to reject the Bill and I hope that the upper House will recognise that and do the right thing.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: If we could guarantee that everyone was united in wanting us to have our fair share of the new additional Members of the European Parliament, it might be sensible to try to squeeze in public inquiries. Unfortunately, whatever the Opposition may say, we simply cannot guarantee that. Some hon. Members and some people outside, no doubt egged on by those hon. Members, do not want any more Members of the European Parliament and so could drag out proceedings at public inquiries and cause us to lose the extra seats. The elections would have come and gone and we would have lost the chance of the extra seats. The United Kingdom would therefore——

Mr. Wallace: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: No.

The United Kingdom would therefore be under-represented, which I would regard as a great mistake. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would like that. I think that he genuinely believes that these few days would be sufficient.

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Sit down.

It is therefore essential that we reject——

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I also expect gentlemanly conduct. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) knows full well that, if the hon. Member who has the Floor does not give way, he must resume his seat.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I shall respond briefly to specific points and not to the general arguments, against which you have warned us sternly, Dame Janet, especially as the latter have been aired several times in previous debates.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) made three points. First, the future shape of the Cornish Euro-constituency and every other Euro-seat is entirely a matter for the independent boundary committees, not for

[Mr. Peter Lloyd]

me. The committees will have to follow the criteria of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978, which the hon. Gentleman related.

Let me repeat them for greater clarity: the Boundary Commission and the boundary committees, under the same rules, must produce Euro-constituencies which consist of a minimum of two parliamentary constituencies. There must be no overlap between parliamentary constituencies, and the Euro-constituency must be as near as possible to the quota, which means that it must be as near as is reasonably practicable having regard, where appropriate, to the special geographical considerations of the region. Under those criteria, it is entirely a matter for the independent committees.

Secondly, the committees are not of course subject to the parliamentary commissioner but, like every other public body, they are liable to challenge in the courts. Only the order approved by both Houses is exempt from such a challenge, which is standard Boundary Commission legislation. I think that the hon. Gentleman will accept that it has been right in the past, and it is right now.

Mr. Tyler: The Minister is now admitting that the announcement, the fiats of the so-called independent committees, can be open to challenge in the courts, or judicial review. Does he therefore accept that there could be substantial delays when it is found that there will be no democratic base for open discussion and debate at a public inquiry for the fiats?

Mr. Lloyd: I am not admitting anything; I am telling the hon. Gentleman what is perfectly clear from a cursory reading of the Bill. Like any other public body or institution, the committees are open to review by the courts. The only things that are not are orders passed by the two Houses.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister mentions orders of the House, but is he satisfied that such orders are not subject to the courts if they contravene the treaties and therefore may not be in accordance with European Community law? Is he satisfied that any legislation passed by the House can override European Community law?

Mr. Lloyd: Great care is taken to ensure that any legislation passed by this House is on all fours with European Community law and with our obligations.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister is surely aware of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, which sought to deal with ships flying flags of convenience. Spanish vessels were taking British quotas and flying the British flag but they were essentially Spanish vessels. The Act was overturned by the Factortame case, not only in the House of Lords which queried it but by the European Court. In this Session, Parliament had to introduce legislation to undo the effect of the 1988 Act. Can the Minister guarantee that what we are passing tonight will not be overturned by a subsequent ruling of the European Court?

Mr. Lloyd: I am certain that what we are passing tonight—and I am glad that the hon. Gentleman accepts that we are passing it—is on all fours with the law and our obligations and will not be overturned by any court.

I deal now with the third issue raised by the hon. Member for North Cornwall. After redrawing the parliamentary boundaries, the Boundary Commission will have to review the Euro-boundaries in the usual way. The Boundary Commission is properly required by statute to review Euro-boundaries after every general review of parliamentary boundaries. Not to do so would leave us with the real problems of overlap about which several hon. Members have complained.

The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) drew my attention to clause 2(6). The intention is to enable the committees to start work straight away. Amendment No. 23, for which the hon. Gentleman voted, was posited on the assumption that the committees would start work almost immediately and, in order for them to start immediately, that subsection must be included. The timetable mentioned by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) relies on the committees starting work straight away, but the hon. Gentleman wanted to wait until after Royal Assent, which may not be granted until the spillover period, thereby losing two or three months in which the committees could be working and hearing the representations that people will undoubtedly make on its provisional recommendations which we hope will be ready by the beginning of August. They could not possibly be ready by the middle of August if we were to accept the suggestion to remove clause 2(6).

Mr. Hoon: The Minister says that he wants the committees to start work immediately, but does he mean tomorrow or next week? When are the appointees going to take up their posts—or have they already started their work?

Mr. Lloyd: Of course they have not started their work, because we shall not appoint them until we have consulted leaders of Opposition parties. We have said that we are trying to secure the services of members of the Boundary Commission. We have gone a long way towards achieving that.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Lloyd: No, I shall not give way on that point, because I have made it perfectly clear.

Mr. Foster: Will the Minister give way on the matter of consultation?

Mr. Lloyd: Very well, I give way on that matter.

Mr. Foster: I understood the Minister to say that no decision about membership would be made until there had been consultation with leaders of Opposition parties. Will he assure me that my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) will be consulted before any decisions are made?

Mr. Lloyd: I have met representatives of the Liberal party to discuss our approach. If the leader of the Liberal party would like to be party to our conversations he can. Consultation is intended to make known the names of those whom we are considering appointing, and we shall of course do that before final letters of appointment are sent. I have understood from all the parties that if the committees are to be set up—whether or not they like the idea of committees—members of the Boundary Commission are the most suitable people to appoint.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lloyd: Very briefly.

Mr. Allen: The Minister is currently going through the consultation process on the membership of the committees. Equally, the work programme timetable laid out by his Department will roll on until and including Royal Assent. I am sure that the Minister would not wish anyone to get the impression that people are waiting until Royal Assent to start work. I raise that point only to make matters absolutely clear for the benefit of their Lordships, who will be aware that work will be going on as they debate the issue.

Mr. Lloyd: Yes, I have made that fact clear already, and amendment No. 23, which the hon. Gentleman supported, assumed that that would happen. That is why it was absurd for the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) to say that this was the worst example of retrospective legislation that he had seen. The legislation is not retrospective at all in any normal meaning of that term—that is, it does not change the legality of a past action. The provision merely confirms that the current absence of the legislation from the statute book cannot be used later to argue that something perfectly valid that the committee does now became invalid when the Bill was enacted. That is the reverse of restrospective legislation, which is a particular reason, among the others that I have explained, why the House should allow clause 2 to stand part of the Bill.

Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—
The Committee divided: Ayes 220, Noes 34.

Division No.324] **[8.59 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Derek Conway.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Cryer, Bob
Dafis, Cynog

Ewing, Mrs Margaret	Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*	Rendel, David
Gordon, Mildred	Salmond, Alex
Harvey, Nick	Simpson, Alan
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*	Skinner, Dennis
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*	Spearing, Nigel
Lewis, Terry	Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Livingstone, Ken	Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Llwyd, Elfyn	Wallace, James
Loyden, Eddie	Welsh, Andrew
Lynne, Ms Liz	
Maclennan, Robert	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Mahon, Alice	**Mr. Archy Kirkwood and**
Marek, Dr John	**Mr. Paul Tyler.**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule agreed to.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

9.12 pm

Mr. Cryer: The Bill should not be given a Third Reading without a few comments being made. The previous stages have been whipped through with far too much haste. Unfortunately, although one cannot question this issue, there has not been a wide range of amendments, which would have been useful. I wanted, for example, to discuss the costs of MEPs. Unfortunately, my amendment was not selected. That is a matter of regret, but it is out of my hands.

Adding to the number of MEPs does not necessarily mean greater democracy. The Assembly in Strasbourg is still a consultative assembly. It has not been given legislative powers. Legislative powers in the Common Market are still in the hands of the Council of Ministers, which meets in secret. There is no public scrutiny. Legislation is administered by unaccountable, appointed Commissioners. The idea that there has been an increase in democracy is wrong—[HON. MEMBERS: "The gravy train."] Some Conservative Members, who will not speak on the Bill, but who like to chatter in a sedentary position, which is disgraceful, talk about a gravy train.

I have set my face against any gravy train. I have taken a cut in income to come to this place because I think that the House is relevant to the interests and aspirations of the people of the United Kingdom. The Common Market Assembly has little, if any, relevance. I question whether we should spend several million pounds over five years on extra Members. The Liberal Democrats are to call a vote on Third Reading because the legislation does not provide for proportional representation. I would oppose it even more vehemently if it did.

I shall vote against the Bill because it is not necessary. The legislation will add to the panoply that is called the Common Market. It has been a millstone around our neck since this country joined. Following the recent meeting of Common Market Heads of State, I asked the Prime Minister what were the benefits of our membership of the Community. An unaccustomed silence falls on the gathering when that topic is raised. The Prime Minister's reply was that Britain exported a lot of goods to the Common Market. The truth is that the other countries export more to us than we do to them. If Britain was not in the Common Market, the remaining member states would give us trading concessions because they would want to keep a lucrative and expanding market.

Our membership of the Common Market has not benefited us. That is why I will vote against the Bill. The legislation will give credence to the Common Market, which has been a huge millstone around our neck. Our membership has cost Britain £2·5 billion a year, and has cost each family £18 a week for the extra food costs created by the Common Market.

The problems of the Common Market have not been solved. The so-called reforms achieved by the Government have cost the taxpayer more. Of that £2·5 billion, 70 per cent. still goes down that huge drain on resources called the common agriculture policy. The food mountains still exist. The whole creaking edifice of the Common Market should be attacked for what it is—a bureaucrats' delight. It is not about nations coming together. Nations could come together without the MEPs and the so-called Parliament in Strasbourg. We come together as nations when we need to; we do so, for example, through a superior organisation called the United Nations.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): If the hon. Gentleman so despises the European Parliament, or assembly as he calls it, why on earth did he sit in it for five years and join the gravy train that he is denouncing?

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Cryer: I intend to answer as soon as Conservative Members stop chanting and give me a chance to be heard. Something should be done, Madam Speaker, about the noise from sedentary positions.

I was selected by the Labour party EC committee in Sheffield on the basis that I was opposed to the Common Market. It wanted someone who would not be seduced by the gravy trains and the wining and dining that go on in the Common Market. There is no doubt that the amount of money that is showered on MEPs tends to warp their judgment. After a while, people say, "Although I was critical, it is not so bad after all."

That did not happen to me. I remained true to the principle of opposition to the Common Market. My election address said that clearly. That was Labour party policy at that time. It was a sensible policy, and I regret that the Labour party has now shifted to acceptance of the Common Market.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, I must point out that this is the Third Reading of a Bill, and not a general exposition of the rights or wrongs of the European Community.

Mr. Cryer: I shall vote against the legislation, because I do not believe that any extra MEPs are necessary. I am told that, if the Bill is defeated in this legislature, it will cause repercussions throughout the Common Market. I take great pleasure in that thought. If it causes chaos that is even greater than the chaotic organisation that already prevails, that will be to our advantage.

I intend to vote against the Bill for entirely different reasons from those of the Liberal Democrats. I shall vote against extra people being sent to the Common Market. MEPs serve no useful purpose. It is true that for some people the European Parliament is a useful job creation scheme, but I see no possibility of adding to the democracy or, indeed, desirability of that.

The Westminster Parliament is the institution whose democracy we must improve. It is understood by people outside. This Parliament should be the focus of our attention. This Chamber and this Parliament are the means by which we shall reverse the dreadful excesses of the past 14 years when we get a Labour Government. That is our aim and intention. That must be our first priority. It should not be the nonsense of the Common Market.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 203, Noes 31.

Division No. 325] **[9.20 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Derek Conway.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Cryer, Bob
Dafis, Cynog
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Harvey, Nick
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Mahon, Alice
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Simon Hughes and
Mr. Don Foster.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Fishing Industry (Decommissioning)

9.32 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): I beg to move,

That the Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning) Scheme 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 1345), dated 25th May 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 26th May, be approved.

I shall begin by sharing with the House some words in a recent report by the European Court of Auditors on former decommisioning schemes. For me, the words sum up clearly the problems that we are facing in fisheries management. It said:

"It must be said that since the CFP was instituted the technological changes in the fishing sector have been so big that catch and detection facilities have now reached such a level of perfection that the traditional balance between fishing and resources has been destroyed. Any resource can now be located and exploited with an efficiency that has never been known in all the time that man has been exploiting fish resources."

That is backed up by some cold hard facts on the state of the United Kingdom's fishing stocks. Comparing 1992 with 1989, the spawning stock of North sea cod was down by 30 per cent., that of North sea haddock was down by 12 per cent., that of west of Scotland cod was down by 14 per cent., that of Irish sea cod was down 32 per cent., and that of Celtic sea cod down by 65 per cent. Overall, our scientists advise that all stocks in United Kingdom waters are vulnerable.

It is important to see the debate in the context not just of the pressure of fishing stocks in the United Kingdom but of news from Canada, carried today in the *Financial Times*, which brings home to us, all too bleakly, what happens when capacity is not limited.

The east coast fishery in Canada has been devastated in recent years with the entire removal of its northern cod stocks. As a result, that fishery had to be closed for two years and 20,000 fishermen and plant employees were put out of work. In summing up, the Canadian authorities said:

"the necessary drastic reductions in fishing mortalities can only be achieved by substantially decreased fishing effort and these reductions need to be permanent."

That gives a clear indication of why we should be discussing this decommissioning order today.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jack: I will give way to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and then to my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden).

Mrs. Ewing: The common fisheries policy is a key aspect of the European Community. Does the Minister agree that that policy was based on the idea that the Spaniards should not have access to the North sea until the next century, but that has been brought forward as a result of the actions of this Government and at the expense of Scottish fishermen? Does he also accept that the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1992, as it currently stands, is a distinct disadvantage to our men, their families and communities?

Mr. Jack: It grieves me to hear the hon. Lady asking me a question when she clearly has not read the recent *Hansard* report of my statement following the Fisheries Council in Luxembourg. If she had read my statement and had seen reports of what happened at that Council in Luxembourg, she would realise that the United Kingdom Government were in the lead in fighting for the parts in the accession treaty in respect of Portugal and Spain to be honoured, but only in the context that there would be no increase in fishing effort.

If the hon. Lady had read those reports, she would be aware of our efforts to ensure that our fishermen would not be disadvantaged in that respect. The United Kingdom Government could not have been in the lead in respect of Spain and Portugal because those countries were arguing their own cases. I will deal with the other aspects of the hon. Lady's question after I have given way to my hon. Friend the Member for Kemptown.

Mr. Bowden: Is my hon. Friend aware that a substantial number of responsible fishermen accept that conservation is necessary? They understand and are aware that we are in danger of eliminating fish stocks around our coasts. However, instead of following the path that is being proposed, would it not be far better to reduce the mesh size of the nets—[HON. MEMBERS: "No, increase them."] Well, at least that makes it easier for the fish to get away. I got there in the end. My hon. Friend the Minister knows exactly what I mean.

Would it not be better to increase the mesh size, as that would allow fish to get away? That would have an effect on catches for one year. However, in the longer term, that would be of enormous benefit to the fishing industry in this country and to the continent as a whole.

Mr. Jack: If we were simply debating conservation, my hon. Friend would have a point. In fairness to the fishing industry, it has taken certain measures and our one-net rule lends itself to the point that my hon. Friend was making. One chooses an appropriate net size according to the species one wishes to catch.

I must inform my hon. Friend the Member for Kemptown that, in concert with the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, we are carrying out a conservation exercise which will take into account the points that my hon. Friend has made. He is right, but his point does not sadly address the essential issue of the scheme, which deals with decommissioning and its contribution to meeting the targets of our multi-annual guidance programmes which are expressed in terms of tonnage.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): The information that I heard from the previous Fisheries Council is exactly contrary to what the Minister is saying. That information is that the British Government, under pressure, presumably from the Foreign Office which always looks to give way on these matters, devoted their time to consumer matters and to opposing any restriction on imports from outside the EEC, and the Commission blithely assumed that the Spanish and Portuguese demands, which are basically for access to the North sea and the Irish sea in particular from 1996, will be granted. That is not so, to the extent that the Irish Minister had to come over and harangue our civil servants for not backing Ireland in opposition to that.

Mr. Jack: If the hon. Gentleman spent less time sowing seeds of discontent and misinformation and more time reading *Hansard*, he would know the facts. He was not

sitting in a Fisheries Council in Luxembourg last week, as I was, supporting the Irish Minister. We needed no persuasion about the need to stick to the strict terms of the treaty and the accession arrangements for Spain and Portugal. We need no lessons from the hon. Gentleman about defending the interests of Britain's fishermen.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Does my hon. Friend agree—this point goes to the very heart of the matter—that no matter what debates there might be about the various theories of conservation, fishermen and the public need to be reassured about whether measures taken as a whole put our fishermen at a greater disadvantage than their EC counterparts? Will my hon. Friend say something about that?

Mr. Jack: I am certainly very determined that Britain's fishermen should not be put at a disadvantage. I will certainly insist that other member states are as effective as possible in taking steps to achieve their multi-annual guidance programme target. My hon. Friend puts his finger on a very important point.

Many people in the British fishing industry are deeply concerned that our continental competitors are not doing what they should on enforcement. We fought long and hard in the recent Fisheries Council to ensure that the new control regulation, which, for the first time, includes independent and random inspection by Community inspectors of other people's inspection systems, was brought into force. We want that greater transparency, greater openness and greater knowledge in enforcement of the common fisheries policy. Our fishermen deserve that protection, and we are fighting for it.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Minister knows that this decommissioning package was initially contingent on the days-at-sea legislation. I understand that the Minister is about to change tack on the days-at-sea legislation. Will he tell us what that change of course is? Is it a genuine change of mind, or is it merely a delay in implementation? I do not want to write the hon. Gentleman's speech, but could he refer to that information, which is of enormous concern to all hon. Members with fishing constituencies?

Mr. Jack: Let me disabuse the hon. Gentleman. He is the last person whom I would ask to be my speechwriter. I sail dinghies. Any changes in tack depend on which way the wind is blowing. So far, it is not blowing from a very propitious quarter.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Does my hon. Friend agree that an important factor in the debate is getting down to some more of the facts, rather than the fiction that appears to be regularly peddled by *Fishing News*? It misinterprets everything that is done and greatly alarms fishermen. Has my hon. Friend joined that newspaper's rogues' gallery of the ones that got away, by suggesting that trawlers in his constituency are affected by the regulations? It would be a change if that journal stuck to the truth rather than spread mayhem, lies and distortions.

Mr. Jack: *Fishing News* is a lively journal. It has picked out my hon. Friend's constituency with its three trawlers and my constituency with one trawler. If that is the way that those who pay for such advertisements wish to proceed, so be it.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Jack: If hon. Members will forgive me for a moment, I shall not give way. I wish to make a little progress. I want to debate the order or you, Madam Deputy Speaker, might rule that I am straying too far from decommissioning.

I was discussing Canadian fish stocks. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will be convinced by my arguments. Those are very good reasons indeed why we must control the overall fishing effort. But to achieve that, we already have in place measures such as total allowable catches and quotas, but, by themselves, they are not able to do the job that we require.

The only sure way to conserve fish stocks and thus ensure the long-term future of the industry is to have less fishing. The industry accepts the need for conservation, but the perspective of the individual fisherman is somewhat different. For him, there is no incentive voluntarily to limit his fishing effort or to see that such an approach is fair and effective. He needs a guarantee that such actions are being applied collectively.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye) *rose*——

Mr. Jack: I should like to make a little progress.

That is why Governments throughout the world have taken responsibility for the conservation of fish stocks for the good of their fishing industries and the European Community has agreed multi-annual guidance programmes with targets for capacity reduction and limiting effort, which all member states must achieve by the end of 1996.

That is why, in February 1992, the Government announced a package of conservation measures aimed at reducing fishing effort—in other words, the number of fish caught—including changes to the licensing regime, the £25 million decommissioning scheme and, indeed, the days-at-sea restrictions.

I shall say more on that last point, but I want to focus on decommissioning, which is a key element of the package.

Mrs. Lait: My hon. Friend referred to the need for fishermen to be reassured about their future. He will know that the wives of the fishermen in Hastings are marching through the town tomorrow and presenting a petition showing their worry about the future. Can he give me the reassurance that they seek—that the fishermen will not be facing unemployment and hardship, which is as they currently see it?

Mr. Jack: The message that my hon. Friend can give to the wives of her fishermen is that they have a Member of Parliament who is assiduous in the way that she has supported their interests. She campaigns for the interests of the fishermen in that part of the world—*[Interruption.]* The noise is coming from the other side of the House. It is coming from Labour Members, who had no words about fishing or decommissioning in their manifesto, and SNP Members, whose sole contribution in their manifesto was to say that fishing was 10 times more important in Scotland than in England. They are the ones who are making the noise. It is the voice of my hon. Friend that is important.

One way of achieving less fishing effort is to have fewer vessels and that is the objective of the decommissioning scheme.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe) *rose*——

Mr. Jack: I shall make a little progress and then give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sure that you will agree that, with regard to the fairness with which debates should be conducted, the Minister should acknowledge that the scheme applies to Northern Ireland as well as to England and Scotland. He should give way at least once to my right hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Jack: There will be plenty of time for hon. Members to intervene, because I have a lot more material to go through. I wish to get on the record the subject of the scheme. I am sure that other hon. Members will have their chance to speak. I want to finish this passage and then I will give way.

The scheme has the potential to reduce the United Kingdom fleet by about 10,000 to 12,000 tonnes and make a contribution to our MAGP target of at least 5 per cent. but that approach cannot be the whole story, because decommissioning alone could simply result in the remaining vessels fishing harder and, therefore, maintaining pressure on the scarce fish stocks. In proposing this decommissioning scheme, we had to think long and hard.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): It will not go down well in Northern Ireland that the Minister has gone out of his way to ignore Northern Ireland Members this evening. We were not howling at what the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) was saying. We were howling because she voted against the interests of her fishermen throughout the earlier stages of the Bill. I simply want to ask the Minister whether this is—*[Interruption.]* The Minister is not listening. [HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] I shall get on with it in my own time with the permission of the Deputy Speaker and not because of Conservative Members' comments from a sedentary position.

The scheme that we are asked to approve applies to British fishing vessels—those of Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland—but not to those from elsewhere in the European Community. It discriminates against the interests of the British fishing industry. [HON MEMBERS: "Silly."] It is not a matter of being silly.

As the fish in the Irish sea do not recognise the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, how can I, as a constituency Member for Northern Ireland, tell my fishermen that their vessels should be tied up in port while the southern Irish fishermen are free to catch the fish which my fishermen should be allowed to catch on equal terms, if the common fisheries policy is to be equal?

Mr. Jack: I had hoped that we might have a more sensible intervention after all that shouting. The right hon. Gentleman may not be aware that every country in the Community has signed up to the system of the multi-annual guidance programme—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) waves his hands, but those are the rules of the game by which we are playing. Other member states have also decided to have their own decommissioning schemes to achieve that target. The scheme is not discriminatory. The targets exist for everybody to achieve and it is up to individual member states to determine how to achieve them and have their scheme agreed with the Commission. I have outlined our policy.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jack: No, I must make some progress. My hon. Friend must be patient for a moment because I have not yet given way to the hon. Member for Glandford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley).

The Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office were highly critical of the previous decommissioning scheme. It gave poor value for money and some vessels rejoined the fleet simply to claim grant. The scheme was inflexible and had no specific objectives. More recently, the European Court of Auditors has made similar criticisms of the schemes operated by other member states.

In spite of large sums of money having been spent on decommissioning schemes, the impact on effort was negligible. Many of the vessels decommissioned were small and not fishing much, and there were no limits to prevent the rest of the fleet from fishing more intensively or new vessels from joining the fleet. Belgium, the Netherlands and Greece had decommissioning schemes, but, like the United Kingdom, they did not achieve their multi-annual guidance programmes.

Mr. Steen: The whole House should be grateful for the effort and energy that my hon. Friend the Minister is putting into wrestling with a difficult problem faced by this country.

Is it possible for us not to implement the scheme until the other European countries have similar arrangements? If we could delay implementation until all the other European countries had similar legislation in place, it would be a level playing field, or a calm sea. The most important contribution that the Government could make to the debate is not to enforce the scheme until the other European countries are doing exactly the same and there is cross-border enforcement.

Mr. Jack: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but I cannot undo what the House has agreed in terms of the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1967. However, I reiterate to my hon. Friend that the most important aspect of the new control regulation is that it will try to ensure that everybody plays by common rules. Our fishing industry seeks that important reassurance, and we shall continue to do all that we can to ensure commonality of enforcement of that policy.

The task of Opposition Members who criticise the Bill is to tell the House what they would do—how they would meet our multi-annual guidance programme, if not by decommissioning. If they say that this scheme is too little, too late, they must tell us how much they would spend, where they would get the money from and what impact it would have on the fishing industry. It is easy to criticise, but more difficult to be constructive.

As I have indicated to my hon. Friends, the manifesto of the official Opposition did not contain a word about fishing. That is how much they have cared.

Mr. Morley: I think that the Minister's brief is a bit inadequate. The reason why there was not a word in our manifesto was that we dedicated a detailed policy document to the fishing industry, which I launched at

Tynemouth during the general election. Rather than calling on the Opposition to say what we would do to deal with the problem, the Minister should get to the point and tell us whether he is going to improve this rather feeble decommissioning scheme.

Mr. Jack: In the interests of greater accuracy, I have obtained a copy of the document, the so-called document "Marine Harvest"—a product of the home-produced word processor industry beloved of the Labour party. It is a thin diet and hardly worth a read; it contains no facts and no quantifiable proposals.

Our facts on the decommissioning scheme were contained in our manifesto. That shows just how much in-depth research that the Opposition do.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jack: No, I want to make some progress. I want to put on record how we will spend £25 million on our decommissioning scheme.

I praise my predecessors for the efforts that they have made in fighting the Treasury to ensure that we have this money in the light of the record of the previous decommissioning scheme. The track record of that scheme was not good, and did not take tonnage out of the fishing industry in the way that it should have.

We have won this money. Before the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) derides me once more from behind his bright and shiny tie—which is typical of the glitz and glitter that he likes to create—let me tell the House that the £25 million is being backed up by £18 million on research and £20 million on fisheries protection. Those are substantial sums in relation to the size of the fishing industry.

The purpose of the statutory instrument is to set out the rules for the payment of decommissioning grant. Eligibility for the grant—I am now coming to the good bits—is restricted to registered fishing vessels that are over 10 m long and over 10 years of age, are seaworthy, have a valid fishing licence that has not been downgraded since 27 February 1992 and were acquired before that date. Those vessels should have spent at least 100 days on fishing trips in each of the years 1991 and 1992.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jack: No, the hon. Gentleman must hear the good news. This is how they will get the money.

Payment for vessels decommissioned will be determined by a tendering process, with bids ranked according to pounds per vessel capacity unit. That approach will enable us to take out the largest catching capacity for the available funds. Owners of eligible vessels must be prepared to scrap and deregister their vessels and surrender all their licences by 1 March 1994. That is a much tighter scheme than its predecessor.

Those are the eligibility rules which will apply for 1993-94. Next year, they may be changed in the light of the experience of this year's scheme. In that way, we can provide for the best targeting of funds. I know that the Opposition will like that.

Moreover, £8·4 million is available under the 1993-94 scheme, and £25 million in total. A press announcement inviting applications under the scheme was made on 26 May 1993. The closing date for applications is 9 July. However, we have had representations from fishermen that that deadline is too tight, particularly in view of uncertainties. I am pleased to announce an extension to the end of the month, to allow fishermen to reflect further and apply if they wish.

I believe that this scheme, as part of the package of conservation measures that I have described, represents an excellent opportunity for fishermen who wish to leave the industry. It will help to reduce fishing effort, and help us to meet our European Community obligations.

But what about the other main element of the package, the days-at-sea restrictions? The fishing industry has expressed many doubts about these restrictions, and I am fully aware that some sectors of the industry have ideas about alternative solutions or specific concerns about the detail of the days-at-sea rules that they want addressed. When the Minister and I were appointed we said that we would listen to the industry on those matters. We have both met the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations. I had a long meeting at Brixham with representatives of the fishing industry. I have been to the EC Fisheries Council, I propose to go to Humberside next week and I have several other engagements lined up in fishing areas.

My Scottish Office colleagues and I will shortly meet the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. We will continue to listen, but I should like to hear from hon. Members about the issues that are arising in their constituencies. With their help, we want to look at ideas for dealing with the problems and to see whether we can be more flexible and responsive to the industry's needs.

To allow more time for this dialogue, I now announce a postponement of the days-at-sea restrictions. They will not be introduced until January 1994. That will give us the opportunity to consult fully with the industry about its concerns and to hear its ideas for tackling conservation.

Mr. Foulkes: I welcome the Minister's announcement. He is a great improvement on his predecessor, and the Secretary of State is an even bigger improvement. *[Interruption.]* I agree with the Minister about my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). I wish he would shut up occasionally.

The Minister said that he wanted to hear from hon. Members. My constituents in Girvan, Ballantrae and Dunure, and those who fish out of Ayr, are worried about the effect of the tie-up regulations on fishermen who fish stocks that are not precious and for which conservation is not a problem. I hope that, when the Minister speaks to the fishermen and looks again at the matter, he will pay attention to that problem.

Mr. Jack: That is the most constructive Opposition contribution during the debate. I am glad that at least one Opposition Member is alive to some of the industry's real problems. The hon. Gentleman puts his finger on an interesting point. In fairness to my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), who has left the Chamber, fishermen in Brixham also raised that matter with me. They also asked about crustacean fishermen. It is important that such ideas are fleshed out and considered, and I look forward to such dialogue.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister said that he and his colleagues from the Scottish Office would shortly meet the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. The federation was given to believe at a much earlier stage that that meeting might

[Mr. Wallace]

have taken place by now and would have been with his right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. When will the meeting be held—or is the federation just being given a hope and a prayer?

Mr. Jack: The fishermen may have prayed to see me and their prayer has been answered. We hope to have the meeting as soon as possible. When I met them at a preliminary meeting in Luxembourg last week, I indicated that we would be meeting as soon as I could fit such a meeting into my diary.

Mrs. Ewing: Is it a blind date?

Mr. Jack: I cannot tell the hon. Lady that. Orders and other bits of parliamentary business keep appearing in my diary just when I want to see people such as the Scottish fishermen. As soon as that business is out of the way, I shall go to see them. I will try to have the meeting before the end of July, but, in any case, it will be held as soon as possible.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann) *rose*——

Mr. Jack: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but this is the last time that I shall give way.

Mr. Trimble: I was impressed by the Minister's itinerary. He has been to Brixham, and intends to visit Humberside and Scotland. When does he intend to go to Northern Ireland to speak to fishermen there?

Mr. Jack: As always, I took many of the engagements because people had the courtesy to invite me. Obviously, my right hon. Friend and I want to listen to representatives of fishermen from all parts of the country and I hope that I have given the hon. Gentleman sufficient indication that, if the appropriate invitation comes, we shall do our best to listen to those views.

Mrs. Ewing: Obviously we are concerned about the blind date which seems to be emerging between the Minister and representatives of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. I hope that we can have some clarification of the immediate need for that particular meeting to take place. Given what he has already said about the Department's change of attitude, what attitude does he strike towards the pelagic fleet which has already met its MAGP requirements, and to the prawn fishermen who represent a very important part of the fishing industry? Many areas, including Buckie in my constituency, are dependent on the crustacean fishermen.

Mr. Jack: It is just like blind date; one never knows what will happen until the screen rolls back. We are on either side of the screen at the moment; I hope that it will roll back and we will have a proper dialogue. The hon. Lady's question draws attention to another area of complexity in a difficult subject—differences between regional fishing area in the way in which policy impacts. I already have a flavour of that from some of the representations that I have received and I will certainly want to hear more and have it developed.

I say to everybody who wants to contribute to the discussion that it must be with the objective of enabling us to meet our multi-annual guidance programme. It is no use running away from the fundamental task of reducing the fishing effort in Britain and Europe. I gave a clear indication at the start of the debate about what happened in Canadian waters when dramatic overfishing occurred.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have a genuine feeling for the industry which is full of dedicated individuals who each day gamble with their economics, their lives, the weather and their well-being. I try to understand that, but, if there is to be an industry and fish stocks for them to enjoy in future, we have to find ways of balancing the effort and the catching capacity of the fleet to the available fishing stocks.

The proposals that I have put before the House this evening are a way forward.

Mr. Morley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe will have the chance to put this point of view later, but I will give way to him.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful to the Minister, because it is a crucial point.

In the discussions that the Minister intends to have with the industry, will there be a possibility of new money being put on the table? We have heard nothing tonight about any increased funding of the core of the decommissioning scheme. If there is no new money, what is the point of having discussions on making the scheme work better?

Mr. Jack: I have just announced the spending of £25 million. It is not an insubstantial sum. Let us assume that the head nodders on the Opposition Benches have now committed their respective parties to very large sums of public expenditure. Let me put it this way. We shall be spending £8·4 million in the first year of decommissioning.

Whichever way the hon. Gentleman seeks to interpret it, and I know how he may argue the case, the fact is that British taxpayers' money is being spent. We want to make certain that the money is applied as effectively as possible and that the new decommissioning scheme does not run foul of the problems of the previous scheme.

Before the hon. Gentleman smiles and blindly promises money away, he should read the European Court of Auditors' report from the beginning to the end of its 100-odd pages and he will see why we have to be careful with public money.

I said that we wished to postpone the introduction of days-at-sea regulations until 1 January 1994, and I want to make quite certain that we give a reasonable amount of time to representations from the fishing industry. I want those to be concluded by the end of September so that we can have a proper time to consider carefully what those representations contain and can then take those into account in terms of the final arrangements for days at sea and their application from 1 January.

Our task will not be easy. Reducing effort in the fishing industry is difficult, but it remains a key part of our multi-annual guidance programme targets. Effort control cannot be abandoned in the long-term interests of the fishing industry. It is vital to ensure that we make the best use of the £25 million available for decommissioning. We cannot remove vessels from the fleet and allow other vessels to fish harder.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Is my hon. Friend aware that his announcement of a postponement of days-at-sea restrictions until next year will be warmly welcomed in the west country, where there has been a great

deal of concern about that? Can he confirm that the decommissioning scheme will not be postponed? Will he also say whether that extra period will give us an opportunity to observe what our European competitors will be doing to conserve their own fish stocks, so that we can see how they are performing against standard?

Mr. Jack: I can confirm that, apart from the extension on applications, which I mentioned earlier, there will be no delay on the decommissioning scheme. As an act of faith, we are putting this scheme before the House. We said that we would introduce the scheme, and that is what we are doing.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) said, it is important to see what other countries are doing. As my predecessor indicated, he wanted to make that a key part of the policies that we are adopting. It is vital that others work hard to meet their multi-annual guidance programmes. We will be watching that carefully, as we will the whole issue of the enforcement of the common fishing policy.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jack: I must come to a conclusion. Many right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part in the debate and it would be churlish for me to take more time than is necessary.

We want to listen carefully to the views expressed in the debate. We want to listen to the views of colleagues from both sides of the House, many of whom are deeply involved with their fishermen and the fishing industry. We want to listen to the fishing industry because it is from the industry that the ideas for managment of change must now come. I commend the scheme to the House.

10.11 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I had hoped that the new Minister would have had an opportunity to look again at the decommissioning scheme and the whole package. He claims that he has looked at it. He has made some suggestions, which both I and the industry welcome. We welcome the stay of execution from this autumn until January 1994. I could be a little churlish and wonder how much that delay has to do with the fact that his Ministry is having difficulty getting it ready to operate from this autumn. That may have influenced the decision. Nevertheless, the Minister has given an assurance that he will consult the industry and I welcome that. However, in his battles with the Treasury, it seems that not one penny of extra money has been put on the table to improve the scheme.

The Minister was full of bluster about the previous decommissioning scheme. The National Audit Office report did criticise that scheme, but it also made it clear that the principle was sound. The reason that it did not work was the Government's incompetence in administering the scheme.

The key issues involved in the package of decommissioning, which is allied to days at sea, are reducing capacity and conservation. We have never, in all these debates, argued against the genuine need for capacity reduction and for tackling conservation. Our question concerns the best way of going about that. We do not feel that the Government have gone far enough or fast enough.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the amount of money put into the scheme this year. Will he give some indication of how much more money he thinks should be put into the scheme this year to make it effective? I genuinely want to know how much more money he thinks is needed to make the scheme work.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that it is hypothetical to ask the Opposition how much money should be allocated, but I shall answer the question directly. He knows that there are two reasons why I cannot give a figure: first, I am not in office and do not know what the situation will be in a few years' time; secondly, when we give guarantees and assurances, unlike the Government's assurances on tax and VAT, we will honour them and ensure that they are delivered. If the hon. Gentleman has so little confidence in his Minister that he wants me to make suggestions, I shall happily do so. He should know that, according to the Government's figures, this package will cost an extra £1·4 million in bureaucracy and enforcement, but I suspect that the total will prove to be much higher.

I shall suggest an alternative approach to the hon. Gentleman which would allow money for enforcement to be added to the total package, attracting a further 70 per cent. from European Community funds. It must be borne in mind that the £25 million is a gross figure comprised of 70 per cent. of European Community money and a very small Government contribution. If the hon. Gentleman wants me to introduce measures, he can move a motion of no confidence and we will be only too pleased to take over.

Mr. Home Robertson: Is it my hon. Friend's understanding that any of the money that the Government are proposing for decommissioning will go to the crews? It would be an outrage if employees who work on fishing vessels were to find themselves redundant and without compensation and all the extra money were to go to skippers or owners. I hope that, when we have a Labour Government, we will ensure fair distribution of this money.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I was disappointed that the Minister did not mention the affected communities that will lose jobs as a result of even this decommissioning scheme. The Minister should be arguing for Community social funds for those communities. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for speaking on behalf of the many share fishermen who stand to get nothing out of the measure.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: It is not only a question of the amount on which these pedantic party political points will be raised but the timing. Had the scheme been introduced when we were asking for it four or five years ago, we would not be in this situation. Every other EC country has put its multi-annual guidance programmes in place by introducing a decommissioning scheme on time and sufficiently funded, which is why we are now behind.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, which I shall deal with in a moment.

We want to see good value for public money and an effective decommissioning scheme. We have no argument about evaluating it and deciding how it operates, but other EC states have been using the scheme for a long time. Labour has consistently argued for the introduction of a decommissioning scheme, but the Government's failure to

[Mr. Morley]

act has impacted on our fishing fleet. Does the Minister accept that part of the crisis of over-capacity is of the Government's own making? Between 1987 and 1991 no effort was made to introduce a decommissioning scheme, and the Government consistently failed to meet their multi-annual guidance programme targets. They must recognise their responsibility and ensure that the industry does not shoulder the full blame.

Mr. Jack: May I check a point of detail? The hon. Gentleman said that he favoured an effective decommissioning policy and cited those who had criticised the previous policy. Does his scheme include as a point of effectiveness an effort reduction policy?

Mr. Morley: An effort reduction policy is certainly extremely important, but it must be considered in the light of technical conservation measures. I shall deal with that point later, but I wish now to dwell on an issue which is at the heart of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992. The Government accepted an amendment to the effect that they were duty bound to

"first give due consideration to a scheme of decommissioning in order to achieve a significant reduction in the capacity of the fishing fleet."

Does the Minister believe that the scheme reduces the fleet significantly? Does it honour that section of the Bill? What consideration has he given to an effective decommissioning scheme to meet the requirements of the Act?

Will the Minister confirm that the decommissioning scheme was initially meant to be financed over a two-year period, whereas it is now projected to be over a three-year period? The decommissioning scheme, as opposed, has therefore been weakened rather than strengthened, and he can hardly claim that it is effective.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to answer that point. It is an effective scheme because, by spreading it over a longer period, we have the opportunity to examine how it is hitting the targets. I said that it was designed to take out 10,000 tonnes to 12,000 tonnes but we may find that the first tranche does not necessarily affect the areas that are most effective in taking out the greatest tonnage in pursuit of our MAGP targets. Opposition Members intervened to ask us to recognise specific differences in the way that fishing is carried out, so I should have thought that having time to reflect and adjust strengthens the scheme,

Mr. Morley: We shall see, but I would argue that it has weakened the scheme.

Does the Minister accept that the £25 million that has been committed will reduce the fleet's capacity only by a measly 5 per cent? That does not go very far and I would hardly say that it was an effective or significant reduction.

Will the Minister confirm that 70 per cent. of the overall funding for the scheme will come from the European Community? Like other Ministers, he may mention the Fontainebleau agreement and how the money is clawed back, but will he confirm that the money that fishermen will receive as part of the decommissioning will be subject to tax? The House would welcome a clarification of how the tax will be calculated; will it be corporation tax or capital gains tax? It would be useful to know.

The Minister said that the scheme has been criticised as being too little too late. He accused the Labour party of making that criticism, but, although we endorse it, it was in fact made by the House of Lords all-party Select Committee. The Minister has not dealt with the fact that, because of technical improvements, the catching rate of the fleet has increased by 2 per cent. a year. Due to the delay, for which I hold the Government responsible, capacity has also increased.

Does the Minister acknowledge the bitterness felt by fishermen when they compare how they have been treated with the way in which the agricultural sector is treated? When there is over-capacity in the agricultural sector, farmers are offered substantial compensation for not growing crops, but when there is a problem in the fishing industry, the response has been a tiny decommissioning scheme and compulsory days in port. Fishermen also have loans and mortgages to pay and families to keep and they feel bitter about the dual standards that the Government have adopted when dealing with them and the agricultural sector.

On scrapping procedures, has the Minister given any thought to how fishermen will find enough places for their boats to be scrapped and who will scrap them? Has he given any thought to the question of who will scrap wooden fishing boats? That is an unusual detail. Does he accept the fact that, as I understand it, fishermen will have to pay between £6,000 and £10,000 for the scrapping of their boats, which has to be included in the bid that they make for the decomissioning money?

I shall make some suggestions to the Minister and deal with some of the points made by the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans). I challenge the Minister, when he meets the fishermen, to consider their proposals for dealing with effort reduction by means of a package of effective and workable technical conservation measures. The Minister has his scheme in place and he can always implement it. He announced tonight that he will delay implementation until January 1994. Why does not he take a step further and delay the scheme until January 1995, to give technical conservation measures a chance? We could evaluate them and see whether they work and we could give the fishing industry a chance to make them work.

Does the Minister recognise that the industry wants to be involved and that the fishermen have sensible and constructive suggestions, which I believe could work? If he will not consider those, will he consider, as an alternative, giving fishermen an option involving technical conservation gear rather than enforcing days in port?

Mr. Jack *rose*——

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Wait until the end.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) has been generous in allowing me to intervene and I would like to pick up a few more of the points that he has raised.

I made it clear in my speech that we were working closely with the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations on its technical conservation review. I am sure that other such measures will be suggested for us to consider, but will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, if those measures are to contribute to achieving the multi-annual guidance programme target, they must be agreed by the Commission to be helpful in that respect? If such ideas are proposed, we are prepared to discuss them

with the Commission, but we must agree that the point at which all our ideas must come together is the achieving of the MAGP target.

Mr. Morley: I accept that, but does the Minister accept that the Commission has been pressing the Government for many years to take up its offer of decommissioning grant, yet until recently the Government have consistently ignored the offer? If the fishermen are making an offer on technical conservation measures, which will cost them money and, by their very nature, reduce their catching capacity, the Minister in turn should give some sign that he is willing to move in terms of the money on the table for the decommissioning scheme.

Is he prepared to move on the idea of returning to a two-year period for decommissioning? The period should be as short as possible. We all accept that we must reduce the fleet, so surely it is better to do that as quickly as possible, to ensure that the reduction is effective, rather than having a slow process that will do neither the industry nor fish stocks any good.

As I said, fishermen will have to put in a bid for the scrapping of their vessels. Will the Minister consider a radical alternative to scrapping and examine, with his colleagues in the Overseas Development Administration, a package of measures that could be financed by EC money from another budget, and which would allow the boats, rather than being scrapped and wasted, to be used in an aid programme for developing countries, as part of a package of support measures for fishing in those countries? I appreciate that there may be technical difficulties, but will the Minister consider and discuss the idea? It would certainly be a more usesful way of disposing of the boats. Indeed, saving the scrapping element in the bids would provide more money that could go into the pot for an effective decommissioning scheme.

Mr. Mans: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me, especially as he has done so twice. How would he get over the problem that would arise if, when we had sent those vessels to third-world countries, they found their way back into British waters to fish our stocks?

Mr. Morley: There would be control by licence applications.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): They would buy licences.

Mr. Morley: There is nothing to stop other member states buying licences now, so there would be no change there. It is unlikely that such vessels would find their way back. There may be ways in which to deal with that in terms of the overall package. However, the main point is that, if boats do not have a licence, they simply cannot fish.

If the Minister feels that that suggestion is not feasible, and if the boats are to be disposed of in this country, will he consider the idea of sinking them rather than scrapping them? They could be sunk to create artificial reefs, which could be used for fish conservation, for marine diving, for rod fishermen or for the protection of conservation areas. I am sure that the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) would not object to a few scuttled boats in the south-west mackerel box to protect fish stocks there.

I shall bring my speech to a conclusion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I recognise that other hon. Members wish to speak, but I am sure that they appreciate that there have been many interventions from hon. Members of all parties. It is right to allow interventions and to allow hon. Members to make their points.

I do not believe that the Government have considered all the options available to them. As I said, if the proposal is successful and takes on board the technical gear conservation measures, it would be possible to add the savings of £1·4 million of annual revenue commitment for enforcement and scrapping to make the decommissioning scheme more viable.

The measure does not go far enough. It does not meet the Government's pledges or the obligations they have accepted. It discriminates unfairly against British fishermen while the fishermen of other EC states, which have made good use of their decommissioning money over the years and which have called on more money from the EC than is the case with our Government, are allowed to fish unhindered. Our fishermen face restrictive and punitive tie-up measures.

I ask the Minister to consider all those points, to take note of the interventions from both sides of the House, to consult the fishermen and to use the breathing space that he has announced tonight to ensure that we have a more sensible, more generous and more effective decommissioning package which will really bring about a sustainable industry in this country.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Hon. Members will notice that only an hour is now available for the remainder of the debate. Many hon. Members hope to catch my eye. I hope that those who are fortunate enough to be called will be brief and will give other hon. Members the opportunity to speak.

10.31 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I welcome very much the tone of my hon. Friend the Minister's speech, and I congratulate him on his appointment. I also welcome his main announcement that he will postpone implementation of the freezing of effort control, at least until January. I am sure that that will be welcomed by the industry, especially in the south-west, as has been said. I am sure, to echo the points made by the hon. Member for Glanford annd Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who is a reasonable hon. Member, that my hon. Friend the Minister will ensure that the time is well spent in listening, as he said, to the views of the fishing industry. At long last, the fishing industry is taking a positive approach to what we all recognise to be a very difficult problem.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend paid tribute to his predecessor. He had a difficult time—the understatement of the year—in fishing matters. However, he was instrumental in getting £25 million from the Treasury, as my hon. Friend the Minister acknowledges. He did that largely because there was—[HON. MEMBERS: "A general election."] Not at all because of the general election. he did that largely because there was agreement by hon. Members of all parties who represent fishing constituencies about the part that a decommissioning scheme could and should play in trying to resolve this difficult problem.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course a decommissioning scheme of itself cannot begin to solve the problem. He was also right to concentrate on the limitations of a decommissioning scheme and to point out

[Mr. David Harris]

our unhappy experiences when we had a decommissioning scheme before. I have never gone along with the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations when it has tried to put the emphasis on decommissioning in bringing about a better balance in the fleet. Decommissioning certainly has a part to play, but it cannot solve, or begin to solve, most of the problem.

It is no secret that I do not believe that £25 million over three years is adequate for a decommissioning scheme. I know that many of my colleagues who also represent fishing constituencies take that view. I should like to see the amount increased. For what it is worth, I have given my hon. Friend the Minister some private advice on the matter. I am delighted to see the Secretary of State here for the debate. The private advice that I gave was that together the Minister and the Secretary of State should find money from within their Departmental budget for decommissioning.

I am reinforced in that view by something that happened today in a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, of which I am a member. We took evidence from the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on whether Britain should rejoin the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. That is a point close to the heart of the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson). She also cares passionately about the interests of her fishermen. Later tonight, in the Adjournment debate, she will undoubtedly argue that we should rejoin UNESCO.

Our subscription to UNESCO would be £11 million a year. Over three years, the cost of rejoining UNESCO would be significantly more than the amount proposed for the decommissioning scheme to help restructure the fishing industry. That puts the matter into context. More money should certainly be made available for the decommissioning scheme.

I also share some of the anxieties expressed by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe, about some of the details of the scheme. He mentioned the cost of scrapping vessels. That is relevant. He also mentioned taxation. There is uncertainty about taxation. I hope that the Minister will clarify exactly how the fishermen will stand in respect of capital gains if they take decommissioning money.

There is also the issue of technical progression in the industry. It is always increasing its capacity to catch. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe said that it increased its capacity by some 2 per cent. a year. I gather that the term for that in the trade is technical creep.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): A Parliamentary Private Secretary.

Mr. Harris: Fortunately, my days as a PPS are long behind me. I am told that the amount of money for decommissioning will hardly match the technical creep in the industry. So, again, the amount proposed for the scheme is not adequate.

I now strike a positive note. The Minister's remarks were welcome. There is a new mood in the industry. I was heartened to hear reports of the discussions that took place in the south-west on 22 May in Brixham between representatives of the industry and Ministry scientists about some other ways of achieving conservation. It is no secret to the House that I have pressed for such discussions for more than a year. The industry was slow to respond to that challenge, but now it is responding. So my plea to the Minister tonight is to take advantage of a changing mood in the industry, put behind us the unhappiness of the past, look to the future and concentrate on how we can devise better ways to achieve conservation than the Government's proposals.

Again, it is no secret that I and some of my colleagues, especially those from Cornwall, including my hon. Friends the Members for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) and for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) have consistently opposed the principle of tie-up. It is not the right way forward.

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): Does my hon. Friend agree that while we welcome the announcement made by my hon. Friend the Minister this evening, it would have had greater credence—I think that my hon. Friend the Minister would agree in his heart of hearts—if he had agreed to suspend the implementation of the tie-up restrictions until there was tangible evidence that our European fishing partners were taking similar measures. That is the crucial point for my hon. Friend's fishermen in Newlyn and for mine in Looe and Polperro.

Mr. Harris: My hon. Friend is right. I share his view, which some of us pressed on our Front Bench colleagues earlier this evening. The previous agreement—the Gummer or Curry agreement—given in the famous debate of last year, that the Government would not move to the next stage until it was proved that others were implementing equivalent or equally effective measures, was a big step forward. We want Ministers to go one step further, and not go ahead with the suspension in January unless there is positive evidence that other member states are also taking that action.

There is now a window of opportunity. If the industry acts positively, as I hope and believe that it will, and if my hon. Friend the Minister and his officials act positively, perhaps we will not need to implement the tie-up scheme. I urge him to take that opportunity.

I asked my hon. Friend the Minister a series of questions last week about the number of boats that were restricted to tie-up in England and the west country, and in particular the number of vessels that, because they do not have a track record, have been given a minimum provisional allocation of 80 days or 160 half days. His answer was that, of the 1,582 boats in England subject to tie-up, 801—over half—are in that category.

I had hoped that my hon. Friend would announce tonight that he would increase that number. I know that he is concerned about the subject and is looking at it carefully. I press him to make an early decision to increase the allocation, because the vessels have not had to keep log books and records, and are being put in an invidious position. It would be an enormous help, and another sign of his good faith towards the industry, if he could make an announcement on that.

Mr. Jack: That is the kind of suggestion that we shall think on carefully.

Mr. Harris: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's approach. I hope that we can return to a reasonable

relationship between the industry and the Government, because the present trench warfare is in the interests of no one.

10.43 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I shall begin by spending a few seconds expressing my sympathy to the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who has been deprived of the chance to go to the farewell dinner for Lord Sanderson, while Tory Back Benchers think that that is much more important than being in the Chamber to defend the fishing industry, from which they derived some votes.

I have only one quarrel with the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). I did not find the Minister's tone conciliatory. I thought that the belligerent way in which he opened the debate was the traditional way of demonstrating weakness—when one has a weak case, shout the others down. I began to think that the Government had learnt nothing from our previous debates.

Our debates on the fishing industry over the past few years have shown a rigidity of purpose among Ministers, brought about by mental paralysis. They seem to be totally incapable of independent thought. However, they have had ample opportunity, provided by the fishing industry——

Mr. Streeter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: No, I will not give way. Many other hon. Members wish to speak. I do not have much time and I want to make my remarks speedily and so allow other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), an opportunity to speak. I will not be like the Minister and speak for 40 minutes. That was quite disgraceful.

The Government are incapable of considering the very constructive points made by the fishing industry. Like many hon. Members, I welcome the Government's apparent conciliatory measure of postponing the days-at-sea regulations until 1 January next year. However, we are not looking for a temporary respite. We are looking for a real, fundamental reappraisal. It is not enough to say that we will put it off for six months or whatever and then come back in January and do nothing.

The Minister announced that the date for application of the decommissioning scheme has been extended to the end of the month as if that was some great concession. It is not a great concession. The Minister must recognise that people will have to consider whether to sell their vessels and so lose their livelihoods and that of their crews. That is not an easy decision. The Minister might argue that people in the industry should have made their minds up by now. That is perhaps a reasonable criticism. However, things have been so tough for those people that it has not been possible for them to make rational decisions.

I welcome the new ministerial team. The team began by saying that it was going to be a much more listening team and that there was to be less of the macho style and the style that Whitehall, Dover house in London and St. Andrew's house know best. We were told that the team would listen. However, the Minister has not listened to the industry.

The industry is saying quite specifically that the decommissioning scheme takes out of the overcapacity only 5 per cent. while the Minister has signed up to a reduction of 19 per cent. If the Minister's scheme works totally, it will produce a saving of only one quarter of what he has signed up to reduce. The £25 million which was initially due to be spent over two years is now to be spent over three years. If enough applications come forward, and if they meet all the criteria, is the Minister prepared to spend that money in one year and then argue for more?

The hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) demanded to know how much we would spend. As soon as we say how much we would spend, the hon. Gentleman gets up and says that we are spendthrifts. We are not having that. We believe that the money should be spent to sharply reduce the capacity.

Everyone agrees that there should be an effective decomissioning scheme. However, the Minister must consider a serious matter that has hung over the industry for many years. The Government talk of decommissioning as though it means only boats and property and not people. People will have to pay the price. Until the Government assure us that they will battle in every quarter to deal with the social consequences of decommissioning in tightly knit fishing communities that depend entirely on fishing for their living, they cannot command our respect.

I concede that the Minister quietened down after intervening like a jack-in-the-box—no pun intended—and toned down his remarks. No doubt he will say that he listened. However, will he, or the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland if he replies to the debate, assure us that the postponement of the days-at-sea scheme that has been announced today will mean a fundamental review and, if necessary, new regulations or new primary legislation? If the Minister were to do that, I am sure that we could support him.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I hope that the length of the speech by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) will be an example to hon. Members. I am keen to call as many hon. Members as possible, not least those from the minority parties.

10.50 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton): I wish to make two brief points.

First, I emphasise the point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). Boats which have been allocated just 80 days are in a particularly difficult position. They are not eligible for decommmissioning. When I attended the Devon county show this year, I was concerned to be approached by an area manager of a national bank, which has been required to lend money to fishermen, particularly for newer boats. In his opinion, with 80 days, they would have great difficulty in servicing the loan, let alone being able to pay crew and others. That is a genuine problem, and I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister would consider that grouping.

Secondly, I emphasise what has been said about non-precious stocks and fishermen, particularly those in the south-west, who fish primarily in area 7. For example, as my hon. Friend the Minister will know, very little cod is caught in that area. Cod and haddock are a conservation problem. Because fishermen who fish primarily non-precious stocks are also subject to the days-at-sea policy, one aspect that worries them is not only the current

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

situation but non-precious stocks also becoming quota stocks and quotas being based on what they have caught in previous years. Because they have to be tied up in comparison with boats from other nations, particularly France and Spain, they fear that they would automatically be down on the list of what they would be eligible to catch of new quota species.

10.51 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I shall follow your stricture to be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister should look again at the Scottish National party manifesto. He will find that we proposed a doubling of decommissioning money over a two-year period. He will remember that at that time the Government were also committed to a two-year period for decommissioning, not the present three-year period. The Minister's argument about the costs of decommissioning is fallacious. There is a 70 per cent. grant from the Community. Admittedly, it comes off the Fontainebleau rebate, but, if we applied the argument to any part of European funding, we would never spend any money from Europe on anything. Why on earth should the fishing industry be discriminated against?

What is certainly true is that, over the past few years, hundreds of millions of ecus of structural funding have gone to other fleets within the European Community, and nothing whatsoever has come to fishermen in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales. That should not be allowed to continue.

Will the Minister explain the split between decommissioning and effort limitation on the multi annual guidance premium targets? Theoretically, it could be 55 per cent. to 45 per cent. At no stage have we been told—many of us suspect that it is because the Minister does not know—what the exact trade-off is. I hope that the Minister also takes on board the argument that to restrict the decommissioning availability to boats which have fished 100 days in each of the past two fishing years might exclude boats which did not fish in the last two years for very good reasons, including conservation of stock.

I wish to read into the record a note that I received today from Hugh Allen, the secretary-designate of Mallaig and North-West Fishermen's Association. The letter was sent to the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), but, as we have heard, the hon. Gentleman is at a farewell dinner, so he is not here to present it to the House. The letter highlights the point which concerns fishermen about the tendering process which could result in some fishermen, even if they applied for decommissioning, ending up with no funds whatsoever.

Mr. Allen writes:

"To give you an illustration, a vessel built 15 years ago at a cost of £200,000 and kept in good condition would probably be worth £150,000 today and that figure is the level of the skipper's bid. She has a written down tax value of £10,000 so if he was successful with his application he would be liable to income tax at 40 per cent. of £140,000 which is £56,000, leaving £94,000 in the kitty. From this figure he has to repay any grants he received during that last three years. This figure could easily be £20,000 reducing his balance to £74,000.

An operating deficit with the salesman's office of £20,000 which must also be repaid now leaves him with £54,000. The clearing of £30,000 outstanding mortgage brings his pay down to £24,000 and the closing of £10,000 worth of electronics contracts leaves him with just £14,000."

Out of that £14,000, he must pay for the scrapping of the vessel—an average of £10,000—leaving £4,000 to disburse among the crew of the fishing vessel. In that illustration, a fisherman could theoretically—because of the tendering process forcing lower bids—end up with nothing from the decommissioning process.

I agree with the point often made by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) about the previous decommissioning scheme. He has argued that, under that scheme, millions of pounds disappeared up the Humber to the friends of the previous Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and nothing whatsoever was made available to the fishing crews who were made redundant as part of that process. I should like to see some sign from the Minister that he is aware of the social consequences of boats which could be decommissioned out of the fleet.

We have had a change of course from the Minister tonight. He is not going ahead with the implementation of days at sea until 1 January 1994. I hope that that also represents a change of heart. Let us face the reality: the days-at-sea legislation is unenforceable. Anyone who has seen the demonstrations up and down the coastline in the past few months knows that the days-at-sea legislation cannot be imposed on the fishing industry.

While the Minister takes a few months to contemplate this matter, let him remember that, if he does not bury the days-at-sea legislation, it will bury him.

10.57 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Underpinning this whole debate is the sense of community that the fishing communities feel and which they realise is under threat. Whether we are talking about a decommissioning scheme worth £25 million or £250 million, ultimately we are talking about the destruction of communities.

It is one thing to say that it is inevitable. It is one thing to say that if there are no fish left, there are no jobs for any fishermen—and it is proper to try to cope with that. However, as representatives of communities—I represent a fishing community—we must never lose sight of the fact that when we are having such a debate, we are talking about the destruction of ways of life and communities.

That way of life will often go back 200 or 300 years in the same family. Sometimes, the feelings of outrage, which can superficially seem unreasonable, are about a folk memory that goes deeply. When we have what may seem like a clinical discussion, it is important to face the fact that we are talking about the destruction of communities and ways of life that can never be replaced. That is certainly the first thing that I learnt from my acquaintance with a fishing community.

The second thing I learnt is that, no matter how modern technology is, fishing is still a dangerous job, because virtually every fishing family will have friends, relatives or acquaintances who ultimately did not come back from trips to sea. Few of us are called to display that type of raw courage in our working life. It says something about the way in which communities are reinforced and why they will find such debates so hard to take.

Another more pragmatic lesson that I learned from my meetings with fishing communities is that there will never be a consensus on how best to conserve fish stocks. When I started in politics, I thought that, if we talked enough and met enough people, and if we were reasonable enough, a consensus came through in the end. There is no consensus

that I can see or that is achievable among the fishing community about how stocks will be conserved. In the end —this is a hard point to make, but I hope that it is an honest one—there is no alternative to Parliament taking a view on how conservation measures will be enforced and then being prepared to stand by them. There is no consensus available.

Even when fishing communities realise that there can be no consensus on conservation, they feel that they have not been listened to. That is unfair, bearing in mind the considerable efforts of my hon. Friend's predecessor. I know him well. I am also conscious that he knew the effect that it would have on fishing communities.

The problem with politics in the 20th century is that perception sometimes matters every bit as much as reality. Sometimes, there was a feeling that the case of the fishing communities was not being listened to. Ideally, they wanted their assessment of the situation to be accepted. What they wanted at the very least was a feeling that, even if nothing could be done, ultimately they were being understood.

I was delighted with the turn of my hon. Friend the Minister's speech. I have been greatly heartened by my meetings with my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Even if they could not do everything that we wanted for our domestic fishermen, I detected a desire and a keenness to understand and listen even when no ideal solution can be delivered.

I should like to think that my fishing community, listening to this debate and reading about it afterwards, will say, "It may not have contained everything that we wanted—how could it when no consensus exists?—but we have been listened to."

My hon. Friend's announcement that there is to be a moratorium on the effort restrictions came as much as a surprise to me as to anyone else. It will be possible, in the next few months, to listen to the fishing community yet again to see whether their concerns can be responded to. The position that my hon. Friend has adopted is extremely important.

Mrs. Ewing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nicholls: In view of the time, I ask the hon. Lady to bear with me, because others want to speak.

Secondly, even where it is accepted that nothing can be done, there is sometimes a feeling of outrage—I use the word deliberately—among the fishing community and members of the public that our communities are somehow being asked to bear the brunt while EC fishermen are not. I shall not repeat what I said to my hon. Friend earlier in the debate, but the assurance that he gave me was exactly what I wanted.

It is all too easy to say that we will not enforce any of our laws until the others do so. If we play that game so obviously, ultimately no targets are met by anyone and no fish are left. Although I should like it in my heart of hearts, I do not see how my hon. Friend could go so far as to say that we will not enforce our laws and meet our own obligations until we see that that has been done in advance by other countries.

But—it is an important "but" in the real world of trying to achieve something instead of indulging in empty rhetoric—my hon. Friend the Minister has made a clear statement that we shall do everything in our power to ensure that our fishermen are not out there by themselves and our EC partners also obey the laws. That seems to be right, and the fishing community can take heart from it.

Although it sounds less exciting and rhetorical than the alternative—that we will not enforce our laws unless others enforce theirs—ultimately, it is a far more honest position to put before fishermen. That is why I was so pleased by my hon. Friend's contribution tonight.

11.3 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I take issue with one point made by the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls). He said that there was no consensus on conservation measures in the fishing industry. There is not only consensus but unity in the fishing industry's opposition to the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1967. It has united all aspects of the industry in all parts of the country.

I welcome the fact that the Government have slightly back tracked. They rushed this measure through in the early weeks of this Parliament, last year. They are now prepared to shelve it until 1 January. Although many of us would have preferred a total moratorium, I welcome the fact that the Minister has agreed to listen and said that he will try to meet Scottish fishermen by the end of this month.

I hope that he will take into account the fact that, although the industry opposes the days-at-sea legislation, if it is to exist and be fair, it must be fine-tuned far more than it is at present and take account of regional differences and pressures on stocks in different parts of the country.

The Minister should also answer the point made by the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). If the pelagic fleet has already met its MAGP target, why in the world do we need to impose days-at-sea restrictions on it? Last year, it could not even catch the full quota allocated to it.

Mr. Salmond: And the quota has gone up.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) reminds me that the quota has gone up, yet the pelagic fleet has been asked to accept further days-at-sea restrictions.

To reduce pressure on white fish stocks in the North sea, many vessels may like to travel to more distant waters and fish new species. The fact that they must be at sea longer to get to those distant waters means that they will spend even more time at sea. I hope that the Minister will allow an opportunity for flexibility on that count.

I hope that the Minister will discuss positively with the industry questions on technical conservation measures. He said that he was already working well with the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations on its conservation review. How and to what extent will technical conservation measures adequately substitute for days-at-sea restrictions? Those restrictions were introduced in a Bill that we debated over a year ago, but they were presented to us then as a conservation measure. What the Minister has said tonight makes it clear that this scheme has far more to do with meeting our MAGP targets.

A number of questions need to be answered. First, what is the trade-off between a days-at-sea restriction or effort limitation and decommissioning, which takes capacity out of the fleet? We are now faced with a two-pronged attack, but we have not been told the conversion factor. I think that it is only fair to let the industry know where it stands.

[Mr. Wallace]

Secondly, we want to know what other European nations have done about the balance between effort limitation and capacity reduction. I am told that, by 1 May 1993, the steps taken by member nations to secure MAGP compliance should have been reported. We want to know what other European Community nations are doing about days-at-sea restrictions.

It has already been pointed out that Opposition Members—and, to be fair, a number of Conservative Members—called for decommissioning for many years before it was eventually announced, a few weeks before the general election. When we say that this is too little, too late, we do not say it with the benefit of hindsight; we said it before. It has also been pointed out that the same view was expressed by a House of Lords Select Committee, which opined that the present decommissioning scheme —the one on offer—would probably do little more than meet the technical increase of 2 per cent. per annum.

If that is so, will the Minister tell us how he thinks the 55 per cent. decrease in capacity will be met if it is not to be met by a decommissioning scheme? What element is being allowed for the bankruptcies that we fear will inevitably follow if harsh days-at-sea restrictions are placed on people who will not be given an adequate opportunity to make a return on the capital that they have invested in their ports?

I hope that the Minister will also answer the question raised by a number of hon. Members about those who will be made redundant, but will not benefit from decommissioning payments.

11.6 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): My constituency includes the coastline from Paignton to Cornwall—about 88 miles of fishing coast. A number of ships in the area fish crab and lobster, which are not part of the quota. Will those crustacea be exempted from the days-at-sea and tie-up proposals?

I understand that, if the decommissioning grant is increased from £25 million to £100 million, the European Commission will give 70 per cent. back. If the British Government contributed £100 million, they would get £70 million back. As the £30 million that would go to the fishermen would be taxed, for £100 million given to our fishermen for decommissioning, the Government would have to spend only £20 million. Why can we not do the same as so many other European countries, which, having put such amounts into decommissioning, have taken many fishing boats off the seas and—rightly—recompensed the fishermen involved?

I believe not only that we should not implement the days-at-sea and tie-up provisions until other countries are involved in similar legislation, but—more importantly—that we should not do so until that legislation is also enforced by those countries. We have to be satisfied that every European country that fishes our seas has exactly the same rules and regulations as ours and that they are enforced in the same way.

I may have my figures wrong, but I understand that this country has about 270 fisheries officers enforcing the regulations on our fishermen. I think that there are only 17 —or is it 27?—such officers in Spain. Curiously, they seem all to be based in Madrid. Until there is a fair system, a level sea as it were, there will be constant complaints from the fishing industry that the scheme is not working fairly. Fishermen will be prepared to accept the measures if they can see that they are fair and reasonable.

I thank the Minister and his staff for their courtesy. Within a week of taking office, the Minister came to Brixham to see my fishermen and explain the matter to me and to them. He also satisfied himself that they had a real problem.

11.10 pm

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): I was glad to hear that the Minister will come to Northern Ireland if he is invited, but I was surprised to hear that the Minister responsible for fishing in Northern Ireland has not yet invited him to Northern Ireland. We shall certainly make representations to that Minister to ensure that such an invitation is extended.

I was disappointed by the belligerency of the Minister's speech. It displayed that element of arrogance that has been one of the problems with the Conservative Government in recent years, and it is the reason why they have lost support in the country. I hope that the Minister will listen more to hon. Members, including Northern Ireland Members. He was not prepared to do that earlier in the debate.

There are two major problems with the legislation, the first of which is the days at sea. That has caused great unease in the fishing industry throughout the United Kingdom, and we heard about it from the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). In Northern Ireland, there is a special issue. Unlike the other fishing fleets, our fleet is in the Irish sea with a fleet from another nation—the Republic of Ireland. The fish obviously do not recognise any political border: they swim up and down the Irish sea.

The legislation will instruct the fishermen of Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie, "You must remain tied up in your ports and watch the southern Irish fishermen catching fish in the Irish sea that you should have the chance to catch." That is the discriminatory element in the legislation, and that is why it has been rejected by the fishermen of County Down.

There is still a lack of information about the impact of the decommissioning scheme. The Minister was short on detail. He did not answer the question, "Will it bring about a reduction of only about 5 per cent. in the size of the British fleet?" That has been suggested by the industry and by Opposition Members, but so far no Minister has come out openly and said that the £25 million scheme will have such an impact. We want an answer. What will be the impact of the decommissioning scheme?

Secondly, we need more detail about the average payments that will be made for fishing boats. Fishermen have no idea of the average amount that they will get. There have been vague suggestions of a tendering scheme. That is mentioned in the regulations and it was dealt with in two or three words by the Minister, but we have had no details about how the tendering scheme will work and what it will mean in pounds for the fishing boats. We need some guidance on that before we can reach our decision.

Postponing the implementation of the days-at-sea regulations until 1 January 1994 has only put off the evil day for a few months. As the fishing boats have applied for their allocation of days and the procedure is now under

way, will that procedure be stopped, will it still go ahead and all the fishing vessels be told how many half days they will have at sea, or will the scheme stop in the meantime?

11.14 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I must congratulate the Minister on a welcome performance at the Dispatch Box. Frankly, I dreaded it when he began his speech in such a combative fashion, and I thought that he was another in a long line of Ministers who would trample on us. However, it was a successful speech, introducing the decommissioning scheme that we have been awaiting for so long.

First, what took the Government so long? Why do all the arguments against a decommissioning scheme that were made with such theological certitude by the previous Minister two years ago no longer apply? However, it would be churlish to go on.

Secondly, the Minister has listened. I made a plea personally to him when he took office not to get into the same deadlock trench warfare as the previous Minister, but to listen to the fishermen and give them a chance and to use the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act as a sanction to get them to agree to conservation measures which would be much more effective in the long run. I am almost pathetically, gibberingly grateful to the Government for having listened and agreed to postpone the Act. I hope that they will now consider the possibility of abandoning it altogether.

The saving that would accrue from not implementing the Act, no matter what the costs are, whether £8 million or £4 million a year, would be the kernel of a bigger decommissioning scheme if the money from the EC were added to it, and that would achieve the purposes we want.

The decommissioning scheme that we are discussing today is not big enough. If it will take out 5 per cent. of the effort over three years, and if we take into account technical creep—which is not the name of the previous Minister, but the effects of technical improvement—we are trying to take out 20 per cent. plus 6 per cent. while achieving only 5 per cent., so 21 per cent. of the effort is still to be taken out and the scheme goes nowhere near to achieving that. Therefore, we need a bigger scheme.

I shall make one final point on tendering. It would be much better to have it in one big bag, to use all the money at once and to achieve the cumulative effect of taking out a big effort earlier. The problem is that we cannot target tendering at those vessels which took the most damage and which would deplete the stocks the most; it will go to those in desperate need. Had we introduced a scheme five years ago, people would have had the choice. Now we urgently need to get out first and quickly those with most damage. Tendering would have a disproportionate effect in Grimsby where many older vessels would be anxious to get out and would put in quite a low tender, but that would pull the prop out from under the Grimsby industry in a disastrous way.

I hope that the Minister will think again about tendering and about a bigger scheme, but most of all I hope he will use the breathing space which he has provided in his wisdom to get on with the conservation measures that the industry itself is taking such as segregated nets, which are a major improvement.

I do not see why the industry should have to continue the experiments. Why can they not be carried out by the Department itself and by the Sea Fish Industry Authority rather than by the industry? National technical conservation measures have a bigger effect than the crude measure of getting out the effort by days-at-sea limitation. The Minister can tell the Commission that we have a better way and that he, the new Minister, developed it, and that is what we want.

11.18 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I shall be brief in my remarks, so that others can get in.

I noticed an article in *The Sunday Telegraph* entitled,

"Those in peril cast for help as fleet flounders".

That article by Adam Nicholson mentioned the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait). It stated:

"Her majority at Hastings is 6,634"

and she is quoted as saying:

"Anyway, I reckon that there are only 1,000 fishing votes in my constituency . . . Let's wait and see. I don't understand why"

the fishermen "are so angry". I have news for the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House know why the fishermen are angry.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): The hon. Gentleman should understand that, as ever, accuracy is not an attribute of many journalists.

Mr. McFall: We now have confirmation that we cannot trust *The Sunday Telegraph*.

All that we have from this debate is a three-month stay of execution for the days-at-sea legislation and a vague promise of a review of how the scheme will operate. As the House of Lords Select Committee said, it is too little, too late. We have a total of £25 million over three years.

The real question concerns the best way to go about conservation. Should we not listen to some of the fishermen's representatives? For example, the Scottish fishermen's representatives have written to me and other Scottish Members. They have said that there should be a quick burst in one year to relieve the fleet of the excess capacity as soon as possible. We find that we are reducing the fleet by 5 per cent., but we have signed up with the EC for 19 per cent.

The £25 million is worthy of further investigation. As the Minister knows, 70 per cent. of that grant is from the Community. Given that it is taxed with a combination of income tax and corporation tax, we could be talking about a figure of £3 million or £4 million. That is a miserly sum from the Government. Does not the Minister accept, even at this stage, the findings of the House of Lords Select Committee, that an effective decommissioning scheme will require £100 million, 70 per cent. of which can be covered by the EC Commission?

It is sometimes said that making sense of the fishing industry row is like trying to catch hold of an eel in a barrel of oil. Bob Allan of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation told me that the tie-up requirements, like no other single issue, have united the industry. Some questions arise from that. As has been mentioned in the past, between 1987 and 1991, nothing happened because of the Government's inactivity. Because of that Government failure, the EC Commission refused to make Community financing available to the United Kingdom fishing industry. Did the Government ever challenge that? How much Community aid was lost to United Kingdom fishermen as a result?

[Mr. McFall]

The Government need to adopt a system of management by objectives, driven by expert advice, and a decommissioning scheme informed by genuine dialogue. That genuine dialogue has been missing until now. As some speakers have said, this is about people and communities. It is about the viability of communities. The social consequences are extremely important in all fishing communities throughout the United Kingdom.

The Government could tonight give a commitment that they will enter into that meaningful dialogue. The Under-Secretary at the Scottish Office could give an indication of when the Minister will meet the Scottish Fishermen's Federation so that it can get its point of view across.

The scheme buys some time for the Government, but, sadly, it does not buy a future for the industry, and we shall have to return to it.

11.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): It was rather disappointing, when my hon. Friend the Minister of State had brought new ideas and attitudes to the fishing industry, to hear such a niggardly and miserable response from the Opposition.

We have shown flexibility in fishing policy. We are glad to hold meetings and we were frequently asked when we would hold them. We shall, of course, hold them as soon as they can be arranged, but it is important not to say that we shall meet tomorrow or the day after, but for the fishing industry to advance constructive ideas. We are giving it the chance to do that between now and the end of September. We will consider its views carefully and reach decisions between then and the end of the year.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): Will the Minister give way?

Sir Hector Monro: I have only about four minutes left.

The days-at-sea restrictions are postponed until 1 January and we shall consider the position at that time. In the meantime, we shall proceed with the £25 million decommissioning scheme over three years. That is an important step forward. Applications have been coming in steadily in the past few days and now approach 150 already. Fishermen see it as a good scheme.

We will continue our consultations in Europe and ensure that, as far as possible, the measures that we have agreed are fair throughout the Community.

We must be absolutely certain that we are conserving our fishing stocks; everything must be complementary to that and it must be scientific conservation, not just the good ideas of individual fishermen. It will be a constructive period for discussion. That is in the interests of the fishing industry, producer organisations and the processing industry, which has a large number of employees to be considered.

I see no reason why we should not achieve an amicable solution to the difficulties that have been facing the fishing industry this year. It can be done with good will on all sides, and I should have liked a bit more good will from the Opposition tonight. Let us see what we can achieve in the rest of the year.

I warmly thank my hon. Friends the Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) for the many important ideas they advanced. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) and, indeed, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who was rather more generous than usual. I say to him that the sum to be met by the taxpayer is £20 million, which is the difference between the Fontainebleau agreement and the rebate.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) mentioned the pelagic fleet. With the postponement of the days-at-sea regulations, that is an important issue, because it will give a clear run for the rest of the year and plenty of time to discuss the position for next year.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) made an important contribution. He must remember that the decommissioning scheme is only for boats longer than 10 m, whereas many of the boats he mentioned will be under 10 m. We must discuss the other issue when we meet the fishing organisations.

Mr Steen: Will my hon. Friend say something about crabs and lobsters?

Sir Hector Monro: Charm has a better chance of intervening than the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan. I shall be pushed to say anything about crabs and lobsters in two minutes, but my hon. Friend and his fishermen will be able to put their good points to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

I re-emphasise that we are giving the fishing industry a real opportunity. We have backed right off the days-at-sea restrictions to allow plenty of time to consult. I say to the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) that we shall file applications, and fishermen will be able to hold discussions with the Ministry. If they are unhappy with the decision made by the Department, they can appeal to the tribunal. We shall thus be able to determine each boat's eligibility.

We have had a worthwhile debate. I am glad that we have been able to get across the issues that are so important to the fishermen, who have a great opportunity to discuss them with Ministers. I hope that we can reach a satisfactory conclusion before the end of the year, which will open new opportunities for the fishing industry in the United Kingdom.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 137, Noes 22.

Division No. 326] **[11.29 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard	Brazier, Julian
Amess, David	Bright, Graham
Ancram, Michael	Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Arbuthnot, James	Browning, Mrs. Angela
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Burns, Simon
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*	Burt, Alistair
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*	Carrington, Matthew
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*	Carttiss, Michael
Baldry, Tony	Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Bates, Michael	Coe, Sebastian
Biffen, Rt Hon John	Colvin, Michael
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Congdon, David
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas	Conway, Derek
Booth, Hartley	Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Boswell, Tim	Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*	Cran, James
Bowden, Andrew	Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Bowis, John	Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Brandreth, Gyles	Davis, David *(Boothferry)*

Day, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Eggar, Tim
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Fabricant, Michael
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
Fry, Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oppenheim, Phillip
Patnick, Irvine
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Cryer, Bob
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Gordon, Mildred
Hood, Jimmy
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Loyden, Eddie
Macdonald, Calum
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Salmond, Alex
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Welsh, Andrew

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John D. Taylor and
Mr. David Trimble.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved.

That the Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning) Scheme 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 1345), dated 25th May 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 26th May, be approved.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

VALUE ADDED TAX

That the Value Added Tax (Supply of Services) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 1507), dated 15th June 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Print Works (Emissions)

11.41 pm

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): I present a petition from 1,645 people who are resident in east London. It expresses concern about the increased incidence of asthma, of meningitis and of cancer in London and about the possible connection between newspaper print works, many of which have now relocated from Fleet street to residential areas in Tower Hamlets, and those diseases. The petititoners note that traces of toxic compounds associated with printing have been found in the blood and urine samples of local residents and in household dust and drinking water.

The petitioners request that an immediate study be undertaken of the effects of combined emissions to the atmosphere and to water from materials and chemical compounds used by national newspaper print works in the docklands area.

To lie upon the Table.

Young People (Benefits)

11.42 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I present a petition gathered by people in Nottingham which comprises over 6,000 signatures. It declares the petitioners' concern about the poverty affecting the lives of young people as a result of the harsh and discriminatory nature of the age-related benefits system. The petition says:

The Petitioners therefore request that, in order to alleviate youth poverty, the House of Commons urge the Government to restore the right to income support to 16 and 17 year olds who cannot find work or a suitable youth training placement, and to end the discriminatory treatment of 18-24 year olds, who live independently, by restoring their right to benefits on the same basis as those aged over 25.

To lie upon the Table.

UNESCO

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*Mr. Conway*].

11.43 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): This is the first time that I have had the opportunity to speak on the subject of UNESCO. I pay tribute to the many colleagues who have put the case for the United Kingdom rejoining UNESCO since we left it in 1985. I first pay tribute to the most eminent of those colleagues, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who has so often said that the United Kingdom should never have left UNESCO and that the earlier we return the better.

Secondly, I pay warm tribute to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), who, since we left UNESCO, has consistently called for us to rejoin. Indeed, in the debate when we left UNESCO my hon. Friend said:

"Does my right hon. Friend accept that his announcement will be received with deep sadness and will be greeted by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends with a certain degree of bitterness? We shall leave our friends in UNESCO to argue our case and continue the battle that my right hon. Friend began so well and pursued with such vigilance . . . I ask my right hon. Friend to accept that it cannot be in Britain's interests to reduce our influence in such an important international organisation."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 451.]

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), a member of the United Nations Association working committee on UNESCO, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), the chairman of the United Nations parliamentary group, my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), who is also here this evening and is a member of the UNA working committee, and many other hon. Members whose names are on the early-day motion on the order paper today. That early-day motion urging the Government to rejoin UNESCO was signed by 247 hon. Members.

I pay warm tribute to the staff of the United Nations office in London and in particular Mr. Rashid Kareh, who has been so supportive throughout these years. I also pay tribute to the other organisations which have kept in contact with UNESCO in professional ways. They range from the Royal Society of Chemistry, of which so many of us are honorary members, to organisations such as Exeter university, which receives fellows and chairs from United Nations organisations such as UNESCO.

The purpose and history of UNESCO is well known to the House. You will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we left in 1985. Our knowledge of UNESCO has been kept alive and warm since then by the creation soon after that, at the suggestion of several Members of Parliament and of another place and of professional and academic people, of a committee under the umbrella of the United Nations Organisation. Roughly half its membership of 40 comes from the House of Commons or the other place. That is why we have had debates in both Houses. The more recent ones were on 22 May and 4 December 1992 in this place and on 14 March in the other place. I suggest that the work of that group has kept knowledge of UNESCO so alive in this place.

It is worth recalling that the United Kingdom was the founder member of UNESCO. It came into being as a result of the initiative taken by Rab Butler, known to so many of us when we were children or young people entering into politics, who was then President of the Board of Education of the United Kingdom, and Sir Malcolm Roberts, the then chairman of the British Council. In 1942 they invited Ministers of Education of the allied countries to form a conference of allied Ministers of Education. That conference was UNESCO's starting point. It was a manifestation of a climate of hope for the future. It was an initiative of the United Kingdom.

The principal purpose of UNESCO described in the constitution was and remains

"to contribute to peace and security be promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed . . . by the Charter of the United Nations."

Indeed, the first paragraph of the preamble to the constitution reads:

"since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed".

Today, from that early beginning in the dark days of the second world war in London, 173 member states belong to UNESCO. Who are the absentees? The most marked of the absentees have to be the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

I greatly respect the views of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister in this and other matters. I suggest —I believe that he will agree with me on this—that UNESCO is a changed body. When we left in 1985, it was overstaffed, slack in thinking, and top-heavy. Although we were sorry to leave, the Minister for Overseas Development at the time made at least a partially convincing case. I have, however, always agreed with the French that the person who is absent is the person who is always wrong, and that we would have done better to have stayed in and reformed UNESCO even more swiftly.

Let me give one example of the transformed UNESCO under its present management. On 25 June this year—12 days ago—President Yeltsin met UNESCO's director-general in Moscow on the occasion of the signing of a memorandum of co-operation. That is a most remarkable document. I have in my hand a press report of it, sent to me by Mr. Tom Forstenzer, from the Paris office of UNESCO. It tells us that, on 25 June, Fredrico Mayor, the director-general of UNESCO, and the President of the Russian Federation met in Moscow to sign a memorandum to strengthen

"co-operation between Russia and UNESCO in the Organisation's fields of competence."

In particular, it concentrated

"on support for, and development of, democratic change in the country"——

a most important and critical focus——

"preservation of the cultural and natural heritage, transmission of information and training of personnel (in management, copyright and other sectors)."

It spans the sectors of culture, education, science and communication.

The press report says:

"Some key activities in the field of culture are in the reconstruction and modernisation of the Bolshoi Theatre and the Russian State Library, both in Moscow, and the Hermitage in St Petersburg."

Those are places well known to many of us. On top of that,

"special attention is given to the EUROLINGUAUNI project, which aims at improving knowledge of foreign languages and increasing student exchanges in the human sciences. UNESCO will also assist in the preparation of new legislation regarding education."

Is not something of that magnitude a project of such value that the United Kingdom and the United States of America should not only warmly welcome it, but, in an honourable world, wish to be involved in it? Do not we honestly wish to participate in something of such value to the world? We pride ourselves on being in the forefront of assisting Russia and other former Soviet Union countries to inherit the democratic traditions that we have matured, and to learn them from us. Why then are we content to be on the outside while those important and exciting activities are going on?

That was not the only large activity that took place that week. UNESCO was a meeting place for all those around the world who are expert in different ways of protecting and restoring ancient stone and brick. One need only look across the road to see how wonderfully Westminster abbey has been enhanced by the tremendous programme that we have undertaken. Was not it France that started that initiative, many years ago, under the banner of UNESCO, in cleaning up the wonderful monuments of Paris? We have been johnny-come-latelys to that work. Should we not have been part of that conference as well?

This week, UNESCO is home to a meeting of specialists in the teaching of science at primary and secondary level —a matter of major concern not just in the United Kingdom but in all other countries. There is also a high-level meeting of experts on solar energy, the solar summit. Each of those important recent events shows us that UNESCO is acting in sectors of vital interest to the United Kingdom—preserving monuments, exploring more effective teaching methods that link the latest research to early learning experience, advancing renewable energy techniques and building bridges to newly fledged democracies. What more exciting programme could any of us wish to be involved in?

I am indebted to Dr. Colin Power, the director of education of UNESCO, for giving me a breakdown, in percentage terms as well as in actuals, of the current expenditure of UNESCO. The budget is remarkably small for the large undertakings in which UNESCO is involved. I remind the House that the biennial figures are 38 per cent. on education; 22·5 per cent. on science; 17 per cent. on culture; 11·2 per cent. on communication; 9·3 per cent. on social sciences and 2 per cent. which is sectoral. That breakdown is of particular importance to us all.

Under the education heading, I have learnt of the excellence of today's UNESCO. I visited the head office in Paris recently where I met for the second time Mr. Frederico Mayor, the director-general. I also met Dr. Colin Power, who, as I have already said, is assistant director-general for education. I met the director of the combating illiteracy project, Mr. Peter Higginson, and also Birgitte Moller, who is the chief of section for contracts with other donors. I met another wonderful donor organiser, Ms Basma Irsheid, who is chief of the unit for good will ambassadors and the special adviser for Arab funding sources. I also met the senior special adviser and deputy director-general, Mr. Sharma, and Mr. Tom Forstenzer, the executive officer.

I found UNESCO in Paris today to be a centre of excellence, with a rigour of thinking and an economy of style carried out by top-flight people with whom, I believe, the United Kingdom should wish to be associated. I sought—and I believe will achieve—a contract partnership between UNESCO and the AMAR appeal to provide education in refugee camps.

You will be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have an interest in helping the plight of children, particularly in refugee camps. I approached UNESCO to assist a particular group of Iraqi children in south-west Iran who have been in camps there for more than two years. I knew that only UNESCO would be able to assist me because, within the United Nations family, UNESCO holds the mandate on education and recognises education as a basic human right and its essential place in any scheme that proposes to offer humanitarian assistance to the young.

UNESCO seeks to assist in the provision of sustainable education resources for children and young people with a view to protecting their individual futures in a developing world. I believe, and I have put this proposal to Paris, that UNESCO has skills and resources that can be channelled effectively to the Iraqi Shia community children in south-west Iran in partnership with the AMAR appeal.

I sought this debate tonight not just because of the general excellence of UNESCO. Many colleagues have made such points over the past seven years with greater knowledge than I have. I sought this debate because, in recent weeks, I have had this hands-on, basic experience of the excellence of UNESCO. After all, UNESCO could have said to me, "There are just a few thousand children down there. They're out of sight. There are only 6,500 or 10,000, so what are you talking about? What has that got to do with us? What have camps and emergencies to do with education?"

Instead, Mr. Frederico Mayor said, "Of course we shall help. We will do all we can with you to meet the childrens' and teachers' needs." That concern for the education of young people caused me to request this debate. I believe that only UNESCO could open the doors. For two years earlier I had sought to bring education to those children. It was not until I went to UNESCO that I found an understanding and professionalism and ready response that has already begun to show fruition in partnership with the AMAR appeal and our host country, Iran, for those children.

I have also referred to the high percentage of UNESCO's budget that is devoted to science. As a member of the Medical Research Council from this place, I have a particular interest in that. I referred earlier to the Royal Society of Chemistry. I have been in contact with the society's parliamentary affairs officer, Mr. Stephen Benn, who is known to many of us. He told me of the Royal Society's wish that we should rejoin UNESCO. Indeed, he tells me that the council has now agreed to submit a formal request to the Government in support of United Kingdom re-entry and that the council is taking a close interest in our debate.

He reminds me that UNESCO carries out the work that the society promotes—the important work that there is still to do in science and environmental work, such as the need in 1992-95 to provide advanced training for 3,000 mathematicians, physicists, chemists and biologists, to award research grants and to establish 15 to 20 pilot projects for updating teaching materials and science curricula.

The recent White Paper on science surely impressed upon us all the importance of the development of science for the United Kingdom. That is one good reason why we should rejoin UNESCO.

Perhaps it was because of the excellence of UNESCO's commitment to science that, on 20 May this year, 37 Nobel laureates who are residents of the United States of

[Miss Emma Nicholson]

America and outside it personally presented a declaration with other eminences to President Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore. I have that declaration with me. The signatures are astounding in their importance and value to the world of science and in the wider world of us all.

A concurrent resolution was introduced into the House of Representatives and the United States Senate at the same time. That was followed in June by two full days of hearings. One was spent on hearings from non-governmental organisations and one was spent on government organisations. That large piece of work stemmed from the efforts made by the Paris office to show the United States of America that UNESCO is indeed transformed. Perhaps because of that, the concurrent resolution asks the President to

"develop a strategy to bring the United States back into active and full membership in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation."

Congressman Howard Berman said:

"The US was right to leave UNESCO in 1984. Politicisation of the communications programmes"—

perhaps that was the nub of the issue here—

"and discrimination against . . . a member state".

It is a long statement, but he goes on to say:

"We should rejoin now because UNESCO has solved the problems which led to our withdrawal. From protecting the global environment to building independent news organisations to educating the world's youth, UNESCO can significantly further our national interests in international intellectual and cultural exchanges, free communication across borders, the promotion of democracy, sustainable development, and international economic competitiveness.

The US was one of the founding members of UNESCO, because, in the wake of world war Two, we profoundly understood the importance of education, culture, science and communication to the maintenance of international peace and stability."

I commend the concurrent resolution to the House. It states:

"UNESCO has elected new leadership, instituted tightened financial controls and strategic planning, cut staff and budget, renewed professionalism, restored recognition of intellectual property, returned the organisation to the principle of an unfettered, independent international press, therefore addressing and redressing the criticisms which formed the justification for the United States' withdrawal."

Those critical points are surely even more vital to those of us who watched the fiasco of the human rights congress in Vienna, when the Minister himself fell foul of its organisers' incompetence and was unable to deliver his speech on behalf of this nation. Surely UNESCO, which is now an excellent organisation, as witnessed by those statements in the concurrent resolution, is a body which can promote human rights ideals in the way in which it is tasked to do.

Now is the time to show our good faith in the ideals and practicalities of UNESCO and rejoin the organisation that we promised to rejoin when adequate reform was accomplished. All of us now agree that that is the case. I ask the Minister if we can honestly remain credible if we delay.

I refer to the point made by the previous Minister of Overseas Development when he was questioned whether we were merely running where the Americans led and simply copying the withdrawal of the United States from UNESCO. I quote his reply to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn):

"The right hon. Gentleman has a mania of finding conspiracy wherever he looks. We have been under no pressure from the United States Government to make this decision. They have pursued their policy quite independently of our own. I say firmly to the right hon. Gentleman that, although we have decided that this international organisation is not doing its job effectively, that in no sense means that, we are opposed to international organisations or the United Nations."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 450.]

I think that I am correct in saying that, this afternoon, my right hon. and learned Friend told the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs—I wait to be corrected if the wording is not accurate—that, if the United States or Singapore were to rejoin UNESCO, the United Kingdom situation would be reviewed and a political decision would have to be made. In essence, that means that, if the United Kingdom was alone on the outside, the Government would have to act.

It is time to act now before we lose credibility. I have put those two quotations together to highlight our need to think and act independently on such important matters. I know the constraints that are on our Government and their budget and those that are pressed on the Foreign Office and its work internationally—which I support so much—through the Overseas Development Administration, the British Council and the Commonwealth Development Corporation. Indeed, I know about the new funding pressures that are put on us by our membership of the European Community.

The Minister could ask people such as myself and others to assist him to raise the money. Does he agree in principle that UNESCO is an organisation that we would be right to rejoin if we could find the cash?

12.7 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) on securing this Adjournment debate on a subject of some importance. She knows that we last had an Adjournment debate on this subject on 22 May 1992. Indeed, we discussed it more recently because earlier today I gave evidence to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on precisely this issue. My hon. Friend, who has obviously had a report of what I said in Committee, will find that what I say now bears a striking resemblance to what I said then—in short, the Government are capable of considerable consistency when they must.

I shall reduce to a few points the position that we have adopted with regard to UNESCO. The United Kingdom and Singapore left UNESCO at the end of 1985, one year after the Americans left, and for broadly the same reasons. We have remained in close contact with the Americans and have shared assessments of the organisation ever since. My hon. Friend asked what I said in Committee about rejoining UNESCO. I broadly said that that creates a new situation. If the Americans and the Government of Singapore were to decide to return to UNESCO, we would have to review our position but without any commitment.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Minister knows that I am no longer the Opposition spokesman dealing with UNESCO, but I was for nine years. I know that I speak on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), who is now our spokesman, when I say that we agree with the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss

Nicholson) that Britain should never have come out of UNESCO and should now be in it. The Minister is implying that, if the Americans return, we will return on their coat tails.

Does the Minister agree that it might be appropriate for Britain, as a founding country of UNESCO, to take a lead and not to follow on this important issue?

Mr. Hogg: We dealt with that point before the Select Committee. The answer is that at present we are in decent company in remaining out. If the Governments of Singapore and the United States rejoin, we shall be isolated. That would create a new situation, and we would then want to reconsider our position but without any commitment.

When we look back to our decision in 1985, we are satisfied that our decision to leave was sound. Our reason for withdrawal, shared by the Americans, was prompted by concern about some six problem areas: programme concentration; duplication of the activities of other United Nations agencies; special programme issues—my hon. Friend referred to those—particularly the New World Information and Communications Order; decentralisation; administration and efficiency; and budget.

Since then, the position has changed because satisfactory progress has been achieved in all those areas, with the exception of decentralisation. UNESCO still lacks a coherent policy on decentralisation and it still needs to present a focused approach, drawing together the strands of its broad mandate, from science to education and culture to promoting freedom of the press. We, like many member states, wish to see more effort devoted to achieving further concentration.

However, if we were now members of UNESCO, we would probably not leave. I accept, too, that in an ideal world it is desirable to belong to all the United Nations organisations. I accept the desirability of universal membership.

A major constraint is the cost of resuming our UNESCO membership. Were we to rejoin today, our assessed contribution for the rest of 1993 would be some £4·5 million. In 1994 and 1995, those costs would be almost £11 million a year, falling to £8 million if the United States were to rejoin. We would also need to weigh up the cost of additional staff both at our UNESCO observer mission and in London to deal with extra UNESCO duties, and with the re-established United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO. Those costs would amount to about an extra £250,000 a year.

The money for resuming our UNESCO membership would almost certainly have to come from the ODA bilateral programmes. There are no surplus funds and no probability of new money. Therefore, a decision on if and when to rejoin depends on spending priorities.

Since 1986, most of the money saved from what could have been our assessed contribution to UNESCO—£6·4 million in 1986—has remained in the ODA's budget, and the funds have been used for activities that are well targeted and over which the ODA can exercise tight control.

In 1986, the former UNESCO money was reallocated to activities falling within the areas of UNESCO's competence. The ODA continues to allocate substantial sums for priority activities in those areas. There is a danger that, were we to rejoin UNESCO, we would have to on such allocations. In short, Ministers would have to make some difficult decisions on shifting money for existing worthy projects from the bilateral programme.

In broadly summing up the position, I accept that UNESCO has carried out substantial reforms. There remain areas in which—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having been continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at thirteen minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Thursday 8 July 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 4) BILL *(By Order)*

Question, That the British Railways (No. 4) Bill be now read a Second time; *put and agreed to.*

Read a Second time, and committed.

CROYDON TRAMLINK BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

WOODGRANGE PARK CEMETERY BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 15 July.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

GATT

2. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will meet her American counterparts to discuss the impact of GATT on agriculture.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I hope to find an opportunity for a meeting. GATT negotiations would certainly figure in such discussions.

Mr. Illsley: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply. While she will be aware that the Labour party has consistently supported a GATT agreement, is she also aware that we share the concern of the National Farmers Union that the Blair House accord could involve much higher rates of set-aside? Will she make it clear, in any meeting with her American counterparts, that we find that totally unacceptable?

Mrs. Shephard: On the whole, I would share the hon. Gentleman's misgivings, were such rumours likely to be true. I think that they are unfounded. I believe that the GATT agreement on agriculture, based on the Blair House accord between the European Community and the United States, is likely to be a good outcome for the EC and I hope that the ground rules laid down in that accord will prove to be the foundation for the GATT agricultural agreement.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Will my right hon. Friend continue to support and fund Food From Britain, which champions the cause of exporters in this country? Is she aware how important exporting is to our producers, as they export approximately 25 per cent. of their produce and, to do so, need the openness in trade that an eventual GATT deal will engender?

Mrs. Shephard: It is encouraging that such good progress has been made on GATT negotiations in Tokyo and I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has played such an important part in achieving that. Like my hon. Friend, I champion the export achievements of Food From Britain and the work of that excellent organisation. As she says, exports are an important part of our agricultural trade. We are not doing well enough, though. Our £6 billion trade gap is far too big and I hope that all our producers, and especially those represented by Food From Britain, will tackle the unacceptably large gap.

Dr. Strang: Is the Minister aware that the Labour party warmly welcomes last night's agreement as an important step along the tortuous route to a GATT agreement? Will she confirm, however, that although the French Government have endorsed the Blair House agreement on oil seeds, they have refused to accept the agriculture agreement, which would be essential to an overall GATT package? Will she give the House an assurance that there will be no question of the British Government agreeing concessions to French farming that would discriminate in any way against British agriculture and British jobs?

Mrs. Shephard: I am more than happy to give the House that assurance. I have already taken the opportunity of making those points to my French counterpart. I expect to meet him in about a fortnight, when I will repeat them. Since France is third in the world for exports, the French will surely recognise that their own interests would be served by a successful outcome to the GATT round.

Integrated Administration and Control Scheme

3. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much subsidy has been distributed to farmers following the implementation of the IACS scheme.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Payments under schemes covered by IACS forms are expected to amount to £1·2 billion for British farmers this year.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for her interesting answer. Does she accept that farmers have encountered considerable difficulty in filling in the IACS forms and considerable cost in obtaining maps from the Ordnance Survey? Will she confirm that next year's procedures will be considerably easier to follow than this year's? Will she also acknowledge the debt that we owe the National Farmers Union, which has consistently helped farmers to fill in their forms?

Mrs. Shephard: I agree that the NFU has played an important part in giving advice to farmers who had difficulty completing their IACS forms. The NFU has also praised the effort of MAFF staff in area offices who have performed an equally useful and helpful role. There was a

problem with maps. In cases where people genuinely could not obtain the relevant maps, the IACS forms were acceptable without them.

I entirely accept my hon. Friend's point about next year's forms. By then, we shall, of course, have established a database, but we are asking the industry to suggest ways in which the forms can be made more user-friendly and entirely sensible for next year.

Fishing (Days At Sea)

4. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she last met representatives of the fishing industry to discuss compulsory days-at-sea legislation; and if she will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): On 8 June, my right hon. Friend the Minister and I met representatives of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and I recently met the fishermen of Brixham. Further meetings are planned.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that I speak on behalf of all hon. Members who represent fishing constituencies in welcoming his announcement yesterday evening that there would be a relaxation, or at least a postponement, of the tie-up regulations under the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1992? May I plead with him to recongnise that the most sensible way forward now would be to suspend the Sea Fish Conservation Act and use the ensuing period to ensure that there is a reasonable dialogue between all sections of the industry and the Government and then to introduce a conservation package that has the support not only of the Government and the Community but of the fishing industry itself?

Mr. Jack: I thank the hon. Lady for the conciliatory tone of her question and in particular for her welcome for the postponement of the introduction of the days-at-sea policy. We are all joined in the common purpose of finding ways to sustain the availability of fish for the benefit of the fishing industry. I certainly accept the hon. Lady's point about dialogue. In fact, I am urgently filling my diary with engagements, including meetings with representatives of the Scottish fishing industry, and will take into account some of the important points raised by hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies in last night's debate.

I cannot, however, suspend our policy for ever or even beyond the period that I have specified because we have to find ways of achieving our multi-annual guidance programme and that set of targets is narrower than the overall desire, which hon. Members on both sides of the House share, to conserve our fish stocks.

Mr. Marland: Does my hon. Friend agree that all parties involved in the fishing industry accept that some steps must be taken to conserve fish? Will he confirm that limiting days at sea is only one of the ways in which the Government are seeking to restrain fishing effort? Will he further confirm that studies have shown that, in some instances, more than 300 days at sea have been allocated in response to fishermen's applications and that the threat of limiting days at sea is not as fierce as some Opposition Members may want fishermen to believe?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend speaks with a sure knowledge on these matters. I can confirm that some fishermen have received days-at-sea allocations up to that level. The particular concern, though, is for those fishermen who may have received the minimum allocation and are uncertain about their future. There may be problems with records, but we have already indicated many different ways in which those fishermen can submit further appeals to see whether their days-at-sea allocation can be enlarged. My hon. Friend is entirely right to say that we are pioneering other ways in which to limit fishing efforts. That is why the House last night approved a decommissioning scheme with a budget of £25 million attached to it.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I am a little disappointed to find the Minister resiling somewhat on what seemed to be the hopes of last night. Does he agree that it would be far better to provide for proper conservation by stopping the pillaging of our grounds by foreigners—in particular, Spaniards—than by stopping our vessels putting out to sea? In that connection, is it correct that, although as many infringements of fish conservation provisions in our grounds are being discovered by the fisheries protection fleet, fewer of them are being brought to court this year because his Department does not have the money for litigation? Is it also correct that the Irish Government are doing far more than ours to stamp out the secret fish holds that the Spanish are using?

Mr. Jack: We are spending some £20 million on the enforcement of fishing regulations and policy. I wish that we did not have to. I wish that people would play by the rules and not hide fish in hidden and dark holes, as every time somebody cheats on the fishing rules they deny another fisherman a living. As to prosecutions, the hon. Gentleman will realise that I cannot comment on specific cases. It is important, though, that when people break the rules they are properly prosecuted and that that information is made available.

Mr. John Townend: May I join the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) in congratulating my hon. Friend on his statement last night. It clearly shows that, in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food we now have Ministers who listen. That is welcome. What proportion of the fleet is affected by the maximum limit of 80 days? If it is a relatively small proportion—I assume that it will be —could not the limit be increased to, say, 100 or 120 days without a significant effect on fishing efforts?

Mr. Jack: First, may I welcome my hon. Friend's kind comments about our announcements last night? On the subject of the number of vessels affected by the minimum allocation of days at sea, approximately half the applications that we have received are affected. I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that some 84 per cent. have already appealed against the minimum allocations. He will be aware that his proposition to increase the minimum number of days at sea was one of many helpful ideas that were put forward during the debate. Right hon. and hon. Members were invited to explore that among themselves and with their fishermen and to put forward their ideas during the period of consultation so that we may consider them.

Land Access

5. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement about improving access to set-aside and country stewardship land.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have issued proposals for a scheme to open up new areas of suitable set-aside land for public access to the countryside. Strictly speaking, as I think the hon. Gentleman will know, the countryside stewardship scheme, which makes provision for access to a significant proportion of sites, is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Bennett: I thank the Minister for that answer. Does she agree that, if land is not used for intensive farming, it is important that it is used for the community at large and that giving people an opportunity to walk peacefully across the land is important? Will she confirm that it is possible for farmers to receive income from the schemes in exchange for supposed access, but that the general public do not know that they have rights of access to that land?

Mrs. Shephard: Mistakes have been made in the countryside stewardship scheme, some of which were about giving adequate publicity. We will certainly learn lessons from the way in which the scheme has worked. However, there is no question of forcing farmers to allow access to land beyond public rights of way, as there are costs involved. The meadowland scheme, which is a new scheme proposed under the agri-environment regulation will provide an incentive and, as the hon. Gentleman has said, the public will benefit.

Mr. Duncan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that most farmers are perfectly reasonable when it comes to people requesting access to their land so long as their behaviour is legitimate? Does she further agree that when people invade their land, farmers have far too few powers under the law to remove people who disrupt lawful activity? Will she therefore undertake to liaise with the Home Secretary to improve the powers of farmers to remove new age travellers and those who wish to disrupt a lawful hunt?

Mrs. Shephard: I agree with the examples that my hon. Friend gave to illustrate his point. I am happy to liaise with the Home Secretary on that and other points about law and order in the countryside. Most farmers are reasonable about allowing public access to their land. It is a two-way process. Those who seek access should treat it as though they were going, for example, to a place of work. They should be expected to behave responsibly and in return we would expect farmers to be reasonable.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Hon. Members: Stone-age traveller.

Mr. Skinner: At least I am not a barrel of lard like the Parliamentary Secretary.

Hon. Members: Oh!

Madam Speaker: Order. I am missing all the fun.

Mr. Skinner: Is not it an indictment of our society that the set-aside schemes were set up by the Common Market in order to destroy food and to allow farmers to watch the grass grow at £100 an acre while millions of people in the Sahara, other parts of Africa and other countries are starving to death? Is not it a fact that the royal family, including the Queen and the Prince of Wales, have had more than a quarter of a million pounds out of those tax avoidance schemes? It is no wonder that the Queen has offered to pay tax; she is using taxpayers' money to do it.

Mrs. Shephard: The fun was quickly over. Far from it being a case of a barrel of lard, it is one of sour milk. The hon. Gentleman has been second to none in requiring surpluses and intervention to be tackled firmly by the EC and set-aside and the CAP reforms do just that. I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman is not welcoming this move forward.

Mrs. Browning: Is my right hon. Friend aware that farmers in my home village of Whimple in the constituency of Tiverton have been refused permission to hold fund-raising public events on set-aside land, the money from which would go to registered charities and the local church, for the sole reason that it is set-aside land? Will my right hon. Friend look at that case?

Mrs. Shephard: I was not aware of that, but I shall certainly look at it.

Mr. Morley: While the Secretary of State is considering the question of public access, I draw attention to the review group considering the possible privatisation of Forestry Enterprise and the Forestry Commission, on which her Department is represented. Is the right hon. Lady aware that the Countryside Commission's submission to that review group stated that public ownership has been an effective means of achieving public benefits? It went on to say that the disposal of some or all of the freehold estate, which comprises 40 per cent. of all forested land in Britain, is likely to lead to the loss of unrestricted, free of charge public access to the land in question. Does the right hon. Lady agree that public access to woodlands is best preserved by public ownership and will she ensure that her Department makes representations to the review group to that effect?

Mrs. Shephard: I was aware of those views and I think that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the review will consider forest land from the point of view of its commercial management, public access—which is important—and the protection of our heritage. Those three aspects are at the heart of the review and I keep an open mind about its findings.

Small Producers

6. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are being taken to help small producers.

Mr. Jack: An important source of help to small producers is their ability to be able to claim arable area payments under simplified arrangements that do not require any land to be set aside.

Mr. Evans: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply and the assistance to small producers, but could not more assistance be given to some of our organic farmers, many of whom are small producers, perhaps via lower limits through the organic aid scheme?

Mr. Jack: I am pleased that my hon. Friend mentions organic farming, which is an important and developing area. However, it is equally important that, in developing, it does not swamp the available market for its excellent produce. A recent consultation document that we put out showed that a minimum eligible area of 10 hectares, and 50 hectares in the less-favoured areas, might be a possibility. As a result of the responses that we have received to that consultation document, we are considering whether a lower limit might be possible without excessive administrative cost.

Common Agricultural Policy

7. **Dr. Howells:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent meetings she has had with her European counterparts to discuss financial aspects of the CAP.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have recently had a number of such meetings.

Dr. Howells: Will the Minister confirm that the common agricultural policy costs each family in Britain approximately £18 per week extra in food bills and that part of the money is due to the absurd subsidies that continue to be paid into areas such as the tobacco mountain, which, even two years ago, cost £70 million? Does she agree that the Government's reluctance to address those absurd subsidies is a result of the sweetheart arrangements that they have with tobacco companies?

Mrs. Shephard: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman—the cost of the CAP is far too high. I am sure that he will be delighted that the United Kingdom has consistently argued that its cost is too high and that it hampers the efficient allocation of resources in the economy. May I take it that his enthusiasm for lower costs shows a change of heart by Opposition Front-Bench Members over the whole range of policy?

I reject entirely the hon. Gentleman's accusation of sweethearting. Certainly tobacco excesses and tobacco mountains should be tackled in the same way as other surpluses have been tackled in the EC.

Sir Roger Moate: Does my right hon. Friend agree that good financial control depends on the famous level playing field, or level ploughing field in this case? Did she see the letter in *Farming News* recently which described a British farmer visiting a French farm after 20 years and finding that nothing had changed, that the farmers had never heard of the set-aside scheme or health and safety regulations, that they were still making butter in the kitchen and selling it at the farm gate and that the village slaughterhouse had not changed either? How can we be more certain under the new rules that financial control is to be applied equally across the European Community?

Mrs. Shephard: I totally agree that we should aim for a level ploughing field as well as a level playing field. One hears the accusations that nobody keeps the rules but us in every member state in the Community and in every policy area. However, there is no doubt that the agreements reached at Edinburgh will help the tightening-up and monitoring of the rules, and not a day too soon.

Mr. Jim Marshall: The Minister confirmed that the average cost to a family arising from the CAP is £18 a week. She has congratulated herself many times on the recent renegotiations of the CAP. Will she confirm that the renegotiations have increased the figure to more than £18 per week?

Mrs. Shephard: It is the case that the figure has increased and much of that is to do with exchange rate mechanism realignments. The package was negotiated within the agricultural guideline that expects and looks forward to agriculture taking up a decreasing amount of the EC budget.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Does my right hon. Friend accept that one of the worrying aspects of the set-aside scheme is its adverse effect on the employment propspects of workers in agriculture? Do the financial arrangements of the CAP, to which we, as a nation, make such huge contributions, make any provision for paying compensation to agricultural workers who lose their jobs because of set-aside?

Mrs. Shephard: No. There are no such arrangements in the CAP. However, my hon. Friend will know that while in this country, as elsewhere, agricultural employment is declining, growth of population in rural areas is increasing and, with it, prosperity and jobs.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the Minister had the opportunity to discuss with her European partners the free-market pricing arrangements that exist in New Zealand, which have some support in the British farming community and some support in interested quarters of the House of Commons? Has she any preliminary views on those matters?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the recent CAP reform package represented a move towards more market-orientated arrangements. I recently met representatives from New Zealand and I was most interested to hear from them about the way in which things were working. I lose no opportunity to press on my EC colleagues the need for farming and agriculture generally to look towards the markets because that is the only sure way in the future.

Fish Conservation

8. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to consult further the fishing industry over its current concerns about the requirement to reduce fishing effort.

Mr. Jack: I announced last night a postponement of the introduction of days-at-sea restrictions which will give us the opportunity to consult the industry about the need to reduce fishing effort. I already have plans to visit fishermen in Humberside next week, and further visits and meetings are being arranged. I look forward to an early and positive response from the industry.

Mr. Ward: Is my hon. Friend aware that the fishermen of Poole will welcome the opportunity to make their contribution to devising sensible—I underline the word "sensible"—conservation measures? Will he assure the House that he will not introduce conservation measures in this country until he has a firm and binding agreement that our EC partners will introduce them at the same time? It

is ridiculous that our fishermen should have to watch fishermen from other EC countries blatantly flouting regulations that they are expected to obey.

Mr. Jack: I very much welcome my hon. Friend's kind comments on our announcements last night. Everyone in the industry shares the desire to conserve fish stocks. I can give my hon. Friend the assurance on the policy announced, especially with reference to days at sea, that we should not dream of going beyond the proposals I outlined last night without clear signs that our Community partners are making an effective attempt to reduce their fishing effort.

Dr. Strang: Is the Minister aware that, having read carefully his remarks last night, I realise that my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) is right to point out that the hon. Gentleman is today putting a different gloss on his announcement? Surely he understands that the fishermen are considering bringing forward additional technical conservation measures as an alternative to compulsory tie-up. Will he accept that, during the postponement, the Government should look at all the options? Can he give us an assurance that one of the options is the complete abandonment of the days-at-sea restrictions?

Mr. Jack: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an assurance on the complete abandonment of days-at-sea restrictions. I remind him of the words in his own document "Marine Harvest", in which he couples with his support for a decommissioning scheme the need for effort reduction. Days-at-sea restrictions have an important contribution to make.

However, I said last night that we should look at all the ideas put to us for modifications of the details of the days-at-sea restrictions. I gave the undertaking, which I am happy to repeat this afternoon, that we should continue to work with, for example, the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, which is undertaking a conservation review. We shall also look at any ideas that others put forward on the subject of technical measures which might be tradeable against effort reduction. However, I make it clear that we cannot say whether those ideas will be accepted in terms of our multi-annual guidance programme target. The only people who can do that are the Commissioners. However, I give the hon. Gentleman the undertaking that we shall discuss sensible ideas with the Commission.

Mrs. Lait: Is my hon. Friend aware that, this morning, the wives of the fishermen in Hastings and Rye marched through the town and presented a petition warning of what they think will be the hardship that they will face because of the introduction of days-at-sea restrictions? Does he agree that that is a welcome sign of a vibrant democracy? Will he please give me some idea of what reassurance he would give the wives, who are very disturbed at the thought of the impact of the restrictions?

Mr. Jack: I had some flavour of the feelings of fishermen's wives when I met them today after my right hon. Friend the Minister and I had given evidence to the Select Committee on Agriculture. They were forceful in the views that they put to me and I was left in no doubt of their feelings. However, I was able to reassure them, as I hope I can reassure my hon. Friend's constituents, about the minimum 80 days, which worried them. I pointed out to them that those who, for example, did not have complete logs or who had been fishing for non-precious stocks, such as crabs, would have an opportunity to have their allocations reviewed. I also said to them that we were interested in a sustainable and viable fishing industry. I said that if there were good ideas, in terms both of fishing policy in general and of modifications to days-at-sea restrictions in particular, we should look at them. I urge the wives in my hon. Friend's constituency to sit down with their papers and to let us have their ideas without delay.

Animal Transport

9. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to improve the welfare of animals transported from the United Kingdom to the rest of the EC.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nicholas Soames): We have maintained strict national rules to safeguard the welfare of animals during transport, both within this country and for export.

We are pressing for these rules to be extended throughout the Community.

Mr. McAvoy: As there are no official figures that show the number of British farm animals that are exported, we must rely on the estimates of the trade, which suggest that there has been a huge increase.

Does the Minister accept that at risk are not only the welfare of animals but the jobs of British meat processors? Instead of watching a year-on-year increase in the number of animals making long journeys abroad, will the Minister fight for meat to be exported on the hook rather than on the hoof, for slaughter to occur as near to the point of production as possible and for a maximum journey time of eight hours?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman did a good job in getting all the salient points into his question—I congratulate him. The British trade in animals is important. Statistics for 1992 show that the live export trade—mainly of cattle, sheep and pigs—is worth more than £160 million. The hon. Gentleman knows that there is a strong demand for British beef and lamb because they are outstandingly good beasts which command a premium on the continent.

Our European friends prefer that the animals be slaughtered on the continent because they particularly like their butchers' cuts. The hon. Gentleman should be equally aware that the export trade keeps a great number of people employed on farms to raise the animals. I take the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about abattoirs, which is a regrettable side effect. On balance, the trade is important for British farmers.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Does my hon. Friend agree that the incomes of lowland livestock producers have fallen dramatically during the past few years and that those producers are worried about the future of their industry? In his future negotiations with EC colleagues, will he take great care to agree to nothing that could disadvantage the United Kingdom livestock producer?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend has my complete assurance that the Government would never do such a

thing. As I said to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), the trade is important and expanding. Nevertheless, the point that the hon. Gentleman made about the welfare of animals during travel is relevant and is one of which we are most mindful. We intend to bring the rest of the EC up to the same high standards of animal welfare that we have in this country.

Woodland

10. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions she has had about introducing long-term non-rotational set-aside relating to woodland.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have received many representations about the importance of allowing woodland planting on non-rotational set-aside. As recently as last week, I raised the matter at the informal agriculture council in Denmark, and I shall continue to press for it to be allowed.

Mr. Tipping: Does the Minister appreciate that a higher rate of set-aside may be necessary to establish environmentally friendly schemes, such as the Greenwood community forest in north Nottinghamshire? Will she continue to press the EC to have such a scheme established quickly?

Mrs. Shephard: The European Commission at the moment is rather negative. It feels that such a scheme might allow marginal land to count against set-aside. We do not agree. The way forward is to make a link with the community forestry measures and arrangements for set-aside to allow farmers to enter the land in the farm woodland premium scheme. The farmers would not receive set-aside payments as well, but they would have a long-term guarantee. I shall continue to press that case.

Mr. Ashby: My right hon. Friend will know that the new national forest in the midlands is centred on my constituency of Leicestershire, North-West. Additional incentives are required if farmers are to set aside land to encourage the creation of the wondrous new forest. Will my right hon. Friend impress on those in Brussels that the forest is of national and European significance?

Mrs. Shephard: There is a link between those proposals and the proposals for non-rotational set-aside on which we expect the Commission to introduce proposals by the end of July. My hon. Friend may rest assured that I will continue to press that case, not only for woodland but for rules on set-aside that our farmers need now.

Common Agricultural Policy

11. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has received on financial aspects of the common agricultural policy.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I receive many representations on all aspects of the CAP.

Mr. Howarth: Given that the Minister conceded earlier that the scheme costs £18 per family in Britain and as the CAP serves the interests of neither agriculture nor the consumer, is it not time that she stopped merely talking about it and took some action to get rid of that obscenity of a policy which suits no one, least of all Britain?

Mrs. Shephard: I find that fairly rich, coming from an Opposition Member. The cost is too high, as the Government agree. It would be good if, for once, someone from the Opposition supported us when we wanted to cut costs in any area.

Mr. Mans: Has my right hon. Friend received any representations about the financial aspects of CAP in association with incentives to create environmentally sensitive areas?

Mrs. Shephard: Part of the CAP reform package included several incentives for what we call the agri-environment package. We have consulted widely on that package and we expect to announce some schemes in the autumn.

Mr. Stevenson: In the light of the Minister's response on the costs of CAP, will she confirm that the costs are due to increase this year by £1·3 billion and that it is expected that by 1995 they will have increased by some £4 billion? How does that equate with the statement made by her predecessor that the CAP reform was good for the taxpayer and the consumer? Will she give us an assurance that the Government will oppose those unacceptable and unjustified increases?

Mrs. Shephard: I explained to the House that the £1·3 billion increase was the result of various exchange rate mechanism realignments. The hon. Gentleman may possibly have missed that. The important thing is that agriculture continues to take a decreasing proportion of the European Community budget as a whole—which it is doing—and that it keeps within the guidelines set by the EC and approved by the House. That is also happening, but I agree that the cost is too high. I am delighted to have such support from the Opposition in cutting public expenditure.

Produce Marketing

12. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made with the marketing of British agricultural produce.

Mr. Soames: The Government are committed to encouraging the agriculture and food industries to improve and enhance their marketing. That is why we have established the market task force within the Ministry, introduced the group marketing grant and promoted the Agriculture Bill.

Mr. Clappison: Does my hon. Friend agree that even though food exports are now increasing at a faster rate than food imports, it is vital that we improve our trade position in food? Does he further agree that, given the competitive exchange rate, all the help that is given to producers with marketing and processing and all the help from Food From Britain, it is up to food companies to make the most of the opportunities that are available to them?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. There is no doubt that dazzling and glittering prizes are available for the food industry in its export markets. It

is one of the industries in which Great Britain truly leads the world. I wholly endorse my hon. Friend's view that we look to the industry for greatly enhanced performance in marketing.

Mr. Olner: I refer the Minister to his earlier answer on the welfare of animals that are transported in awful conditions. Those conditions have no place in today's modern society. Is the Minister aware that the export of sheep from Britain has led to the closure of a modern abattoir in my constituency with the loss of 35 jobs? Surely the Ministry should encourage the export of farm produce chilled rather than on the hoof.

Mr. Soames: I explained to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) why our continental friends prefer the export of animals on the hoof. The hon. Gentleman must understand that the business is important for our farmers. Equally, he is perfectly right to highlight the important welfare aspects of the business. That trade can take place only if the conditions in which it operates are honourable and have the integrity of properly enforced rules. I deeply regret the closure of the abattoir in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I am afraid that that is a function of the marketplace and, for the moment, the very admirable British stock is commanding very high prices abroad.

Sir Donald Thompson: When my hon. Friend meets those who buy British goods in this country, will he urge them to plan their purchases carefully and as gently as they do when they plan purchasing goods from abroad?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Naturally, we always hope that our British—*[Interruption.]* I am grateful to the House. We always hope that our British goods, which are so very reasonably priced and so excellent in quality, will always command the support of the housewife wherever she buys them.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 8 July.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is attending the G7 economic summit in Tokyo where he has played an important part in bringing about a major step forward in resolving the GATT round.

Mr. Tipping: Given the citizens charter, is the Lord President concerned that Regional Railways has cut its publicity budget by 30 per cent? As a result of that, many small stations in the east midlands and East Anglia no longer appear on the timetable. Can the right hon. Gentleman assure rail users that those stations will stay open after privatisation? Does the right hon. Gentleman understand the problem? With no platform, no timetable and no sense of direction—that surely sounds like this Government.

Mr. Newton: The Government's sense of direction is very clear with regard to the vigour with which we have carried the rail privatisation proposals through the House to pave the way for further improvements in rail services. That is what we shall see.

Mr. Spring: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as a result of the Government's trade union reforms, substantial power has been handed back to individual trade union members? Does he believe that there are other parts of union activity that could benefit from the introduction of one man, one vote?

Mr. Newton: I very much agree with my hon. Friend's point about the effect of the trade union reforms that we have carried through in respect of returning power to individual members. I can think of quite a number of other reforms that should be carried out, but, unfortunately, they depend on the success of the leader of the Labour party, which he is not exactly having.

Mr. John Smith: Bearing in mind that pensioners already face value added tax on their heating bills and the prospect of having to pay prescription charges, why is the Prime Minister in his speech in Tokyo adding to their very genuine fears by threatening even further curbs on social spending?

Mr. Newton: I must say that I am not suprised, in view of the contrast between my right hon. Friend's success in Tokyo and the right hon. and learned Gentleman's catastrophe in Bournemouth, that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should—*[Interruption.]* In Tokyo, my right hon. Friend was making the point that all western countries face rising pressures on their welfare budgets. Few would argue in this country that the current Department of Social Security budget of almost £80 billion is necessarily spent in the best way possible and that any Government are not entitled and right to review policy and spending patterns. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman disagrees with that, may I say that I have just been quoting, to all intents and purposes, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar).

Mr. Smith: Is not it now absolutely clear from the Prime Minister's speech in Tokyo and the documents issued by the Secretary of State for Social Security that the Government have embarked on a blatant attempt to soften up the public for cuts in public spending? Does he not appreciate the justified anger of pensioners who have paid tax and insurance all their lives and hear these threats to their pensions? Does he not think that it is monstrous that these people should be asked to pay the price of the Government's economic improvidence?

Mr. Newton: What my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has published this morning is a range of information to inform the debate which, in my view, everybody in this country agrees must sensibly be had. It is a debate which the right hon. and learned Gentleman undertook in setting up his social justice commission and in his own manifesto statement for the Labour party leadership. Pensioners have an absolute guarantee from the Government that we will maintain our commitment to uprate the basic retirement pension in line with prices and that we will not do what the right hon. and learned Gentleman's Government did—fiddle the uprating figures and abolish the Christmas bonus two years running.

Mr. Smith: On the subject of guarantees, can the right hon. Gentleman remind us of what the Government said at the election about guarantees on value added tax?

Mr. Newton: The Government made it clear at the election that they would maintain the commitments to pensioners that I outlined. What I want to hear from the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and have not yet heard at any stage, is why the Labour party left VAT on fuel out of the list of those things that it was determined not to do.

Mr. Knapman: The whole House will wish to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on his considerable success at the G7 economic summit—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—the sensible ones, anyway. Will my right hon. Friend, on his return, look at the ever-increasing number of directions and regulations coming from Brussels, because, surely, what we really need to meet and beat world competition is a lightly regulated, free-trading economy?

Mr. Newton: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. That, indeed, is another of the points that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has underlined, not only time and again in discussions in Europe but now in the discussions in Tokyo in relation to the G7 summit. It is clear from the response from one country after another, most recently from President Clinton and the United States, that that crucial British message about the need to ensure the competitiveness of our economies is beginning to hit home all around the world.

Q2. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 8 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fraser: I remind the Leader of the House, in relation to the questions put by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), that the Government were absolutely explicit about not extending the ambit of value added tax. Now they impose a hypothermia tax, which will mostly hit people with modest savings and small pensions and people on the margins of poverty. Because the Government did that, why should anyone believe what they say about not whittling away pensions and making pensioners' incomes means tested? Surely the Government's problem is that their clock has now struck for the 13th time.

Mr. Newton: The reason that pensioners should believe the commitments that we have made about their pensions is that we have consistently honoured our commitments to pensioners in a way that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members cannot possibly claim to have done.

Mr. David Howell: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming not only the excellent news from Tokyo about the proposed tariff cuts—which will, of course greatly increase trade and jobs—but the fact that at present the pound is regarded as the strongest currency in Europe? Does he agree that the right response to those two positive developments is to do everything possible, not to manipulate the exchange rate up or down but to maintain our competitiveness, build a good infrastructure, keep down inflation and manage our costs very tightly, and that that is a very promising way forward for this nation?

Mr. Newton: Again, I very much agree with my right hon. Friend. Alongside my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's success in contributing to a further step forward in an important deal for world trade is his success—and that of the Government—in emphasising and carrying through in Britain the policies to which my right hon. Friend has referred, and which will leave us particularly well placed to take advantage of the increase in world trade that will result.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Can the Leader of the House, speaking on behalf of the Government, tell us whether, at the intergovernmental conference today, the Government will contend that the democratic rights of the people of Northern Ireland should not be ridden over roughshod any longer but that those people should be treated as part of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Newton: I can assure the hon. Gentleman, and he would expect no less from me, that the Government remain totally committed to the principle that any change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland would come about only with the consent of a majority of the people who live there, and I repeat that commitment this afternoon.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Did the Leader of the House read in *The Guardian* this morning an article that stated that the Foreign Affairs Minister of the Irish Republic attempted to pour petrol on Ulster fires by endorsing the Labour party proposal for joint authority and putting forward a further proposition for a commission, with representatives from the Dublin Government, Her Majesty's Government and the European Community, taking charge of Northern Ireland? Will the Leader of the House rebuke, as strongly as the Prime Minister did last week, the Irish Foreign Affairs Minister for making such a suggestion?

Mr. Newton: I have noted that report. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is meeting Mr. Spring this afternoon and will seek clarification of what he said. What I can do, and have just done for the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), is to repeat clearly and emphatically the British Government's position in this matter. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) can no doubt speak for the Labour party, but the British Government deplore the Labour party's position as well.

Mr. Ashdown: Do the Government yet understand that typhus and cholera are shortly to be added to shells and bullets as the means by which the people of Sarajevo will be condemned to die? Does the right hon. Gentleman really believe that mere words from the G7 in Tokyo will be sufficient to save them?

Mr. Newton: The G7 summit in Tokyo has clearly reaffirmed our and other countries' commitment to the territorial integrity of Bosnia and to a negotiated settlement based on the principles of the London conference. It has made it absolutely clear that we cannot agree to any solution for Bosnia dictated by the Serbs and Croats at the expense of the Muslims. As the whole House

would wish it to do, the summit has underlined our commitment to the urgent implementation of safe areas and to improving the flow of humanitarian aid.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that during the past 14 years the Conservative Government have shown real determination and courage in carrying through their reforms with the trade unions? Does he agree that the Leader of the Opposition singularly lacks those qualities in dealing with the same matters?

Mr. Newton: The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East probably wishes that he was in Tokyo and had not had to go to Bournemouth. Since he left Bournemouth with what looked to me on the television news last night as a rather sheepish expression on his face, he has, of course, suffered a further significant reverse with the vote that the Transport and General Workers Union took this morning to reject his plans.

Q3. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 8 July.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Prentice: What would the Lord President say to the firefighters in Pendle who, over the past 14 years, have seen their pay formula scrapped and the imposition of a 1·5 per cent. pay limit, when the chairman of North West Water has received a 43 per cent. increase, taking his salary to £267,000 a year? Why is it that those who douse the flames are worth so much less than those who provide the water?

Mr. Newton: I would say to the firefighters of Pendle or anywhere else that they should not listen to the kind of overheated rhetoric in which the hon. Gentleman indulges.

Mr. Cormack: Reverting to the issue raised by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), may I ask my right hon. Friend to accept that reaffirmation of itself is a cruel hoax unless it is followed by action? There is nothing to stop Sarajevo being saved. Can something now be done?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend has taken a long and honourable interest in these matters. He knows the difficulties of proceeding in quite the way he has often suggested. I would do no more at this stage than repeat what I said in an earlier answer—the British Government will continue to do everything that they properly and responsibly can to achieve a settlement that will stop the bloodshed in Bosnia.

Local Government (Scotland)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): With permission—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Will right hon. and hon. Members take their seats? The Secretary of State is waiting to make a statement.

Mr. Lang: With permission, Madam Speaker, I will make a statement about local government in Scotland.

The Government's proposals for local government reorganisation in Scotland have been the subject of detailed consultation and discussion for the last two years. Throughout that time, support for the concept of single-tier local government has been strong and sustained. I have received a great deal of valuable comment from a wide range of individuals and organisations.

I am publishing today a White Paper which sets out our decisions on the new structure. I am also publishing a leaflet, which will be made widely available in Scotland, and summaries of the responses that I received to our second consultation paper on local government reform and our paper about the future of water and sewerage services. I have placed copies of those documents in the Vote Office, where they will be available in the usual way when I have completed this statement.

The Government have decided to establish a single-tier structure of local government throughout Scotland, comprising 28 authorities. The details of those authorities are set out in the White Paper. The new authorities will vary significantly in size and character, reflecting local wishes, circumstances and requirements.

We intend to re-establish the four Scottish cities as unitary councils and to create powerful new authorities on their outskirts to act as a counterbalance. In the more rural areas of Scotland, the new authorities will inevitably cover substantial areas, but areas for which our consultation has shown there is an established identity. The three islands authorities will remain unchanged.

The new authorities, whatever their size, will be encouraged and expected to pursue actively the adoption of schemes of decentralised management and administration to ensure that decisions are taken at the most local level practicable, enabling people to discuss problems with their council without having to make a long journey to its headquarters. I shall be asking authorities to prepare and publish comprehensive schemes of decentralisation.

The new authorities will all be responsible for providing the full range of local authority services, including education, housing and social work. The Government consider, however, that the reporter service for children's hearings would be more effectively provided as a national service, and I am proposing to establish a new body for that purpose. In addition, economies of scale available in the water and sewerage industry point to fewer, rather than more, bodies responsible for those services than we have at present. Further, customers should be able to benefit from the efficiencies and investment in the water and sewerage infrastructure which can be provided by the private sector.

The existing police forces and fire brigades will be retained. Some statutory co-operation will be required for their oversight and for the management of the Strathclyde passenger transport executive. In all other respects, it will be for individual authorities to make appropriate arrangements for the delivery of services in their areas. I shall expect to see a considerable development of the enabling role of authorities and a willingness to explore further the possibilities of co-operation with the private sector as they explore new ways of delivering services more efficiently. I shall be looking also for a greater willingness to share the expertise of specialist staff.

The changes I have announced will, of course, have implications for local government staff. I have already announced the Government's intention to establish a staff commission in Scotland to oversee the transfer process and to provide me with appropriate advice. Early retirement or redundancy compensation will be available in cases where particular staff are not required by the new authorities under the new structure and further decisions about those arrangements will be taken in due course.

I have, of course, made it clear that I expect the new structure to cost less than the present two-tier system. Savings of up to £65 million per annum can be expected from the new structure and those savings are likely to pay back the inevitable transitional costs within four or five years. The actual level of savings achieved by the new structure will ultimately depend upon the actions of the new authorities themselves.

The main objective of the reorganisation is not, however, to cut costs; it is to increase the effectiveness of local government in arranging the delivery of services and responding to local needs and concerns. I believe that the new structure will make local authorities more accountable and responsive to the people they serve and will help all authorities to achieve the standards already reached by the best. It will remove the confusion which undoubtedly exists over which council is responsible for which function, so that users know where to go when they are dissatisfied. It offers local government in Scotland the prospect of a bright, dynamic future. It will give a major boost to the implementation of the citizens charter in Scottish local government.

My intention is to introduce a Bill to implement those arrangements. Subject to the parliamentary consideration of the arrangements being completed, I hope that it will be possible for elections to the new authorities to take place in the spring of 1995, to give them until 1 April 1996 to establish themselves and to prepare for the assumption of responsibility from existing authorities on that date. Thereafter, election to the new councils will take place every three years.

The proposals I have announced today are of the utmost importance to everybody in Scotland. They reflect the strong and growing support for all-purpose councils in Scotland. They represent a tremendous opportunity to improve and strengthen our local government system and the delivey of local services and they are a great stride forward for local democracy in Scotland. I commend the White Paper to the House.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): We have listened to a statement from the Secretary of State and we are being asked to consider a White Paper for which there is no consensus in Scotland, no support and no demand, and which runs counter to the stories from the Treasury that it faces—because of its policies—a £50 billion deficit. Where

will the right hon. Gentleman find the money for his absurd and unwanted proposals? Which services does the Scottish Office intend to cut?

On water privatisation, the people of Scotland are entitled to claim that at least this unlistening Government have, in some respects—but some only—heard their voice, but only because the Secretary of State has abandoned his ludicrous proposals for outright privatisation—*[Interruption.]* If that is not the case, and if the Scottish Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart)—who appears to have undue weight in these matters—takes a contrary view, perhaps we will hear it before the end of our questions on the statement. The Government's ludicrous extremes over water have at least been restricted for the moment. Nevertheless, in the light of Government betrayals over so many Scottish issues—from Rosyth to Ravenscraig—we are entitled to ask specific questions on water, and we do.

Why has the Secretary of State taken water out of local authority control? How will board appointees keep charges down even when they must provide profits for private financiers? What guarantees can the Secretary of State give on the future ownership of water and on protecting Scottish consumers from the threat of water disconnections—a subject that the right hon. Gentleman seems reluctant to discuss?

Why does the Secretary of State disregard the overwhelming view of the people of Scotland when he says that he takes that as much into account in Eastwood as in Edinburgh? Eighty-nine per cent. of the people oppose water privatisation. Why does not the right hon. Gentleman end the argument by saying that the matter is finished and final?

The Secretary of State's somewhat thin statement is in contrast with a document of 30 pages that reeks of dogma, centralisation, and policies that the Scottish people utterly reject. That dogma involves education, social work and essential local services and does not disguise—and nor can members of the Government Front Bench—the hidden agenda of centralisation, commercialism and privatisation which flies in the face of the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the people of Scotland.

I ask the Secretary of State, who represents a minority party in Scotland, to justify his statement that there will be no joint boards, when he intends to have police and fire services in Strathclyde run by joint committees from 10 different councils. How can he justify the massive destruction of Scottish local government on the ground of the efficient provision of social services, and at the same time take upon himself the power to impose joint boards where he thinks fit? Where is democracy and accountability there? Who in Scotland made representations to the Secretary of State in response to his document, saying that is what they wanted?

How can the Secretary of State justify the centralising of reporting to children's hearing services in advance of producing comprehensive legislation later this year, as he promised earlier?

Of less importance to people's lives but more outrageous is the gerrymandering that the Secretary of State's proposals represent for Scotland's future. They are unashamedly and undisguised not proposals for local government reform, improving the quality of the delivery of service, cost efficiency or local democracy. No one in Scotland is fooled into thinking that. The proposals are about Tory revenge on the Scottish people and on Scottish local government, which the Government clearly utterly detest.

As the hon. Member for Eastwood has often said, Thatcherism still rules—and it is no more acceptable in Scotland today than it ever was. How can the right hon. Gentleman expect the House to take seriously the Eastwood solution to these important matters—the creation of safe havens for the beleaguered minority of Scottish Tories, which at present account for an absurd 16 per cent., seeking to impose dictatorial policies on us?

How can he expect anyone to take seriously his plans for Greater Eastwood, Greater Berwickshire and Greater Milngavie, and his plan to put Stirling district and Perth district on a par with Fife and with Highland region? How can we take seriously proposals for the reform of local government that ignore the thoughtful and constructive Wheatley commission, and the thoughtful and constructive debate that followed?

This is a disgrace to local government and to the way in which we deal with national government throughout the United Kingdom. This is a bankrupt policy from a bankrupt Government, unrepresentative and unworthy of the Scottish people. It will be as utterly rejected today as the Tories were in April last year.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) said that there was no consensus for the policy for the reform of local government. I suggest that he look at some of the submissions that we have received in response to the consultation process, which has gone on in great detail over the last two years. They have shown increasing support for single-tier local authorities.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the Treasury, as though seeking to imply that the exercise was Treasury-driven. I have come under no direct pressure from the Treasury in regard to my proposals. The Treasury, like other Government Departments, has taken an interest in the proposals and has expressed itself content with them. I am not surprised, because we are not talking about an additional cost of £600 million, as the hon. Gentleman claimed; there will be transitional costs which, on the greatest present estimates, will be less than a third of that. We are talking of savings of up to £65 million a year—over £1 million a week—as a result of the contraction of local government that we are comtemplating.

As to water, the kindest thing that can be said about the hon. Gentleman's remarks is that he must have written his response before he had even read last week's issue of *The Scotsman*, let alone heard my statement today. The hon. Gentleman has totally misjudged this campaign, and has attributed to the Government a policy that we have not adopted. Like the grand old Duke of York, he has led his men up the hill, and now he must turn round and lead them down again.

What we are proposing is a sensible way forward for water in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman asked why it was being taken out of local authority control. The answer is that 28 water authorities would be extremely inefficient, lead to wide variations in costs and impose extra burdens on consumers. What we are proposing with the three authorities, using the private sector for future capital investment, will lead to the efficient delivery of water and raise the necessary investment, without imposing an

[Mr. Lang]

unnecessary burden on the taxpayer. It was the Leader of the Opposition who said that the question of ownership was irrelevant.

The hon. Gentleman said that I was reluctant to speak about disconnections. I draw his attention to what I said as recently as yesterday, which is that we have no plans for any change to the present arrangements.

The hon. Gentleman questioned the future of the reporter to children's services. We are anxious to deliver an efficient service without imposing excessive burdens on local authorities, many of whose departments in this regard would consist of only one or two individuals. That would not be a cost-effective way of delivering the services.

As to joint boards, I know that the hon. Gentleman is disappointed because, yet again, we have shot one of his foxes. We do not intend to increase the number of joint boards in Scotland; we see no need for more boards. We will continue to have joint boards for fire services, for police services, for the passenger transport executive and for the assessors. We are leaving the rest to local authorities to arrange what best suits their needs and the interests of their residents. The right way forward is to encourage responsible behaviour in local authorities.

As to the map, I encourage the hon. Gentleman to study our proposals more carefully before he rushes into a judgment. There will be no safe havens for bureaucracy, for duplication or for waste of taxpayers' resources.

The whole story of the hon. Gentleman's reaction to our important proposals for the reform of local government over recent months has been one of scaremongering. Last autumn, he claimed that we had a hidden agenda for a national police force, water privatisation, spending cuts, job losses, greater central control and a Treasury veto. On every one of those issues the hon. Gentleman is now seen to be wrong. What we are proposing is for the best future of local democracy in Scotland in the 21st century.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the warm welcome from my constituency and the constituencies surrounding mine for the abolition of Strathclyde regional council? My constituents have never identified with that council. I thank my right hon. Friend for listening to the responses, which have allowed the establishment of a Kyle and Carrick council. My constituents will identify with that council and will feel that they can influence the activities and accountability of the councillors elected to that body and exercise some control. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that, like me, he will welcome the re-emergence of many of the old county names in what we are now proposing for the future structure of local government. I agree with my hon. Friend, as, I am sure, does the Labour party, on the abolition of Strathclyde region. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the Leader of the Opposition, said:

"When we look at all the services provided by local government—both personal and protective—there can be no possible justification for the size of the Strathclyde region. It varies from being two and a half times to five times too big."
—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 25 January 1973; c. 207.]

I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will welcome the replacement of Strathclyde region with no fewer than 10 independent local authorities.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): Well, well, was it all worth waiting for? After all the hype we have a document that has been lying on the press desk for the past week and is only now being presented to the House.

Is the Secretary of State aware that he has no right to introduce single-tier local authorities in Scotland without setting up a Scottish Parliament to look after the affairs that he now holds undemocratically in his hands? With hindsight, does he agree that this will be a costly exercise, that he has laid himself open to the charge of political manipulation and that he should have had an independent commission to investigate all the matters of local government reform?

I believe that the Secretary of State's announcement about water is just the beginning of the road to privatisation. Is he not aware that 94 per cent. of the submissions to his office were against his plans for water? How many letters and submissions does it require for him to listen to what the people of Scotland have said?

This is a complete mess. We have overlapping councils and parliamentary seats and overlapping local enterprise companies. We have mixed-up water and police authorities and there is no coherence or stability. I reject it, and I believe that the people of Scotland will reject it also.

Mr. Lang: I am surprised that the hon. Lady has made no mention of the future of Argyll and makes no attempt to reflect the interests of her constituents. Argyll district council expressed its keenness to have a single-tier structure and a willingness to take into Argyll pieces of neighbouring territory if that were thought appropriate.

The hon. Lady asked whether the statement was worth waiting for. My answer is an emphatic "Yes". I am certain that the people of Scotland will warmly welcome the implementation of these proposals and the improved delivery of services that they will bring.

The hon. Lady mentioned the setting up of a Scottish Parliament before local government can be reformed. The policies of the Labour party for setting up a separate Scottish Parliament would drain power from local government. I have it on the authority of Mrs. Jean McFadden, the leader of Glasgow district council, that

"There may well be a tendency for a Scottish Parliament to suck up power from below."

That is the fact. These proposals will be welcomed in Argyll, as they will be welcomed elsewhere in Scotland.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Order. I shall try to call as many hon. Members as possible but I ask for the House's co-operation in the form of brisk questions and brisk answers to help me to do so.

Mr. George Kynoch (Kincardine and Deeside): In welcoming the advent of the proposed single-tier local authorities and my right hon. Friend's sensible and realistic proposals for water services, may I ask whether he will fully consider any representations that he receives from constituencies such as mine about the effective local delivery of services in larger rural areas? During the Committee stage of the Bill, will he be willing to reconsider the splitting of the Mearns from the former local county of Kincardineshire?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's welcome for the underlying thrust of our proposals, which I am sure will be of great advantage to the north-east of Scotland and, indeed, to the rest of Scotland. As for the detailed proposals, such issues will come up for consideration as the Bill goes through the House and, in due course, once Parliament has decided on the map, the Local Government Boundary Commission will immediately go to work on them. There will be plenty of opportunity for my hon. Friend to advance any thoughts that he may have on the precise nature of the boundaries.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Who does the Secretary of State think he is kidding? Does he not realise that the overwhelming majority of the people of Scotland will recognise this as a squalid job creation scheme for Tory councillors and quango members and that everyone responsible for it, including the Secretary of State, is corrupt and unfit to hold public office?

Mr. Lang: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will carefully examine the proposals for his part of Scotland and for the rest of Scotland. We are removing unnecessary bureaucracy and duplication, improving local accountability and creating greater accessibility and clarity in the delivery of local government services. If the hon. Gentleman does not share my objectives, he should be considering his own priorities.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I take points of order after statements. If the House were not so noisy, we could hear what hon. Members said. I think that there is some concern that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) used the word "corrupt". I did not hear it—*[Interruption.]* Order. If the House were quieter, we could all hear what was going on. I did not hear the hon. Gentleman. He may have used the word but if the House were quieter, I could hear. Unless the Speaker hears, there is nothing I can do about it, so I ask the House to remain quiet so that I and everyone else can hear what is going on.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his announcement will be met with a thunderous roar of approval by the people of the city of Aberdeen, who have long campaigned for an all-purpose city council, and that includes the ruling Labour group of the present city district council? Does my right hon. Friend agree that what he has announced is subsidiarity in action, giving local decision makers the right to make local decisions in local communities, which is far removed from what is on offer from the Opposition, who would take decision making away from local communities and transfer it to a central belt in Edinburgh?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that the city of Aberdeen will be a strong and effective all-purpose authority. I also believe that the surrounding area of Aberdeenshire will provide an effective counterbalance and that there will soon be a vibrant and extremely efficient local government system in north-east Scotland.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that his wish that the White Paper should be regarded as a sensible reform of local government would carry more credence but for his ill-conceived decision to have the whole process carried out by the Scottish Office, not by means of a proper inquiry? Does he accept that there will be considerable dissatisfaction in the Grampian area about the break-up of Grampian regional council, which I hope he will concede has done a great deal for fishing and the rural areas of north-east Scotland? Although there will certainly be great satisfaction at the restoration of a single-tier authority for the city of Aberdeen, what is the rationale for the new addition of Westhill, other than his determined gerrymandering to dilute Labour control of the city?

Mr. Lang: Yes, Grampian has been an efficient region, but we had to make decisions as we examined the map of Scotland. We were told at one stage that the whole excercise was a plan to abolish the regions of Scotland. It was no such thing—indeed, four of the regions will survive under our proposals, some in slightly reduced form. We have sought to find the most effective pattern and structure for each part of Scotland. We are not imposing a blueprint, but considering the circumstances of each area and finding the right solution. Although Grampian has been a successful and effective region, I believe that the new authorities that we shall set up in the north-east will be more effective. I should say that there was little support for the continuance of Grampian region.

Mr. Andrew, Welsh (Angus, East): Does the Secretary of State understand that everyone can see that the document is a paving Bill for stealing Scotland's water through Tory quangos? This is the end of the road for the Westminster system, and the Secretary of State has no place left to hide. His gerrymandered map is an insult to democracy and an affront to Scotland. Every Scottish Member of Parliament worth his or her salt should oppose it. It is an insult, a betrayal of democracy and a betrayal of Scotland. It must be rejected.

Mr. Lang: May I say to the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* By leaving the Chamber, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have not only scored an own goal, but have left me with an open goal. He left because he was so deeply embarrassed about the fact that Angus district favoured a single-tier authority based on Angus, which is what we propose.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Is my right hon. Friend surprised that those who were reluctant personally to pay for the cost of local government are so interested in the structure of local government?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. It is incumbent on all parties in the House to raise their horizons above party self-interest and to look to the future interests of Scottish local government.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): Does not the document represent a kind of "electoral cleansing"—a desperate effort by a discredited Government to sweep together as many Tory voters as can possibly be found to form a kind of East Renfrewstan, as we have in Eastwood? Would it not be better if the Government went the whole hog and allowed Tory voters to opt out of the local authority in whose area they live and to choose another more suited to their political tastes? Better still, why do they not rent an island somewher off the coast of Scotland

[Mr. George Galloway]

—Rockall, for example, would be big enough—where all the remaining Scottish Conservatives could be collected, and could live in the wild blue yonder thereafter?

Is not the truth that a Government without popular support—they have less popular support now than the risible amount that they polled in April 1992—cannot possibly command the authority for proposals of such magnitude? Is not the only way forward a referendum for Scotland and a parliament in Scotland, so that the Scottish people can decide how and where they are governed?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. Fifteen months ago, he and his hon. Friends were talking about the Tory party being wiped out in Scotland. Now, simply because we are reforming local government, they seem to think that we are suddenly going to sweep the country. The Conservative party has always been a modest participant in local government in Scotland, and the suggestion that we could construct a scenario to benefit us at the expense of other parties is preposterous. I am surprised that the Labour party seems so uncertain of its prospects at the next local government elections under the new arrangements.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the fact that many of his colleagues in England will look enviously on the new streamlined structure of local government in Scotland, and that we hope to catch him up soon? If my right hon. Friend is thinking of renting islands, as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) suggested, will he rent a Greek island and put the socialists—what is left of them —on it?

Mr. Lang: I shall leave my hon. Friend's latter suggestion hanging in the air, but I welcome his support for my proposals. I believe that they represent an effective, coherent and clear-cut solution which will meet Scotland's needs. I hope that England will be as successful in its activities as we shall be in ours.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Can the Secretary of State explain to the House the principles according to which he links Eastwood and Barrhead, which are five miles apart and have no direct bus link, instead of putting Eastwood where it ought to be, in the city of Glasgow, where its people work and where they use the leisure facilities and the halls? Under his proposals, the people of Eastwood will pay nothing towards those services. Is it not an act of political cowardice—giving in to his junior Minister and to those selfish, greedy electors he represents, who are not prepared to pay for the services they use?

Mr. Lang: I am glad that we have been able to revive the county of Renfrewshire, and that it is of a size that enables us to propose two authorties in that county, as we are doing in Ayrshire, Lanarkshire and other parts of Scotland. I believe that what we are proposing is the right way forward for those areas and for Scotland as a whole. Those matters will be fully debated as the Bill goes through Parliament.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that there was wide support for single-tier authorities, and that he has listened carefully to representations? Does not the success of Conservative Members of Parliament, in their representations on behalf of their constituents, show the difference between the right honourable whingers on the Opposition Benches and Conservative Members who put forward logical cases?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I can assure him that there was substantial support for single-tier authorities in our initial consultation process. That support has increased considerably and, in the most recent opinion poll, was shown to stand substantially higher than that for alternative solutions.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): The Secretary of State's undistinguished statement this afternoon says little or nothing about jobs and inward investment. It is not clear to me how local enterprise companies will sit with the new authorities. Will the right hon. Gentleman say something about that? Is it not the case, for example, that the new towns with development corporations will be covered by local enterprise companies? Where will Dunbartonshire enterprise boundaries end in the new structure as it affects the new town of Cumbernauld? Will the Minister say something generally about the new towns?

Mr. Lang: I am glad to do so, and the hon. Gentleman mentions a significant point. We shall consider the boundaries of local enterprise companies, health boards and other such organisations and, where appropriate, we shall propose the rationalisation of boundaries.

Under our proposals, there will be one new town—Cumbernauld—in north Lanarkshire, and one new town —East Kilbride—in south Lanarkshire. The new towns will benefit from the change because they will deal with one local authority instead of with two, and that will also improve inward investment relationships with local government.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his carefully crafted proposals for local government in Scotland, but is he aware that some Conservative Members will be a little disappointed that the water industry is not to be speedily privatised? Can he confirm that the resources necessary for the much-needed investment in the water industry in Scotland will not come from the public sector pot—where obviously the priorities should be schools, hospitals, roads and so on—but rather from the private sector?

I hope that you have noticed, Madam Speaker, that I have followed the advice you gave me yesterday about the need for moderate language. I have not said a word about Monklands.

Mr. Lang: I am happy to reassure my hon. Friend. He will appreciate that the circumstances in Scotland are different from those in England, where water authorities had existed for some years. At present, water in Scotland is a local authority service. We are proposing the establishment of water authorities, but they will raise most of their resources for new capital investment from the private sector, which will reduce the demand for resources from other areas of Government expenditure.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The Secretary of State talked about reviving Scotland's counties. Does he accept that East Lothian can never be part of the Borders, let alone part of West Lothian, and

that he has no right to split the historic county of East Lothian in two? What community of interest is there between Cockenzie and Coldstream, and what about the non-existent link between Prestonpans and Livingston, for goodness' sake? Is he aware that the geographical centre of his proposed Tory mini-Bantustan, composed of Berwickshire and the eastern part of East Lothian, is a place 1,000 ft up in the Lammermuirs called the Hungry Snout, which is quite a good description of the expensive, unworkable and squalid set-up that he is proposing?

Mr. Lang: For all I know, it forms part of the hon. Gentleman's estate. East Lothian is not part of the Borders under our proposals, any more than it has been historically. What we propose is broadly in line with what used to be a parliamentary constituency and—most interestingly—seems to conform to what the independent Boundary Commission now proposes for the future parliamentary constituency.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Does the Secretary of State recall that yesterday his ministerial colleague rebuked me for extravagant language and urged me to wait for the proposals? Now that I have seen them, I marvel at my moderation. They are the most corrupt proposals presented to the House by any Government during my time in this place.

As regards the Borders area, the Secretary of State will remember putting two options in his consultation document. What he now proposes is neither of those options. How does he justify that? What was the point of the consultation? As he has always told us that the Borders region is doubtfully viable, with a population of 100,000, why does he now propose to chop it up and take Berwickshire out to satisfy a few local government Tories?

Mr. Lang: We made it clear when we published the consultation paper that we were including four illustrative options and that we were not suggesting that the choice need be confined to them. We are talking not about a handbook for six-year-old schoolchildren, saying, "Pick one of the four," but about illustrative options from which guidance could be given to people replying to the consultation exercise and making their suggestions.

The right hon. Gentleman used extreme language today. I note that he used similar language in his criticism of the Boundary Commission following its proposals for the area containing his constituency and that of his neighbour. I have to suspect the hon. Gentleman and his party of gerrymandering the future parliamentary boundaries in their area.

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating the people of Scotland on the magnificent fight that they have put up against his proposals for all-out water privatisation? Will he be assured that they will not be fooled by his proposals for privatisation by the back door?

Will the Secretary of State justify the fact that there is no commission to look at Scotland's local government boundaries, and explain to me how, in his reforming of Renfrewshire, he has come up with proposals for two councils, one of which consists of the only Tory constituency in Renfrewshire plus the only two Tory-held wards in Paisley and the other of which consists of four Labour-held constituencies, with populations of 88,000 and 265,000 respectively?

Will the right hon. Gentleman further confirm that in reality he put his proposals not to this House today, but to *The Scotsman* last week?

Mr. Lang: I can confirm to the hon. Lady that I did no such thing. I deplore the leaking of any Government document. As the hon. Lady knows, we never comment on allegedly leaked documents.

For water, what we propose is a Scottish solution suitable for Scottish circumstances. I believe that it will be effective in the delivery of water services in future.

The hon. Lady referred to Renfrewshire. I should have thought that she would welcome the restoration of Renfrewshire as an area of all-purpose authorities in its own right. I am glad, too, that we have been able to divide it into two authorities. They do not need to be numerically equal any more than they need to be geographically equal. What we need is a proper and sensible division between east and west Renfrewshire, and that will no doubt be debated further as the Bill proceeds through Parliament.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Before the Secretary of State reminds me of the fact, may I make it clear that I have always advocated an all-purpose authority for the city of Dundee, but we do not want it under the present gerrymandered proposals.

Do you, Madam Speaker, feel as disturbed as I do at the fact that Ministers preface every statement that they make about Northern Ireland by making it clear that no change will take place without the consent of the majority in Northern Ireland, but that we get no such statements from the Secretary of State for Scotland? Is it not extremely relevant that, in the period leading up to 22 July, it is repeatedly being emphasised that change will not take place in Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority? Why does not the Secretary of State fight his and Scotland's corner in the Cabinet?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for welcoming what the Government propose for Dundee. I suppose that he will be accusing me of gerrymandering next. As we have eight Conservative councillors out of 40 in the area that will form Dundee council, I hardly think that such a charge would be credible.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): It would be less than honest of me not to welcome one part of the White Paper—the recognition that Cambuslang and Rutherglen are separate communities in their own right. However—as the saying goes—let me assure the right hon. Gentleman that my hon. Friends and I will be defending the continued existence of Strathclyde regional council, which is one of the best councils in the history of local government in Scotland. If the process is not to be devalued and defiled as a gerrymandered issue, will the Secretary of State explain why no separate council has been recommended for Cambuslang and Rutherglen, which are in my constituency and have a similar population to Eastwood, Stirling and Berwickshire? What is the difference?

Mr. Lang: That area is traditionally part of Lanarkshire and it will go into south Lanarkshire. I am surprised to find the hon. Gentleman defending Strathclyde. I would be surprised if he found strong support for that among his constituents. I believe, as does the Leader of the Opposition, that Strathclyde is too large.

[Mr. Lang]

The 10 independent self-governing local authority areas that we propose will be widely welcomed throughout the Strathclyde area.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I was brought up in Glasgow, and have lived in the north side of the city all my life. I am not all that familiar with the south side, but it has always been my understanding that King's Park and Toryglen were part of the city of Glasgow. Why has the Secretary of State sought to take those areas out of Glasgow when he claims that he is trying to make local government more accessible to the people?

I mean no disrespect to the people of Giffnock and Newton Mearns, but the vast majority of those who are lucky enough to be in a job work mainly in the Glasgow area—sometimes in businesses, sometimes in lawyers' firms—sometimes in the Strathclyde region. Why is the Secretary of State allowing Eastwood to become an authority? The only conclusion that I can reach is that his ear has been bent day after day by the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart). If the Secretary of State accepts that all of us are equal, why does the Under-Secretary of State have more say than any other hon. Member?

Mr. Lang: As the hon. Gentleman can imagine, Toryglen is a place after my own heart. I understand that, historically, some 85 per cent. of Toryglen and King's Park have formed part of Lanarkshire. The hon. Gentleman suggests that we propose to make Eastwood an all-purpose authority on its own. That is not part of our proposals.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Is the Secretary of State aware that the private sector is already describing his proposed water authorities as business units which will promote the franchising and market testing of Scotland's water by as early as 1995? Does he not yet understand that, having failed his own market test in Scotland at the last general election, he has no democratic authority whatever for any of the changes that he has announced this afternoon? Therefore, when he introduces the Bill, he can expect not just token opposition from us, but unrelenting hostility, resistance and obstruction to ensure that these measures never see the light of day in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for promising to take a close interest in these matters.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Will not the reforms result in Scotland being run largely by quangos staffed by Tory party members and those prepared to pay into Tory party funds? Does the Secretary of State accept that, by attempting to gerrymander councils that the Tory party can control, he is corrupting the political system in Scotland in a way that would have done the former eastern European communist system proud?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong on both points. I feel certain that Edinburgh, which has been widely welcomed in the area as an all-purpose authority, will be extremely successful in advancing the interests of his constituents.

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): Scotland will see the statement for what it really is: a piece of political chicanery of the worst kind. As others have said, it is a form of political corruption.

Will the Secretary of State explain why it is right for Stirling, with a population of 81,000, and Eastwood, with a population of 88,000, to be given an authority in their own right while my area of East Kilbride, which has the same population and is economically stronger, is denied that right?

Mr. Lang: In drawing up the map we took account not just of individual areas but of their relationship to neighbouring areas and the way in which they fitted in to the overall map for Scotland. I believe that it is right that we should be willing to reflect the diversity and variety of the demography and geography of Scotland. We have sought to do that with the proposals. We have always made it clear that size, in geographical and population terms, would vary. I believe that that is generally widely welcomed.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Will the Secretary of State bear in mind the fact that, if he wishes to retain the links between communities, the severing of the links between Falkirk, Alloa and Stirling stands ill beside the retention of Fife region virtually in its entirety? Could that be because he is more concerned about the political fate of his ministeral colleague than he is about the good governance of the area? Will he also reflect upon the fact that, within Clackmannan district, there are Catholic children who go to school at St. Modan's high school in Stirling, and there is no provision in the White Paper for cross-boundary help for youngsters for whom there is no educational provision in the proposed areas?

Mr. Lang: It is always the case with boundaries between local government authorities that some services overlap and sensible relationships are quickly and easily arrived at. Clackmannan and Falkirk are compact and industrialised areas, widely different from Stirling, which is largely a rural area. Our proposal to revive much of the old Stirling county will be warmly welcomed there. I was most impressed by Stirling district council's submission to me.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Does the Secretary of State for Scotland think that the House believes that this document is about local government democracy? Is it not a cost-saving exercise? The Secretary of State for Scotland has gone on about the saving of £65 million, but he does not tell us who will pay the penalty. Thousands of employees, men and women, in Strathclyde and all over Scotland have dedicated their lives to local authorities. If the right hon. Gentleman was really serious as Secretary of State for Scotland, he would have set up a commission similar to that in 1975 when Wheatley considered management and corporate structures.

In going for option D on water privatisation, the Secretary of State is inviting the private sector to invest, but the people of Scotland do not want anything to do with the private sector, franchising or anything else. Nor do they want anything to do with this gerrymandering, this jumble sale of boundaries, which has nothing to do with democracy, and we shall oppose it. If anybody is to do anything about local government reorganisation, it should be a Scottish Parliament.

Madam Speaker: Order. This is question time. I did ask for brief questions.

Mr. Lang: I shall certainly answer the two new points that the hon. Gentleman raised. First, with regard to whether this is a cost-saving exercise, the hon. Gentleman should have a word with those on the Opposition Front Bench who for the past few months have been busy trying to persuade everyone that this exercise will cost a fortune. The fact is that it will save money. It will save up to £65 million per year—about £1 million a week. With regard to redundancies, there will be fewer employees in local government, because we are contemplating reducing the number of authorities from 65 to 28. That means less duplication and less bureaucracy. But we estimate that the number of employees will be reduced by less than 1 per cent.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): The Secretary of State has now confirmed that when the Prime Minister said after the last general election that he would take stock, what he really meant was that he would take the mickey. That is what this gerrymandering statement means to us today. Yesterday, the Secretary of State asked me to contain my soul in patience until the statement was made about the number of councillors that he proposed in the new local authorities——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am trying to contain my patience, but I am now listening for a question rather than a statement. Will the hon. Gentleman come to a question, please?

Mr. Hood: Will the Secretary of State now tell us what he refused to tell me yesterday—the number of councillors that he proposes for the so-called new local authorities?

Mr. Lang: I envisage that, taking districts and regions as they are at present, the number of councillors will fall from over 1,600 to over 1,200.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the Secretary of State accept a warm welcome for the fact that water will remain in public ownership and that there will be no law of disconnection in Scotland? Does he accept that the people of Scotland, led by the Labour party and everyone else who is prepared to campaign in that direction, will keep it that way this side of a general election, and that the general election in Scotland will be fought largely on that issue and on the issue of returning water to public accountability?

Will the Secretary of State also consider that, when I say that the ludicrous proposal to call Ayrshire north Ayrshire when it stretches all the way down to Dumfries and Galloway is a falsehood, an absurdity and an offence to reason, I am joined not just by everyone in the Labour party, not just by everybody with any common sense in Ayrshire, but by the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues in the Tory party? Does he further accept that there will be an intensive cross-party campaign against the gerrymandering of Ayrshire?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman need not bother campaigning for the return of water to public accountability, because it will not have left it. On his point about the name of the Ayrshire authorities, the document makes it clear—I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman has not had the opportunity to read it—that the Government will welcome suggestions for any changes of name.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I have an inkling towards all-purpose authorities. An obvious all-purpose authority would have been Ayrshire, with Kilmarnock as its capital. I cannot see for the life of me—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ask a question."] I cannot understand why the Secretary of State saw fit to divide Ayrshire into north and south. Is that divide amendable, and if there is to be a separation, may we propose that Ayrshire should stand as a single, all-purpose, tiered authority? Will the Secretary of State assure us that he will give that consideration? I am sure that the majority of people in Ayrshire would wish to suggest that, if they have not already done so.

Mr. Lang: The combined population of what we propose to be north Ayrshire and south Ayrshire will be 376,000. We felt that that would be too large for a local authority covering that geographical area, and that it was possible to divide Ayrshire to create a more accountable local authority and to enable Kilmarnock, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, to become a central town in the Ayrshire local authority structure. I believe that that is right. In seeking to divide Ayrshire, we decided that one of the best boundaries was one that was established by Lord Wheatley and his commission.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Secretary of State answer this question honestly—I know it will be a change: will he confirm that, during the consultation, the vast majority of people from Ayrshire wanted an all-Ayrshire authority, including Enterprise Ayrshire, the health board, the chamber of commerce and most of the MPs and councillors, and that the only people who wanted the Kyle and Carrick authority were the few discredited Tories there and the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie)? Will he therefore pay attention to the consultation? It is not a question of names or viability—Ayrshire is a viable authority. Will he accept the views of the people of Ayrshire and agree to an all-Ayrshire authority?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman was sufficiently honest to concede that there had been support in Ayrshire for Kyle and Carrick as a unitary authority. Kilmarnock and Loudoun also supported its proposed unitary status. What we propose strikes the right balance between local loyalties and the need for authorities to be large enough to ensure the efficient delivery of services.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Even the Secretary of State will agree that nobody in the House would accuse me of over-statement, but there is almost unanimous agreement that we have heard a pathetic response to the demands of the people of Scotland to have a say in their own affairs. The Secretary of State for Scotland has waved a paper, a document, to the House that represents appeasement of Scotland's interest which we find utterly repugnant.

For that reason, and in view of his weak and pathetic response, may I say, through you, Madam Speaker, and with great respect to you, that my hon. Friends will proceed to Downing street to ask for the resignation of this pathetic Secretary of State. He has yet again destroyed Scotland's interest. In the words of Leo Amery to Chamberlain's Government:

"You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing . . . In the name of God, go!"—*Official Report*, 7 May 1940; Vol. 360, c. 1150.]—

[Interruption.]

Madam Speaker: Order. I call the Secretary of State to reply.

Mr. Lang: I am not sure whether there is very much to reply to. There are certainly no Scottish Labour Members to whom to reply. They will be disappointed. I suppose that they will reach Downing street about 10 minutes from now, but they will find that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is not there. As most of the rest of the country knows, my right hon. Friend is still in Japan. I am sure that the messenger on the door will be happy to take a message.

Business of the House

4.30 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 12 JULY—Report stage of the Finance (No. 2) Bill.

Motion on the International Development Association (Tenth Replenishment) Order.

TUESDAY 13 JULY—Remaining stages of the Finance (No. 2) Bill.

Motion on the Education (Assistend Places) (Amendment) Regulations.

Motion on the Partnerships and Unlimited Companies (Accounts) regulations.

WEDNESDAY 14 JULY—Assuming that Scottish Labour Members are back from Downing street, Opposition Day (17th allotted day).

Until about seven o'clock, there will be a debate on Scottish local government and water privatisation, followed by a debate on debt, trade and development after the G7 summit. Both debates arise on Opposition motions.

THURSDAY 15 JULY—Until about seven o'clock, remaining stages of the Welsh Language Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion on the Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Irealand) Order.

FRIDAY 16 JULY—Debate entitled "Tackling Fraud and Abuse in Social Security" on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 19 JULY—Supplemental timetable motion on and consideration of Lords amendments to the Education Bill.

I regret that I am not in a position today to announce the precise dates of the summer recess. However, it may be for the convenience of the House to know that Government business will be taken in the week commencing 26 July.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet on Wednesday 14 July at 10.30 am to consider European Community documents as follows: Committee A, document No. 6744/93 relating to non-rotational set-aside and document No. 7033/93 relating to arable land set-aside. Committee B, document No. 4148/93 relating to the legal protection of biotechnological inventions.

[Wednesday 14 July:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community documents: 6744/93, non-rotational set-aside; 7033/93, arable set-aside. Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: HC 79-xxix (1992-93) and HC 79-xxx (1992-93).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: 4148/93, patenting of biotechnological inventions. Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: HC 79-xix (1992-93).]

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I thank the Leader of the House for telling us the business for next week. Will he consider again the amount of time being allocated to the Education Bill? As I understand it, there are 622 Government amendments and 14 amendments that have been tabled against the wishes of the Government. Apparently the amendments include 34

new clauses. If the Education Bill is so bad that it already requires so many amendments, surely it is a mistake to try to bulldoze it through the House by force of numbers. Surely it would be better to get it through by force of reason. That would require more discussion than the Leader of the House seems to be willing to allocate. However, at least we shall have some discussion on education matters.

The Government tell us that public expenditure is the largest single concern of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, yet we have not been allowed to discuss the details of the Government's public expenditure plans for last year, let alone for this year. A debate is long overdue. I reiterate the Opposition's call for such a debate.

May we also have a debate on some of the reports now emanating from the Public Accounts Committee? There is a report on major defence projects and especially on the AR1 scandal, or HMS De Lorean, as I understand it is known in the industry. May we have a special debate on the National Audit Office report on the Welsh Development Agency, which will be considered by the Public Accounts Committee?

In particular, I ask the Leader of the House how it is possible for a man with three previous criminal convictions for deception to be appointed to a senior post in the Welsh Development Agency. Does the Conservative party regard that as qualifications? How can a former international director of that agency not only work as a private consultant as well, but be paid off with a £230,000 golden handshake? Those are outrageous states of affairs which the National Audit Office has uncovered. The House should discuss them at an earlier moment. Will the Leader of the House at least assure me that Doctor Gwyn Jones will be suspended from his other public appointments, pending a further inquiry into the matter?

Finally, I wish to raise an issue that ought to command consensus in the House. May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the Opposition's support in principle for the unified budget statement and for the investigation into the procedures that will be adopted by the Procedure Committee? However, I deplore the fact that the Government are trying to pre-empt the Procedure Committee's work by making amendments to this year's Finance (No. 2) Bill that effectively take some of the major decisions well before the House, or even the Procedure Committee, has had a chance to consider the matters. Even at this late stage, I urge the Leader of the House to persuade his colleagues on the Treasury Bench to drop the offensive clause 202 from the Finance (No. 2) Bill pending its consideration by the Procedure Committee.

Mr. Newton: I cannot guarantee to find more time for discussions on the Education Bill, but of course I am, as ever, content for the matters to be further discussed through the usual channels. I say that with perhaps some scepticism about what the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) said about allowing the forces of reason to prevail. The Government, of course, always allow the forces of reason to prevail. There has not been much reason shown by the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends on this and other matters.

I cannot add to what I have said about public expenditure on previous occasions. But I draw attention again to the fact that there will be a substantial opportunity to debate those matters on Third Reading of the Finance (No. 2) Bill next week. The hon. Gentleman's points about the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office will be noted, I am sure, by my right hon. and hon. Friends. They may also be noted by the Chairman and the members of the Liaison Committee in considering what other subjects should be recommended for any estimates days at some future stage.

I would not want to pre-empt the consideration that my right hon. and hon. Friends will give to the various reports, and they will respond in due course. In return, I hope that the Opposition will acknowledge that, while it is right that the report should be studied, it should not detract from the fact that the Welsh Development Agency, for example, has a record of outstanding achievement in promoting new investment and jobs to the benefit of the people of Wales.

I will make sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends are made aware of what the hon. Gentleman said about the unified budget. It must be right to take advantage of the fact that we are passing a Finance Bill to make changes that are seen to be necessary to the process on which we are embarking. That is without prejudice to my right hon. Friends having their attention drawn to what the hon. Gentleman said.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Is any progress being made towards the implementation of the all-party Jopling report? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the way that we conduct our affairs in the House is regarded with derision by the public and with bewilderment by other countries? Most hon. Members want the reforms——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): They don't.

Sir Anthony Grant: With the exception of a minority of jurassic dinosaurs, hon. Members of all parties want the reforms. It is high time that they were put into effect.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend speaks for many hon. Members on both sides of the House. He will be aware, as I mentioned last week, that there have been disturbing reports of the proceedings on the matter in the parliamentary Labour party.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) has written to me about the matter, although not with the straightforward yes that my hon. Friend would have wished to hear.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Does the Leader of the House accept that the statement about local government in Scotland made this afternoon by the Secretary of State for Scotland was deeply controversial, to put it mildly? Notwithstanding the welcome half Supply Day that the official Opposition will have next week, will the right hon. Gentleman give us an undertaking that, in the spillover Session when we return from the summer recess, once people have had a chance to digest the proposals for local government in Scotland, and before Second Reading, there will be a debate in Government time? That would enable the force of feeling in Scotland to be brought to bear on the Government about the results that some of the proposals will have.

I assume that the Government will give an assurance that, if local people demonstrate beyond peradventure that they are against the proposals, their objections will be borne in mind before the proposals are finalised and the Bill is introduced.

Mr. Newton: I can safely observe at least that I did not need the hon. Gentleman to tell me that the proposals were controversial. I had observed that in the past few minutes. In response to his specific question, I cannot give him the undertaking that he requests. Let us see how we get on in the debate next week. Then we can give further consideration to these matters.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a full debate on the proposal to extend the selected list scheme for pharmaceuticals? The matter has not been discussed in the Chamber since the Government proposed the scheme in November last year. It is widely rumoured that the Government intend to lay three orders next week which will extend the list. The methods used by the committee are causing considerable anxiety to doctors and patients and, indeed, to the pharmaceutical industry. I remind the House that I have an interest in the matter.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comment. His interest in the matter is well known. The proper thing for me to do is to draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Given that an event took place yesterday which has fundamental implications for the rule of law and for justice and democracy in this country, and that an action was taken by the Home Secretary which is usually taken only by dictators, why has no statement been made to the House and why has no time been allowed to debate the issue? I refer to the case in which a young constituent of mine who had been held for months on a serious charge with no evidence was told by a magistrate in Britain's so-called respected courts that he left the court without a stain on his character. Before he got to the door he was handcuffed. The Secretary of State for Home Affairs had signed an exclusion order. There has been no debate of any description on the matter.

More than 3,000 people have died on the streets of Northern Ireland. Does the Leader of the House agree that if that were happening on the streets of Britain, it would be discussed every day of the week by a packed House until the problem was resolved? Does he agree that the fact that it is discussed only occasionally late on a Thursday night to let British Members have a long weekend shows clearly that, in spite of the repeated guarantees that the Government give—such guarantees were given often in the past week to buy votes on 22 July—*[Interruption.]* No, on 22 July—the social chapter. Is not the lack of discussion a clear sign that the Government have psychologically withdrawn from Northern Ireland?

Mr. Newton: No, I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's interpretation of those matters. I can only say, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said, that for him to make an exclusion order he has to be satisfied, in accordance with criteria laid down by Parliament, that someone has been involved in the commission, perpetration or instigation of acts of terrorism connected with Northern Ireland. My right hon. and learned Friend reviewed all the information before him, including material that would not be admissible as evidence in court proceedings. On the basis of that information, he was satisfied that the statutory criteria were met.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): My right hon. Friend will recognise that the defence White Paper published on Monday was one of the most important documents published in the post-second world war era. Does he agree that Britain is at a crossroads in defence terms? It either remains a global power with a right to a seat on the Security Council or it becomes a backwater—a small island off the north coast of Europe.

Bearing in mind the importance of that defence White Paper and the implications for Britain's defence needs in the future, does my right hon. Friend accept that there is an urgent need to debate the issue? Will he give an assurance to the House that he will break with convention and that we shall not have to wait for 12 months to have such an important debate?

Mr. Newton: May I make two points which echo something that I said last week? I think that I am right in saying that the convention is that, following the publication of the defence estimates—I entirely accept that the White Paper is a significant document—the first step is for the Defence Select Committee to consider it and, if it wishes to do so, to make a report. That is appropriate in this case. I shall certainly make every endeavour—I underline that—to ensure that the new defence estimates are debated rather more rapidly than proved possible with the previous set of defence estimates.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Will the Leader of the House invite the Home Secretary to make a statement to the House next week following the statement made by the High Court about Derek Bentley? I believe that it is the wish of the House that the Home Secretary makes a statement about the case. There is widespread support both in the House and outside for a posthumous pardon.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is considering the text of yesterday's court judgment and will decide what action to take in the light of it. He clearly needs to give it proper and careful consideration. I would not want to go beyond that this afternoon.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Will the Leader of the House prevail on the Secretary of State for Defence to come to the House next week to make a statement on the ammunition ordering programme for the next five years in the light of the short-time working announced today at the royal ordnance factory Birtley?

Mr. Newton: I cannot undertake to bring my right hon. and learned Friend here to make such a statement next week, but I understand the reasons why the hon. Gentleman raises the point. I shall ensure that it is drawn to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does the Leader of the House recognise the urgency of the need for a debate on the Welsh Development Agency? The Public Accounts Committee report is a remarkable account of corruption, incompetence and nepotism in a public body. The great urgency arises because the two men responsible still hold public office. One is the chairman of the Broadcasting Council for Wales. The other is the Secretary of State for Employment. We must root out those two people. The report proves that neither of them is fit to hold public office.

Mr. Newton: I made some comments on that matter earlier in these exchanges and I shall not add to them. The report has been published. The hon. Gentleman referred to it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has issued a press release today in which he makes it clear that he will examine carefully what the report says. That must be the right course.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Will the Leader of the House think again about the request from my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) for a debate on the WDA and the report published today by the Public Accounts Committee? While I endorse what the right hon. Gentleman said about the excellent industrial record of the WDA, will he bear in mind the fact that it had that excellent record before it introduced rip-off, expensive, private motoring schemes for executives, before it introduced a quarter of a million pound redundancy package complete with gagging clauses, before it spent a third of a million pounds on privatisation proposals that were concealed from Parliament and before it appointed a professional conman as marketing director to join the amateurs who were already at the WDA?

Mr. Newton: Whatever may be appropriate in terms of careful examination of the recommendations and comments made in the report, it is rather unfortunate that the right hon. Gentleman should use language of that nature about people. He would probably have to be rather more careful with his language if he were speaking outside the Chamber. Leaving that aside, I repeat that my right hon. Friends, not only in the Welsh Office but elsewhere, will carefully study what the report says. That is the right course.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House press the Prime Minister to make a statement next week on the Government's policy on Bosnia quite separate from any statement on the outcome of the G7 conference? Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that, bearing in mind the fact that the people of Sarajevo have been hit by an average of 500 artillery shells a day over the past year and are now without water or electricity, his description of Government policy at Prime Minister's Question Time will be judged as pathetically inadequate?

Will he impress on the Prime Minister the fact that it is now time for the British Government to press on the international community a course of decisive action that will lift the siege and allow the people of Sarajevo to overcome the attack on them by Serbian forces over the past year?

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, the issues to which he adverts have been discussed at the G7 summit in Tokyo and have been the subject of comments and statements from there. It would seem to be appropriate, if the hon. Gentleman so wishes, to raise the matter in relation to any statement that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister may wish to make about the G7 summit as a whole. I am certainly not in a position to give the hon. Gentleman undertakings beyond that at present.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Leader of the House give us some Government time to discuss the coal industry, and in particular the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation? If the coal industy is privatised, many dependent disabled miners and others will lose out if that organisation is dismantled. When the right hon. Gentleman provides that time, could he drop a little note to the leader of the Liberal Democratic party, who made that special effort in Hyde Park in October to support the miners, and tell him to turn up to vote for the miners because, on a vital vote last Monday, he was nowhere to be found?

Mr. Newton: The second part and punchline of the hon. Gentleman's question appeared to be directed at the Liberal Democrat Bench behind him, where I see that there is an appropriate messenger in the form of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), the Liberal Chief Whip, to transmit that message to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), and no doubt he will do so. As to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I am sure that he will be able to raise that matter further in the context of any discussions we may have in due course about the Government's privatisation proposals.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): May I press the Leader of the House about the need for a statement from the Home Secretary in respect of the case of John Matthews? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Opposition Members who have consistently made clear their total detestation of all forms of terrorist violence, not least from the provisional IRA, nevertheless remain very concerned indeed about the exclusion order made against Mr. Matthews, bearing in mind what was said earlier—that that person left the court without a stain on his character? The case is very serious and it concerns civil liberties. I hope that the Leader of the House will try to persuade the Home Secretary to come to the House on Monday and explain precisely why he decided on the exclusion order.

Mr. Newton: I will, of course, in line with my usual practice, draw the Home Secretary's attention to what the hon. Gentleman has said. However, I must repeat what I said earlier—that Parliament provided the power of exclusion as an exceptional measure against the grave threat of terrorism. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has set out how he has acted in accordance with the requirements of the law in that case.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate when the Government reply to the report of the National Heritage Select Committee on privacy? As I am sure the Leader of the House is aware, that report deals with the work of the Press Complaints Commission. Will the right hon. Gentleman join me and take this opportunity to congratulate a member of that commission, Mr. Gerald Isaaman, on his 25 years as editor of the *Hampstead and Highgate Express*, which is a very fine local newspaper?

Mr. Newton: While I cannot immediately undertake to arrange another debate in that area at the moment, I am happy to join the hon. Lady in her tribute to the editor of the "Ham and High". As it happens, in the interval in my life when I did not live in Essex, I lived in Hornsey. My children started their schooling in Highgate, and I am well aware of the standing of that newspaper and its editor in her part of London.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): About a year ago, the House debated the excesses of cowboy wheel clampers and the end of May marked the closing date for submissions to the Home Office. Will the Leader of the House prevail on

[Mr. John Spellar]

the Home Secretary to bring proposals to the House before the summer recess so that the clampers know, during the summer, that they are on notice?

Mr. Newton: I cannot undertake that my right hon. and learned Friend will be able to do that, but I am sure that he will wish to reach conclusions as soon as possible in the light of the consultation and announce them in an appropriate way.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Some of us were privileged to hear in the House my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) describe the plight of two of his constituents, the London taxi drivers whose taxis were turned into living bombs, and their brave and public-spirited action. Some of us are very concerned that the right people should be convicted for those offences.

According to the magistrate in the case of John Matthews, there has been no stain on his character. However, the Home Secretary then immediately placed a massive stain on his character. That assassination of character is very worrying. Indeed, even more dangerous might be the assassination of John Matthews himself, as the Home Secretary may have pointed the finger at him so that Protestant paramilitaries might take action against him. The Home Secretary should come to the House to answer questions on this very serious subject that affects an individual's civil liberties.

Mr. Newton: I make no complaint about the fact that the hon. Gentleman has felt it right to raise that matter again. However, quite clearly, I cannot add to what I have already said on two previous occasions.

ESTIMATES DAY

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

ESTIMATES AND SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1993-94

Class XIII, Vote 4

Department of Social Security

Pensions

[Relevant document: First Report from the Social Security Committee of Session 1992-93 on The Operation of Pension Funds: The Recovery of Assets (House of Commons Paper No. 189)]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a further sum, not exceeding £1,505,632,000, and including a Supplementary Sum of £810,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1994 for expenditure by the Department of Social Security on administration, for agency payments, and for certain other services including grants to local authorities and voluntary organisations.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

4.56 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): It is a pleasure to open this afternoon's debate on a vote that takes note of a report by the Select Committee on Social Security and which draws attention to the grants in aid to the occupational pensions advisory service and to the Maxwell pensioners' trust.

I begin the debate by putting on record the Select Committee's thanks to a number of individuals and organisations. When the Committee began what is now turning out to be a mammoth task, considering the ownership and control of Britain's occupational pensions schemes, we were blessed—I use that word advisedly—by the services of Philip Chappell as one of our specialist advisers. Some months ago, Philip Chappell died after bravely trying to ward off brain cancer. While that death was a total blow to his family, it was also a severe knock to radical forces in this country.

Some hon. Members will be aware that Philip Chappell and Lord Vinson formulated a number of very important radical ideas about why and how individuals should own their own pension funds. Those ideas stemmed from those two individuals. Philip was not only a most courteous and careful attender of our Select Committee gatherings; there was about him a boyish enthusiasm for ideas which endeared him to each and every member of the Committee on both sides of the table—if I may use that phrase. When one met Philip, one stretched across to meet him because his moral earnestness was totally attractive.

There is a sadness about our debate today as we have lost a great radical champion on pensions and capital ownership in this country. As my grandmother would say, "Dark clouds have silver linings." The Committee has similarly been blessed by an initiative of the National Audit Office which has allowed us to have seconded to the Committee one of its staff—Mr. Jonathan Cable.

All members of the Committee would wish me to say that the quality of our work in this area and related areas is very much determined by the high standards that Jonathan brings to his work. He does that in conjunction

with our new special adviser, Peter Mills. The Committee is thankful to both those people as it is to the House of Commons Library for the care and diligence that it shows us when answering our inquiries.

I begin one part of the debate by recapping for the House the reports of the Select Committee and the work that it has undertaken, not merely in the field of the ownership of pension funds, but specifically relating to the plight of the Maxwell pensioners. Some hon. Members were not in the House when we made our first report on the theft by Maxwell of much of the pension fund.

Following the publication of that report, the Government responded very quickly to one of our main proposals, which was to establish the Goode committee. This will report in late September. If it does not report on the key question of the ownership and control of pension funds, that will be seen by many of us to be a cop-out and the loss of a great deal of parliamentary time. I hope that that initial report helped to sharpen and focus the debate that has ensued.

Secondly, the Select Committee reported two persons to the House for contempt. It is not advisable to dwell on that report for contempt now. I merely wish to record that at some stage the Select Committee, which has a long memory, will wish it to be debated in the House.

Thirdly, the Select Committee has already reported on the recovery process. It said that that was an initial report and part of today's debate is about it. Shortly, however, we shall be making a much more major contribution to the study of the recovery process, when we will look at three of the four agents deputised for the task of recovering both assets which were stolen and assets which were misappropriated or are in disarray as a result of Robert Maxwell's behaviour, and then his death.

It is true to say that, while we have rightly been concerned with the Maxwell pensioners, and it has been totally proper for the Select Committee to put them at the centre of its consideration—indeed, they have looked to the Select Committee to champion their cause—the Committee has not been concerned only with their plight. We have tried to use what has happened to those tens of thousands of people as a barium meal is used for an X-ray; we have been concerned to draw out the weaknesses of occupational pensions, to enliven and inform the debate, and to draw general policy conclusions from our considerations, not being concerned only—I emphasise the word only—with the Maxwell pensioners, important though they are.

I turn now to what the Government have done in this area. I hope that I do not embarrass the Under-Secretary —whom I welcome for the first time in this debate to his post on the Treasury Bench—by going through the various moves that the Government have accomplished.

First, very soon after the extent of this awful theft became apparent, the Government agreed to drip-feed the pension funds to ensure that pensions were paid. The Government are to be congratulated on that and on using taxpayers' money—not their money—to good effect. That initial sum has already been spent.

The second move made by the Government to help to minimise the horror of this enormous theft of pension funds was, in effect, to give the pension funds a loan of £100 million or so, which the Government have every right to call in now, to underwrite the guaranteed minimum pension under the relevant social security Act. So they are to be congratulated on that.

Next, they deserve congratulation on setting up the Maxwell pension units and, above all, on appointing Sir John Cuckney to an overseeing job in this whole area. Our friends who sit elsewhere in this Chamber have been slow to wake up to the importance of this initiative. When we look at the initiative that the Government have taken in trying to combine public responsibility and private initiative, the Maxwell pension units and the role of Sir John Cuckney will, I believe, be at the forefront of the debate.

I am sure that the whole House joins me in emphasising the thanks that I now pay publicly to Sir John for the work that he does and the skill that he brings to that task. He is a public servant of considerable distinction. Many Maxwell pensioners are particularly grateful to him, because it is from the trust fund that he established that they are now being paid their weekly or monthly pensions.

The next reason for which we have to record thanks to the Government is that, through the initiative of Sir John Cuckney, we now have in place Sir Peter Webster, a retired High Court judge, who is attempting to build up some expertise in the area of mediation in this country. It is fair to say that he is probably the first person of that standing to attempt such a task and our thanks go to him.

Next, the Government have established the Goode committee, and we await patiently, but anxiously, its findings, due in September this year.

Lastly, the Government have taken the initiative, through the Board of Trade, to investigate the Mirror group prospectus. The Select Committee believes that that has very important repercussions for many of the pensioners.

I shall end by calling for some Government action, but it is right and proper that, in looking at this today, we should record what the Government have done. I shall watch with considerable interest how schizophrenic the Under-Secretary is when he comments on the Government's record. He knows that, if he is too boastful about what the Government have done, he will clearly be committing them to an interventionist line, from which they have tried to shield themselves. So I am sure that we shall have that pleasure before too many hours have passed.

There are two topics on which I shall not comment, because I am anxious that every hon. Member who has played a part in previous debates and in the Select Committee should have a chance to speak.

The first is the cost of the recovery process. It will probably reach something like £50 million before the task is finished, which is a ginormous sum. I will not dwell on it, because I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy), who hopes to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, intends to concentrate on that aspect. The second area of real concern relates to the two pensioner groups that have been left out in the cold. I guess that the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) will be dealing with that.

I will end by looking at the actions that we now want the Government to take, or not to take.

The first crucial necessity is that pressure is kept up on the main players in the Maxwell saga so that it is brought to an end as quickly as possible. There are a number of ways in which we as Members can help—by having debates such as we are having today, the work that the Select Committee can do, the statements that Ministers and Opposition spokespersons can make in their

[Mr. Frank Field]

contributions to these debates, and the comments that Ministers can make both throughout the country and in letters that are published.

It is essential that none of the main players—whether it be those who are, in a sense, in the dock for playing a part in the theft of these assets, or those committed by the courts to the recovery of the assets—believes that they can relax, sit back and take their time, because the patience of the pensioners is clearly running out. Keeping up the pressure, therefore, is a very important task, in which this debate will play some part.

Secondly, there is the question of the distribution of the common investment fund. As I expected, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) is in his place. Given that he has given the parties to the common investment fund such a good old shaking in the past, and a justifiable one, I need not dwell too long on that. I leave the common investment fund and its main participants to his gentle but firm boot.

Thirdly, I hope that we are not going to hear today that the Government should call a halt to the whole proceedings and shovel out large sums of taxpayers' money. There is something that the Government can do, but I am not in favour of their taking over the entire deficit and suggesting that the taxpayer should meet the total cost.

The recovery process is in operation and other forces are at work to gather funds for the depleted pension funds. However, I believe that, in the near future, the Government should make a statement on what they believe to be the likely shortfall when the whole process has been concluded, which may not be for three or four years, and at that stage to suggest how they envisage that sum being made up.

Some of us noted that the Securities and Investments Board recently fined Invesco MIM £750,000 for malpractices over its stewardship of some of the Maxwell pension funds. I hope that the Government will be asking the SIB to pay that fine, and other fines that we shall hear about shortly which will make £750,000 mere chicken feed, and that those funds will be paid into the Maxwell pension funds to help rebuild the capital stock.

I hope that the Government will judge the situation carefully and, if they consider that it would be useful to bring the parties together soon, to suggest a round table meeting. There will be three parties to that round table meeting.

Thanks to the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, South-West and others, the Government need not concern themselves too much with the distribution of the common investment fund. The money is there; the question is when the assets are realised and how they are distributed. I am sure that the process will take its natural course.

There is also the disputed ownership of some assets. Sadly, it is now clear that those disputes will probably end in the courts, will cost a great deal of money in legal fees and, at the end of the day, will be settled. I hope that rightful restitution will ensue from that activity and that the assets will be returned to Maxwell pension fund holders.

There is another matter on which the Government may be able to act. There are already some writs out, but there will be many more on those City institutions which were only too willing to work with Robert Maxwell and take his fees. Some of them are grand institutions, and I am sure that they now wish that Mr. Maxwell had never crossed their path.

They know perfectly well that, if matters are not settled, they will be dragged through the courts and that process will be time-consuming and immensely expensive. Their professional reputations will suffer and some may be fatally flawed as a result of those cases. At some stage soon they may well have an interest in settling, and I hope the Government will keep a watching brief so that, when the minds of those people are concentrated—as Doctor Johnson said, being hanged in the morning concentrates the mind wonderfully, and so does losing one's professional reputation—the Government will act swiftly to bring the parties together.

When they know what the shortfall will be, the Government may consider what small, modest contribution the taxpayer should make, but they should suggest to those professional bodies that the time has come for them to contribute and make good whatever shortfall there is when the recovery process and the legal proceedings have been completed.

I end as I began, by underlining our commitment to the Maxwell pensioners.

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): The hon. Gentleman will recall that I was briefly a member of the Select Committee in the last Parliament. May I ask him just two questions? First, will the Committee keep a watching eye on Maxwell victims who are part of British International Helicopters and who had a particular problem which made them different from other Maxwell victims?

Secondly, in its first report, the Committee suggested that, if the Government did not produce a Bill on occupational pensions, the Committee itself might do so. Is that still the hon. Gentleman's intention?

Mr. Field: I hope that, following the Goode committee, the Government will bring forward its most radical proposals. If not, I hope that they will at least seek to amend those proposals.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point about those caught in the sale of the helicopter company, when the hon. Gentleman was a member of the Select Committee, he was a doughty champion of his and some other Members' constituents, and his intervention underlines that point. However, I understand that the hon. Member for Dover will deal with that point if he is lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I end as I began by focusing our attention on the Maxwell pensioners. Since the House last debated the plight of Maxwell pensioners, a considerable number of them have died. That should concentrate our minds on the task of maintaining pressure and trying to seek settlements without resort to the courts.

We should also expect the Government, who do not have a bad record in protecting the interests of the Maxwell pensioners, not to be frightened by their record but to build on it and, if the timing is right, to try to get those professional organisations which grew fat on fees from Robert Maxwell to pass on some of that fat to rebuilding the pension funds, so that, when we next debate the plight of Maxwell pensioners, it will be in celebration of reaching a conclusion instead of recording that more of them have died awaiting a resolution to their plight.

5.6 pm

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): I have two reasons for speaking in the debate: first, I have been fortunate to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker; and, secondly, my constituency abuts that of Watford, the one-time print centre of the United Kingdom until Robert Maxwell operated upon it, leaving a considerable number of unemployed people and a large number of pensioners. When I heard of his death late in 1991, little did I know the difficulties and the effect that his passing would have not only on me but, more important, on my constituents.

It is ironic that, three months before Robert Maxwell's death, I saw a line diagram of the management structure of the Maxwell empire. I remember thinking that it was a management structure designed for purposes other than ease of management control. Little did I know that within a few months I would be among those trying to unravel where the money had gone. I believe that the behaviour of some British institutions in that affair requires the type of examination to which the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) referred.

The House can imagine my horror and dismay when I found that hundreds of pensioners in my constituency were in danger of having the roof taken from above their heads. When the truth began to filter through, I cursed the man for what he was doing to my constituents. However, now that there is some stability for those pensioners, I can see, perhaps with a little more tolerance, part of the reasoning behind his actions.

It is true that Robert Maxwell was an egotist, a bully and a thug, but I can understand what drove him to try to save his empire. I make that comment because Robert Maxwell is not unique. In future, there will be other Maxwells; I hope that they will not be as big but will be teeny ones. The House should face the fact that other pensioners in other occupational schemes are going short, and will go short, of their pensions because we have not closed the loophole that allows pension funds to be raided in that way.

Fortunately, in this case, a large number of Maxwell pensioners were involved when the shortfall in funds began to show in early 1992. I say "fortunately" because, had there been only a small number of them, the case would not have received the same publicity and they would not have been in the fortunate position that they are in today. They were also fortunate in that Maxwell was a flashy character who commanded plenty of newsprint before and after his departure. But, as I say, other pensioners in other occupational schemes have not been so lucky.

The Government's position is simple, and I understand and support it. They cannot be expected to bail out every pension scheme that goes wrong. It would be morally wrong to use vast sums of taxpayers' money in that way. But in the Maxwell case, with such large numbers descending on the social security services for support—to pay mortgages and make up for lost pensions—more money would have been lost had the Government not contributed.

When I first examined the position of the pensioners, I thought of R. A. Butler. If an hon. Member went to Rab with a problem, one of his first questions always was, "How many of you are there?" If the reply was, "Just me," the chances of achieving a favourable response or a change of Government policy were slim. But a reply such as, "I have a large number of people outside demanding action," focused Rab's mind on the issue in hand.

I admit to being a mere spear-carrier in the great Conservative party. I appreciated early on that, if I was to be of real help in the pensioners' cause, I needed the strength of numbers around me. I did a trawl through the House and was fortunate to persuade more than 70 hon. Members to attend the first Maxwell pensioners' meeting. I thank the hon. Member for Birkenhead for joining me as co-chairman of the group, which helped to make it an all-party affair and to lift it out of the endless possibilities of party bickering that the situation could have engendered. I also appreciate the efforts of other hon. Members who supported my idea of a lifebelt.

I shall not go into the details of the many meetings that took place. I am grateful to the Secretary of State not only for taking up the suggestion that was made in that context but for going much further and setting up the pension units and seconding senior civil servants to enable moneys to be traced. Setting up the Cuckney fund was of great assistance, and I am grateful to Sir John Cuckney and Mr. Ballard, both of whom dealt with some of the trustees of the fund in a more delicate fashion than I did at various stages of the affair.

With the partial distribution of the common investment fund, we have a breathing space, but it is only that and we must look to the future urgently. We cannot relax and say, "We need not worry. Nothing will happen for another two or three years." We must press on with all speed.

Looking to the future and to the position of Government on pensions, it is clear that they face a huge dilemma. A study of the demographic profile of this country reveals an aging population, a subject on which my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) will speak if he has an opportunity to address the House. He has done research and majored on that issue and has expressed much concern about the future.

In 1901, only 17 per cent. of men and 22 per cent. of women lived to be 75. The figures are now 52 and 70 respectively, and it is calculated that the 4 million people involved will grow to 6 million in the next four decades. The numbers aged over 85 will triple in those four decades. *The Daily Mail* today points out that one in five are over 60, an increase of 8 per cent. in 10 years, and that the trend will continue.

The dilemma facing the Government is horrendous. They must persuade as many people as possible to accept the full responsibility of pension payments, getting them into occupational schemes as well as disclaiming financial responsibility for those schemes.

The Government want to get people into occupational schemes for obvious and sensible financial reasons, but surely they have a moral responsibility to ensure that those people are protected. The Government cannot say, "You are now out of the state scheme, into occupational schemes, and on your own." They must accept that, when people are moved from one to the other—let us not forget the contributions of 2 per cent., or whatever the figure was, which encouraged people to move from SERPS to occupational pension schemes—they retain some responsibility.

Some may point to the work of the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, and I agree that it has received some criticism during the Maxwell affair. I fear that it was a stable door closing operation, the horse

[Mr. Richard Page]

having bolted; the door being closed, the remaining horses are locked in the stable. Unfortunately, the horse that got out has caused an immense amount of damage and hardship to pensioners.

We are awaiting the Goode report and cannot predict what it will contain, but it must propose some form of safety net. What I am suggesting is not like a bolt from the blue. There is already in place, for example, the air travel trust. Under that, if people book a package holiday and the airline on which they are to travel fails, there is a £30 million fund to pick up the costs of the failure. That money is made up of a levy on the industry, authorised by the Government. With the recent collapse of the International Leisure Group, a great chunk of that £30 million was absorbed. It is now being rebuilt and the Government are guaranteeing it.

I see no reason why another fund, paid for by the pension companies, should not be established. The levy need not be vast, bearing in mind the billions of pounds that go into occupational pension funds every year. Whatever form it takes, a safety net organisation should be established to pick up the Maxwells of the future to prevent pensioners falling on hard times.

I shall detail only one of the many cases that have come to my attention, literally that of the proverbial little old lady. In no way could she have survived in her house without her pension money. Her small mortgage was coming to an end and she needed money to pay the mortgage if she was to remain in her home.

It is incumbent on the Government to ensure that a scheme is established involving the whole pensions industry. The House has a duty to make sure that, should there be Maxwells in the future, pensioners will be protected.

5.27 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): It is clear to me as I look around the House that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members who will take part in the debate are members of the Select Committee and have therefore developed a certain expertise in the subject. My only expertise comes from frequently meeting many of the Maxwell pensioners who live in Leeds.

Leeds is the home of the former printers, E. J. Arnold, the company which was taken over by Robert Maxwell and which was the basis of the Headington pension fund, one of the funds that is less happy just now. There are also in Leeds a number of other printers who were taken over by Maxwell, but the pensioners in those companies come under the Maxwell works scheme and are more fortunate than their fellows, although they attend the same meetings as pensioners from the Headington scheme.

Those pensioners meet about once a month and I often attend their meetings. I am always struck by the way in which they cannot take for granted the almost everyday matters that we accept as normal. For example, we assume that at the end of the month there will be a salary cheque waiting for us. Most of us also assume that, having put in our claims, we shall receive our travel allowances, and so on. We know that those will come at the end of the month so we do not worry about them.

As Robert Maxwell has been gone for 20 months, but pensions have nevertheless been paid, we might expect pensioners to believe that they will continue to be paid. My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) was right to praise the actions that have been taken to ensure that. However, the Maxwell pensioners are not entirely certain that their pensions will continue to arrive.

That might seem strange, given existing guarantees, but it is not really that strange, because the original £2·5 million that was properly made available is now exhausted and the money is coming from the £6 million that Sir John Cuckney was able to raise through voluntary donations. Obviously, the pensioners can estimate the length of time that that is likely to last before it, too, is exhausted.

Elderly people rely on their pension cheques arriving for the rest of their lives and they need to be reassured that that will happen. Hon. Members concerned about the matter should meet pensioners and talk to them. Indeed, the Minister represents a seat not so far from Leeds—I welcome a Yorkshire Member in the office that he holds—and the Maxwell pensioners would be happy to meet him. Although some things have not gone as they hoped and they have had disappointments, I am sure that they would not shout at him. They would have a sensible discussion about the issues on the table and the best way forward.

The whole community of Leeds have been involved in supporting the Maxwell pensioners. I pay tribute to the work of the Yorkshire newspapers, particularly the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, which continually emphasised the injustice suffered by the pensioners and our obligation to ensure that their pensions were paid.

I pay particular tribute to one blind pensioner in my constituency, Ivy Needham, who leads the Leeds pensioners. When we think of Robert Maxwell and his wealth and of Ivy Needham struggling in her council house in Middleton, it is clear that Ivy is an apt symbol of the injustice that the pensioners have suffered. I knew Ivy before all this arose. She put pressure on me because a class for the blind and partially sighted in a local school faced a rent increase. She certainly let me know what she thought of that. In some ways, the injustice of the events surrounding Robert Maxwell inspired Ivy to lead the Maxwell pensioners, despite her physical handicap.

As the Minister knows, Ivy was recently granted up to £7,500 legal aid for her application to the European Court where, as the symbolic pensioner, she is pursuing a claim against the Government for failing to implement EC directive 80/897, which requires member states to take the steps that are necessary to protect the pensions of former employees of insolvent companies. The legal aid covers the preliminary work needed to establish whether there is a case to be heard.

I believe that it is in the Government's interests that that case is heard. It would be valuable to know whether the directive applies. I regret that the Government are not committed to ensuring that the case is heard so that we can know what judgments will be made. To have knowledge of such judgments would be helpful not just to Ivy Needham, the symbolic pensioner, but to the Select Committee—which, I am sure, would want to see European judgments on the matter—and the Government.

There are one or two matters that I hope will be resolved in today's debate. I recognise that setting up the Maxwell pension unit is an achievement for the Government. The civil servant who heads that unit is leaving—or he may have just left. As he gave good and clear leadership to the unit, I want the Minister to assure

me that the fact that he has returned to his native department does not mean any lessening of the Government's commitment to the work of that unit. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead said, there are tasks still to be carried out. There is a clear co-ordinating job for the unit as the distribution of the Cuckney investment fund is arranged and assets are recovered. The unit's excellent leadership has been especially helpful in that process.

I want the Minister to clarify the position on the state earnings-related pension scheme. We recognise that not having to pay to get back into SERPS is a positive move by the Government, and it should be seen as such. However, people are a little uncertain about when and whether that money will become payable. We need to know what the shortfall will be between the money raised and the money required. The £100 million involved in that is clearly relevant.

We must look at pension funds that are especially disadvantaged. People in Leeds come from two different schemes, so they are able to compare one with the other. The Maxwell pensioners had hoped for a 5 per cent. increase but are to get 3 per cent. When they compare their position with that of pensioners in the other scheme, who are to have no increase, perhaps they will not feel too badly about not getting the full 5 per cent. There should be justice between the schemes and I hope that the Minister will say something about that.

As hon. Members have said, at the end of the day there will be some shortfall. Assets have been identified and there are now mechanisms to ensure that they are recovered. That fact gives some validity to the Government's assertion that had they underwritten the necessary money from the start, that information would not have been discovered and the assets identified and recovered.

It becomes less valid as more information is received. At some point there will be a gap, and I want to be certain that when it is reached, the matter will be positively resolved. I do not want my pensioners, who worry week by week, to continue worrying into the distant future. The time must come when Maxwell pensioners in Leeds will be able to celebrate and to say, "We can stop meeting on the basis that we meet now, because we are assured that our pensions will continue to arrive in the post for as long as we need them."

5.40 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Eleven million people have occupational pensions, and 5 million have personal pensions. That is a major success story and a tremendous achievement by the Government, which has contributed to a true capital-owning democracy, greater security in retirement and a better understanding by many more people of the economic processes by which this country creates wealth.

When the history of the Thatcher and Major Governments is written, people will pay great attention to the fact that so many members of the public were able to increase their ownership of the community by home ownership, pension ownership or other assets.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in the final quarter of 1992, 44,000 owners of personal pensions allowed them to lapse? What will they think when they look back on the age of Thatcherism? They have no personal or occupational pension or SERPS.

Mr. Shaw: There will always be people who, for one reason or another, do not continue their payments. Sadly, many people are oversold individual schemes—but they can obtain restitution under the Financial Services Act 1986. A lapse of 44,000 pensions schemes out of 5 million is not enormously significant—and it occurred at the peak of a recessionary period, when many people may have felt that it was difficult to keep up their payments. I have every confidence that many of them will return to their schemes, and that a large number of them may be members of other schemes anyway. Some people discover that they are in too many schemes and that the Inland Revenue has rules that prohibit that. There are several reasons why membership of schemes is cancelled.

I have not even mentioned the number of people who have life assurance policies and who save through unit trusts. A major change has been achieved and I look forward to the day when the Labour party will join that debate on an equal footing and will welcome that development.

Many of the 16 million pension scheme members have no problems or fears, whether their schemes are personal or occupational. They will pursue worthwhile careers while they save for their years of retirement and will then enjoy many years of happy retirement with no problems. However, members of the Social Security Select Committee recognise that some schemes have problems.

The Select Committee has examined several schemes, including the Harland and Wolff scheme in Northern Ireland, which has problems, and has discussed the Belling and Lucas schemes. The Select Committee is also concerned about the Dormobile scheme, with which I had a particular problem, because a number of my constituents were concerned about a mysterious loan that had been made.

Sadly, some schemes have been brought to the Select Committee's attention and they need careful investigation and review. However, it surely cannot be the long-term role of a Select Committee to become involved in problems of that kind. We must establish a mechanism that allows for problems to be resolved in a better way.

A number of organisations are involved, including the occupational pensions advisory service, and they do the best job that they can in the circumstances. Perhaps the Goode report will recommend that a better way be found of structuring the various advisory bodies and support mechanisms. I hope that the Government will always play an active role in supporting them. Given that there are 16 million pension scheme members, it is incumbent on the Government never to abandon or be accused of abandoning those people, but always to examine better ways of protecting the interests of scheme members and of ensuring that this country's pension system remains one of the best in the world.

The Select Committee began examining occupational pension schemes in general in July 1991. When the Chairman and I began discussing with colleagues our producing a report on occupational schemes, little did we realise that Mr. Maxwell was at that very moment already secretly ripping off his company's pension fund to the tune of £220 million. As our report got under way, that figure was to grow to £450 million. We must have had a sixth

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sense in July 1991. Mr. Maxwell went overboard—jumped overboard, as it would now appear—in November 1991, and within a month it was apparent that the Maxwell fund was encountering serious difficulties. The Select Committee therefore extended its investigations.

Following the Select Committee's initial work in the last Parliament, the Department of Trade and Industry announced that the Mirror Group prospectus would be investigated, and the Government established the Goode committee to investigate aspects of occupational pensions. The Securities and Futures Association—unbeknown to some, but this is now know to all—investigated Goldman Sachs and its role in the Maxwell dealings.

The Investment Management Regulatory Organisation appeared before the Select Committee, and there came to light a number of deficiencies in the way that it had treated the Maxwell companies. As a consequence, IMRO examined its own organisation and the role of its members, and that led to Invesco MIM recently being fined £2 million including costs. There is no question but that, in just those four areas, the Select Committee had a considerable impact on initiating serious examination of some of the problems surrounding the Maxwell affair.

I am delighted with the Government's response to the Select Committee. There is no question but that the action of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security in establishing the Maxwell pension unit displayed remarkable sensitivity in recognising that a serious problem existed that required special attention. That unit has been an incredible success. The Maxwell pension trust, which my right hon. Friend also initiated, has also been enormously successful, with the Government paying its administrative costs, so that it has not been a burden on any pensioners. That trust has helped to raise a considerable amount of money, to ensure that Maxwell pensioners have their legitimate current needs met for the foreseeable future.

The Government's contribution of £2·5 million to support certain pensioners in pension schemes in financial difficulties is an important and compassionate measure that has helped a number of pensioners—including a small number who were direct pensioners of companies that went into liquidation. There was therefore no pension scheme to pay them and they were dependent on those companies' survival. Once the companies went into liquidation, the pensioners were left without any money. The Government's £2·5 million certainly came to their rescue.

More important than anything else, the Government have, in effect, lent £100 million to the Maxwell pension schemes by deferring collection of state scheme premiums. Many of us have difficulty in understanding how it operates, and I will not attempt to explain the complexities of that particular transaction. It is one that, even as an accountant, I find difficult to follow; it is very intricate. There is no doubt that the Maxwell pensioners have benefited a great deal from collection being deferred and that there is no interest payable.

Mr. Frank Field: It is worth putting on record the fact that both the hon. Gentleman and I have sounded sycophantic when talking about the Government. That is because the Government did many of the things that we asked them to do.

Mr. Shaw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, as an Opposition Member, for pointing that out. It is a delight that hon. Members on both sides of the House recognise that there has been an all-party move on this issue to keep it off the main political agenda. Inevitably, there are differing political views about certain aspects and individuals involved, but there has been tremendous cross-party agreement. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) made great efforts, together with the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and myself, to avoid getting to a point where the Maxwell pensioners lost because of political wrangling.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is considerable concern—particularly among the deferred pensioners involved in the Maxwell schemes—that the Government's intention might be to postpone premium and interest payments only until the pension funds are able once again to meet their liabilities to pensioners currently in receipt of pensions, rather than until the schemes are able to cope with their liabilities to deferred pensioners? It would be reassuring to many of the deferred pensioners, including those whom I represent, if the Government responded generously this evening.

Mr. Shaw: I commend that course to my hon. Friend the Minister. We welcome him to the Front Bench for his first major debate on this issue, which I hope will be one of many—although not too many!

My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) makes a strong point about deferred pensioners. There will be considerable concern if the Government cannot find a way of bridging the gap. The Committee has increasing confidence that that can be done, if the institutions that have done wrong meet their commitments to make restitution. Moreover, because of the various events that have taken place with the pension funds, the Committee feels that it might be possible to reconstruct the position and enable much of what has been lost to be recovered. That can be achieved, as my hon. Friend has pointed out, only if we get to a point where the Government can ensure that there is enough support in the intervening period.

I hope that the institutions that are to blame will come forward, in the not too distant future, and recognise their responsibility. That would ensure that the public-purse commitment would not continue for long. We have to consider the many other pensioners, the many disabled and other people who need help from the public purse. If the institutions and companies involved with Mr. Maxwell have done wrong, they should be made to pay out soon. We could then get on with the business of government and Parliament and ensure that the £300 billion a year of public spending goes to those in need, and not to finance those financial institutions that may have done wrong.

I am particularly concerned about two pension schemes. One is the Maxwell Communication Corporation works pension scheme, and the other is the British Island Helicopters pension scheme. My hon. Friends the Members for Waveney (Mr. Porter) and for St. Ives (Mr. Harris)—both former members of the Select Committee—have taken considerable interest in that matter during the last year and a half.

Those two schemes are in a terrible position. Mirror Group Newspapers issued a prospectus that said, in paragraph 3(a) of the accountant's report, that the works

scheme would be incorporated into the Mirror Group Newspapers pension scheme. The prospectus was issued in April 1991; by the time Mr. Maxwell had jumped overboard in November 1991, a commitment to the board of directors, in a prospectus—a doctrine issued under the Companies Act—had not been carried out. That is an appalling state of affairs for someone like myself who has been involved in the issuing of prospectuses; it is appalling that a commitment should have been given and, many months later, not been carried out.

There is no doubt that the directors of Mirror Group Newspapers—many of whom are still directors—must address the issue of meeting the commitment in the prospectus, or should resign and cease to hold any public or corporate office in the land. They are unfit to be directors of public companies—as Mr. Maxwell was described—if they cannot meet the commitment in the prospectus.

There is also an appalling situation with British Island Helicopters. Mr. Maxwell said that he would bring those pensioners into the Mirror Group Newspapers scheme, and in that instance he did so. There was a substantial liability, therefore, to pay pensions to British Island Helicopters employees. What has happened is that the old Mirror Group Newspapers scheme has effectively been closed and a new scheme started, but the British Island Helicopters members are not included in the new scheme.

A clear commitment was made by Mirror Group Newspapers and its pension fund to British Island Helicopters' members. There is clearly a moral commitment, even if legal devices enable the fund to get out of it. It is totally unsatisfactory that an existing legal and moral commitment like that could be avoided by closing down an old scheme and opening a new one.

I turn now to the issue of whistleblowing and corporate governance. As I said at the beginning of my speech, this has cost the Government money. The Government have, compassionately, come up with money, but they should not have had to do so. If the Maxwell empire had been properly run—and the people who know about the irregularities in it had spoken at an earlier stage—we would not have had this problem.

Deborah Maxwell is no relation to any of the Maxwell family—it is coincidental that she has that name—but she is a solicitor, a member of the Law Society, and on 19 November 1990 she wrote three memoranda. Having read the memoranda, I think that she is a very competent solicitor, with considerable skills and abilities.

In one memorandum, Deborah Maxwell points out that there are implications in the share dealing involving MCC shares that concern the takeover code. She refers to stock exchange compliance in relation to family private companies and their shareholdings in public companies and also to section 134 in part VI of the Companies Act 1985, which deals with the 3 per cent. disclosure rules in regard to shareholdings in public companies. She mentions that there had been a panel ruling in relation to Maxwell family companies and their concert-party relationships, and she refers to the put option by Goldman Sachs and the notification to the stock exchange of the implications arising from that put option. That was a substantive and well-produced memorandum.

A second memorandum states:

"The failure to disclose this holding could have consequences under section 47 of the Financial Services Act 1986, a copy of which I attach. This concerns, inter alia, the making of misleading statements to and the concealment of any material facts from the investment community."

The memorandum goes on to state:

"Trevor Cook has I believe advised you separately on the IMRO aspects of this holding . . . The other matter of this which you must be satisfied about is that the trustees of BIM"—

Bishopsgate Investment Management—

"have properly carried out their duties, inter alia, to act in the best interests of the various pensions funds in making these investment decisions."

Deborah Maxwell was querying whether investment decisions were being made properly by the trustees of BIM, or whether investment decisions were being made by Maxwell in his personal or family interest.

The third memorandum states:

"Following my conversation with Robert Maxwell on Saturday, it has as you know been agreed that, with effect from today, I am relieved of any compliance responsibilities in relation to BIM and MCC generally.

I am attaching two files relating respectively to the private holdings in MCC (the family and the Maxwell Foundation)" —

in Liechtenstein, of course—

"and BIM's holding in MCC. Each file has a summary on top to show the present status. I will tomorrow let you have such other files as I keep relating to other companies in which BIM owns shares.

I recommend that you give the BIM file to Trevor Cook who is already up to date with the position. I consider that the MCC private side holdings file should go to Robert Bunn who knows all the background information and has up to date details."

Those are three very good memoranda. They are clear and to the point. As I have just shown, in the third memo, Deborah Maxwell gave up her duties. She resigned. Hon. Members may be sad to know that, according to another memorandum, when she resigned she moved down the corridor and was given a salary increase of some £75,000 a year. She was also paid £50,000 in cash for leaving her job as compliance officer. She used £40,000 cash to repay her mortgage with the building society.

Hon. Members will no doubt be concerned that this person, who on 19 November 1990—a year before Mr. Maxwell jumped overboard—had substantial knowledge about the fact that Mr. Maxwell, in a host of areas, was potentially breaking the law or breaking City codes and regulations, had received a substantial sum and ceased her duties when whistleblowing could have occurred. It is a great tragedy for the pensioners, who, in the end, have lost many hundreds of millions of pounds, that £50,000 managed to secure her silence in a way that could have been critical in the circumstances.

We should not blame Deborah Maxwell alone. There were many other potential whistleblowers who could have prevented the enormous cost that the Government have incurred in helping the Maxwell pensioners. A number of directors of MCC knew of the problems. Sadly, they did not know of much else. I have seen the board minutes of that corporation. It is difficult to envisage what the board thought was the business of MCC. I understood that it was publishing, but the board minutes show no reference to publishing. All one can see is a number of transactions with banks as Mr. Maxwell was rapidly renegotiating his loans.

As I have said, we know that Deborah Maxwell knew. We also know that Goldman Sachs had immense knowledge of the Maxwell empire. It knew that he was a desperate man from the way in which he was structuring

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his deals. It knew that he was short of cash and was involved in strange deals. It knew that there was a severe risk of a false market developing for MCC shares. Indeed, many people believe that there was a false market. We also know that Lord Donoughue knew of irregularities involving stock lending.

There were many more who knew about problems in the Maxwell empire because there were many resignations in Maxwell companies in the last two years. In many instances, the money involved, as with Deborah Maxwell, was only £50,000. In other instances, people received £100,000. In the Maxwell empire, £100,000 here or £100,000 there was nothing if it secured silence. It was £250,000 that secured the silence of Lord Donoughue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker. (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman is probably aware that he must not criticise Members of the other place.

Mr. Shaw: It has been difficult. I have tried merely to state fact and avoid criticism. A payment of £250,000 was made and, in the view of many, it did secure silence.

Occasionally, the sums involved were greater than £250,000. Jean-Pierre Anselmimi, as far as one can make out from documentation, knew virtually everything that went on in the Maxwell empire up to his resignation. It took £300,000 to buy his silence.

My final point concerns restitution. Who will pay back the pensioners' money? Enough information about wrongdoing is now emerging. I do not think that we need to see a trial next year in order to establish whether serious wrongdoing has occurred. Common sense shows that there has been some wrongdoing by some parties who must, in many instances, remain nameless for the purposes of this debate and for legal reasons.

The Government have committed no wrong. As I said earlier, they have bent over backwards to try to assist in different ways. The reality is that private individuals and the private sector have failed the Maxwell pensioners. There is no justification for public expenditure being taken away from important Government programmes in order to continue bailing out those involved in this affair and so that some institutions and private individuals can be let off the hook. The City firms that failed in their duties in their enthusiasm to do business with Maxwell, and the private individuals who were directors of his companies and took large sums of money on resignation simply because they knew too much, must make their contributions to restitution for the pensioners.

I believe that a list should be prepared showing all those involved. Contributions should be invited and every lawful method should be used to ensure that contributions are made. It may be that the largest contribution should be £100 million. Many hon. Members know what sort of financial institution should be contributing at that level. Smaller contributions should also be made, right down to £50,000 or so from some private individuals who have benefited enormously from the Maxwell pension problems.

I hope that the Government will do everything that they can to continue to help the pensioners. I hope that they will take a particular interest in the plight of the MCC works pensioners and the British Island Helicopters pensioners, who have particular problems, even worse than those of many others. I hope that we are not far away from a resolution—perhaps on the second anniversary, or just before it, of Mr. Maxwell going overboard—to this awful and appalling problem that has upset so many people in their pension years.

6.9 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I apologise to the House, and especially to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), for being a little late. I was hosting a reception for Deaf Accord, which overran slightly. I did not hear everything that the hon. Gentleman had to say but I heard some. As other hon. Members have done, I thank him for the work that he has done since the sad story broke and I also thank the Select Committee on Social Security for the progress that it has made.

May I reverse the sycophancy and say that, although it is good to witness the hon. Gentleman's good nature in his thanking the Government for their response, the House must nevertheless be grateful to him for his work and for ensuring that the arguments were presented in a way that would secure that response. I shall not break the spirit of all-party accord, but I believe that the Government have a little more responsibility for certain aspects of the matter than has been acknowledged.

I pick up where the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) left off. He spoke of those who should contribute to reinstating the Maxwell pension fund. It is deeply disappointing that the City of London appears to have lost sight of just how much damage has been done to its interests, and that it has shown so little concern about what it could and should do to repair that damage.

In the last Parliament, I was a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, which compiled a report on financial services and the single market. We travelled to the main European financial centres such as Paris, Madrid, Milan and Frankfurt. There was no doubt that the credibility of British financial institutions had been deeply undermined by the Maxwell experience. That was especially so in Germany, where we have had considerable difficulty in getting our way of managing pension funds accepted. If the Germans had their way, our system would not be admitted in the European Community.

I acknowledge that considerable benefits have accrued from the way in which the reputable life and pension institutions in the City of London make a pound work much harder than almost any other comparable institutions in the world. We do not want to lose that, so I wish to make it clear that my remarks are not designed to undermine those institutions, although I suppose that one could argue—and the Germans surely would argue—that, if our pension administration followed their law, the Maxwell case could not have arisen.

We must complete the reform of our pension fund law to ensure that such an occurrence is almost impossible in the future. If we can achieve that, we might eventually be able to ensure that the pensioners who have been defrauded will receive full compensation, including contributions from the City. I accept that the Government should not jump straight in and pay for the consequences of fraud, but on behalf of the pensioners I am obliged to say that, although the bit-by-bit access to funds is better than nothing and although it ensures that the day-to-day bills can be paid, it does not make for a long, happy and

planned retirement. It seriously undermines the plans that many people had for their retirement, and we can all have a great deal of sympathy for people in that situation.

Mr. Page: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about the mental processes of pensioners who are wondering where the next penny will come from, but does he accept that it is incumbent on the unit to ensure that the money was supplied only to the various pension funds when it was needed—in other words, to continue to apply pressure on to reach a decision, because some were not over-hasty in, for example, resolving the common investment fund allocations?

Mr. Bruce: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, but individual pensioners are still left in a difficult position. Such pressure was regrettably necessary to produce some results.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is important that one of the messages that goes out to the pensioners from this debate is one of reassurance that the House is ultimately determined to ensure that restitution in full is made but that we are also adamant that payment, as far as possible in full, must be made by those who made mistakes or were responsible for wrongdoing?

Mr. Bruce: I entirely agree. Having had numerous meetings with Ministers, I understand their difficulty in saying that in such terms although I think that many would like to. All we can ask is that they say nothing that undermines the sentiment that the hon. Gentleman has expressed.

The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) referred to members of pension schemes with annual reviews but no guaranteed increase. I have been contacted on their behalf, and I understand that more than 1,000 people are members of two or three such schemes. Following on from what I said earlier, it is understood that getting a payment is better than not getting a payment, but their concern is that, had the money not been stolen, they could reasonably have been assured that they would have received at least a cost of living rise every year for the foreseeable future.

For those who retired recently and perhaps took early retirement, the thought that their pension is fixed for the next 20 or 30 years, if they live that long, or even for 15 or 20 years, is a further worry. I therefore hope that full restitution might include returning to those people the money that they might reasonably have expected to get from the fund if it had not been stolen. I have been asked to make that suggestion to the House.

I echo the points made about deferred pensioners. There appear to be different views. The claim that the £100 million to which the Secretary of State referred is effectively an interest free loan cannot be squared, but the issue was raised in an intervention. I am sure that the Minister has taken note, and I merely want to reinforce the point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) has members of three different former Maxwell schemes in his constituency and has asked to be associated with my remarks. He has been active on their behalf and has made representations to try to ensure that they get full refund of that to which they are entitled.

My particular point of constituency interest has already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Dover. I do not mean to criticise him in his absence, but the correct name of the firm to which he referred is British International Helicopters, not British Island Helicopters. The firm has its headquarters in my constituency. I have been very much involved with the company—more involved than I might have wished—since it was sold by British Airways.

When selling the company, British Airways' management behaved dishonestly and despicably towards its work force. The management, especially the then chairman and the current chief executive and chairman—I do not need to name them because everyone knows who they are—treated members of all parties with absolute contempt.

They convened a meeting shortly after I was elected. They invited me, the then hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, Sir Albert McQuarrie who was a Conservative, and the present hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes). In front of an audience of several hundred employees, they asked us to campaign for the Nott assurances to be implemented and for British Airways to be privatised as a single entity, specifically on behalf of the work force of British International Helicopters.

Before the ink on the privatisation agreement was dry, we discovered that the management were in secret negotiations to sell the company, initially to a Mr. Meade—a person at least as disreputable as, if not more so than, the person to whom it ultimately was sold. I managed to blow the whistle on that deal when I heard about it, because I happened to be due to ask the Prime Minister a parliamentary question that day, and the negotiations were broken off 24 hours after the matter was raised during Prime Minister's questions. According to information brought to my attention more recently, Ministers had intervened to say that that sale should not go through.

That is a pertinent point. Hon. Members with a particular interest in British International Helicopters have had numerous meetings with Ministers, and we believe not only that the employees have been appallingly treated, but that the Government have a responsibility rather different from any responsibility that they may have for the other companies.

Basically, the Government gave their approval to the sale to Robert Maxwell, whom they had previously designated as a person unfit to run a public company. I am sure that the Minister is already aware of the fact, but I should like to make it clear to him that the hon. Members apart from myself who have a constituency interest in the company include the hon. Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), for Waveney (Mr. Porter), and for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), the hon. Members for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) and for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) and the Secretary of State for Transport. So it certainly is an all-party group.

I do not expect the Minister to acknowledge the belief that the Government have a moral responsibility arising out of the sale—indeed, some of his colleagues have refused to accept that. Nevertheless, everyone in the all-party group believes that that moral responsibility exists. That is not simply a personal view of mine. The hon. Member for St. Ives, in particular, has vigorously expressed the same view.

The hon. Member for Dover has to some extent brought us up to date on the way in which the Mirror Group has treated BIH pensioners. Those pensioners were

[Mr. Bruce]

induced by an agreement between Maxwell and British Airways to transfer from the British Airways pension fund to the Mirror Group pension fund. They then contributed to the Mirror Group fund, and the day that Robert Maxwell fell overboard the company went into administration because of the way it had been managed. I should like to put on record the fact that the company has been bought out by its management and staff and is now trading successfully. Nevertheless, not only those people's pensions but their entire livelihoods were put at risk. Indeed, a number of them lost their jobs.

I find it breathtaking that the directors and management of the Mirror Group can simply expel a group of people from the pension fund with impunity. I read with some interest the exchanges between the hon. Member for Dover and the chairman of the trustees, Mr. Colin Cornwall, and the brittleness of the atmosphere comes through even on the printed page. I have met Mr. Cornwall, and I appreciate his compromised position, but I am concerned by the fact that he felt unable to speak out in a more forthright way as a trustee of the original fund.

In response to the question asked by the hon. Member for Dover in the Select Committee, Mr. Cornwall said that the decision effectively to freeze the old scheme and to set up a new scheme to which the employees were not party "was a decision of MGN. The trustees really had no status in the matter of who should or who should not be eligible for the Past Service Scheme . . . we simply are not in a position to bandy words with MGN, which has the sole control over who is and who is not admitted in their Past Service Scheme". That may be the literal and legal truth, but in terms of moral justice it is an outrageous position for the trustees to have taken. I certainly hope that it may yet be possible to resolve the matter without recourse to the courts, but legal action is still not ruled out.

At a meeting between the all-party group and the present Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), who was then a Minister responsible for social security, it was suggested that we might try to secure arbitration. Sir John Cuckney was approached, but he felt unable to arbitrate.

I have been told that representatives of the BIH pensioners have now briefed officials of the Maxwell pension unit on their legal claims, and we are now waiting to see whether that will secure some kind of mediation. The legal claims being made by BIH staff against the Mirror Group and its professional advisers have been shown to me and, although I am not a qualified lawyer, they seem to me to have a strong legal case. They certainly believe that they have.

I repeat that the moral responsibility seems to me incontrovertible, and I should regard it as most regrettable if the case had to go to court. I hope that we may be able to secure some justice, and anything that the Minister can do behind the scenes to bring that about would be much appreciated by all the parties involved in and concerned about BIH. I repeat my belief that the Government have more responsibility here than they have for some of the other schemes.

Arthur Andersen, which acted as the administrator for BIH, has accepted liability under section 58(b), covering contracting back into SERPS, and the negotiation concerns only the size of that liability. The firm has approached the Inland Revenue because the Revenue is a preferred creditor in the liquidation of BIH, ahead of the trustees, and there is an £11 million corporation tax bill. The firm has asked the Revenue to allow payment, once the figure is decided, to be tax deductible.

The current position is that the Revenue has said: "tax credits, having been given once, cannot be repeated". The sources in BIH to whom I have been talking say that they understand that argument, and that in normal circumstances they would accept it, but that if the Government could re-assess the matter, that would be of enormous assistance in enabling the transition to take place. I know that such a procedure would be exceptional, but I argue that the Government's involvement is exceptional, and it would be a gesture that might help to move the matter forward.

Each debate that we have had in the House and in the Committees has enabled us to secure progress. I am grateful for the cross-party nature of the support and for the constructive attitude of Ministers. Even if the questions that I have asked cannot be answered in a forthright manner at the Dispatch Box today, I hope that they will be taken fully on board, and that ultimately we shall be able to ensure that every pensioner who has been affected will have his or her rights fully restored.

6.28 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I begin by congratulating the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security, on which I serve, on the way in which he has conducted the Committee's deliberations on this subject. Many members of the Select Committee, of all party loyalties, are surprised that the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) is not yet the leader of the Labour party. If he ever gets fed up with waiting for that distinguished post, the outstanding way in which he has conducted our investigations into the Maxwell affair over the past two years suggests that he would make an ideal candidate to run the Serious Fraud Office, which clearly needs improved management. The training and expertise that the hon. Gentleman has developed in investigating fraud make him the ideal man to take on that responsibility.

I am a layman in such debates. I have no accountancy or legal expertise, so some of the arguments and investigations of the tangled affairs of Mr. Maxwell have been beyond me. Three or four points, however, emerged strongly from the Committee hearings.

First, I was surprised at how easy it is in the City simply to transfer securities from one holder to another and from one physical location to another. Because so many securities are bearer certificates—there is no stamp on them saying who they belong to or what organisation claims their ownership—it seems to be possible to pick them up, carry them somewhere else and claim to own them, or to dispose of them. That surprised me.

Secondly, I was surprised by the way in which apparently elementary tricks, such as calling one firm BIM, Bishopsgate Investment Management, and another BIT, Bishopsgate Investment Trust, makes it possible to shuffle shares around with no one noticing what is being done, because BIT and BIM look so similar on a transaction document. Robert Maxwell did not need to develop extraordinary accountancy skills to carry out some of his frauds. Elementary techniques of that kind were used.

Thirdly, it appears that the regulatory organisations let Maxwell pensioners down. The Investment Management Regulatory Organisation has already accepted some responsibility. Many of us have been rather surprised at the narrow role that the Occupational Pensions Board has played in the affair. I hope that the Goode committee—an ingenious and suitable name—will examine the possibility of establishing a new regulatory authority to supervise pension funds. However, any new organisation that is established must displace an existing one. It would be a pity if there were a multiplicity of organisations.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I have just joined the debate, having been about my duties in other parts of the House, and I shall intervene only briefly. Committee members will know that, by nature, people who have retired are getting older and worry more and more, once they have retired, about their pensions going wrong. Does my hon. Friend think it a good idea, not only that there should be an ombudsman, but that there should be a system whereby pensioners could appeal, for example, to special commissioners? They could then give evidence and at least get that worry off their chest and into the open.

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend's suggestion is an interesting one, which I hope that the Minister will consider and perhaps deal with in his speech.

My final observation about the investigation of the Maxwell affair is simply on the extraordinary cost of professional fees, which are clocking up at a very high rate. That is an additional argument to the many already advanced in our debate for a negotiated settlement, which does not involve years of elaborate wranglings in the courts. I understand that many of the organisations involved are ready for a negotiated settlement, but a problem has arisen because of insurance entitlements. Many insurance companies will pay out only if a final legal case has resolved liability. I hope that Sir John Cuckney —who has made such a distinguished contribution to solving those problems—is able to solve that one as well.

There is a danger of these debates—we have fallen into that trap a little today—ending with exchanges of mutual admiration in which different members of the Select Committee agree on how marvellously it has done. So I was thinking of something controversial and outrageous to say.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Uncharacteristically so.

Mr. Willetts: I thank my hon. Friend for that. I was thinking of saying something uncharacteristically outrageous and controversial.

We have better prospects for a sensible pensions policy in this country than almost every other advanced western country.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Outrageous.

Mr. Willetts: Yes. What an outrageous remark. I was afraid that it would stir up dispute.

I was very surprised by the remarks made by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who committed the classic Liberal Democratic assumption that it is all better in Germany; they have all got it sorted out on the continent. We heard eloquent praise of how German pension regulation would have made the Maxwell affair impossible here.

However, the extraordinarily high self-investment in the German system is shocking, with company pension funds investing in the companies for which the employees work. That is one reason why Germany does not have a healthy takeover market for its firms. The only way in which they can manage to run the risks of self-investment is by pension funds insuring against the risk that the company in which they invest does not go bankrupt.

Such insurance is only possible in a stable economic environment. It will be interesting to observe, as Germany goes into deep recession, whether the insurance premiums that German pensioners have to pay rise and whether that forces a change in the behaviour of German pension funds, by opening up German capital markets so that they more closely resemble those in Britain and America. We have a healthy system of properly funded private pension arrangements, which is much better than in most other advanced countries.

Secondly, the public sector has avoided making the bogus promises that have brought state social security arrangements into such disrepute in many other countries. We have not been trapped in the seductive politics, but dangerous economics, of the chain letter, which has bedevilled state pension arrangements in other countries. Ending the link between the basic pension and earnings and linking it solely with prices has been crucial.

Thirdly, in this country we do not face the dramatic demographic change that is in prospect for some other advanced western nations. Although there will be an increase in the number of old-age pensioners in the 21st century, I think that it is manageable. I do not think that it is, of itself, a reason for crisis measures.

The Government surely should base their approach to pensions policy on the fundamental principle that we in the Conservative party believe that it is best that claims on future resources should be registered in the form of private contracts wherever possible. I appreciate that one could not imagine that slogan on the blue baize of the Conservative party conference platform—it might need to be put rather more crisply—but it is a fundamental principle.

It is better if people's claims on the resources on which they are to live in retirement can be registered through the ownership of private assets—through their personal pensions, savings or occupational pensions. That is more reliable than relying on the state's promise that it will tax future generations to pay for pensions.

Mr. Frank Field: The hon. Gentleman promised that he would be controversial. At what part of his speech will that start?

Mr. Willetts: One of the other pleasures of serving under the hon. Member for Birkenhead on the Social Security Select Committee is that occasionally he comes up with ideas so radical and imaginative that we Conservative members find ourselves acting the role of the boring old greybeards. I know that we have in prospect an exciting pamphlet for him on pensions policy, which may be an example of that.

Mr. Page: If my hon. Friend wants to be controversial, I find some of his remarks extremely controversial. His laid-back approach towards the demographic profile is unwise and unjustified. If I were him, I would be exceedingly careful about projecting that profile as a solution to our future.

Mr. Willetts: I will not detain the House with a learned debate on the nature of the demographic change confronting the country. Suffice it to say that, in the 1960s and 1970s, we had an age-dependency ratio rather worse than the average for OECD countries. In the next century, we face the prospect of an age-dependency ratio rather better than that in other advanced OECD countries. That subject is obviously being discussed at the G7 summit this week, and quite rightly so. Anything that can be done to shift the burden of pension provision from the public to the private sector makes sense, but we do not face the sort of demographic crisis which confronts countries such as Japan.

I hope that, in his concluding remarks, the Minister will range also into the wider aspects of the debate on occupational pensions. We look forward with keen anticipation to his first speech from the Dispatch Box—the first of many, no doubt. As occupational pension provision is covered by the estimate, I hope that he will give a signal to the occupational pension industry, which is seeking clear guidance on what will happen to the pension age.

Almost all experts agree that the case for equalising the pension age at 65 is unassailable. That is widely accepted. I have not come across a single expert on social policy who, if he were given £3 billion by Father Christmas, would spend it on pensions for men aged 60 to 65. That is not a sensible priority. It is much more sensible to move towards a higher equal pension age of 65 for women. That is the trend in other advanced western countries and I hope that we shall participate in that trend.

I hope also that there will be progress on establishing an age-related bonus for people who opt out of the state earnings-related pension scheme. To achieve success in encouraging people to opt out of SERPS and to take out personal pensions, a sensible framework of incentives is required. That means that the incentives have to be age-related. I hope that we shall hear more on the encouragement of personal pensions.

I am concerned that the personal pension regime will experience the same difficulties as the Government's policy on share ownership. They had enormous success in spreading share ownership more widely, but insufficient success in making that share ownership deep. Similarly, the Government have had enormous success in increasing the take-up of personal pensions—5 million new personal pensions have been taken out. But those personal pensions need to be substantial. They need to be deep and valuable investments. That means encouraging employers wherever possible to contribute to personal pensions.

I have been told by people in the industry that, at the moment, group personal pensions, which would provide the right incentive for employers to contribute to personal pension arrangements, are virtually impossible to organise in Britain because of the absurd regulations under the Financial Services Act 1986. It would be marvellous if encouragement could be given to group personal pensions as a way of ensuring that personal pension provision was deep as well as wide.

I hope that the important connection between the occupational pension provision and the tax regime will be recognised in this debate. Having served for several years as the Chancellor's PPS, the Minister is in an ideal position —I can see him perking up—to have a broad view and to bring together the fundamental considerations of tax policy and those of pensions policy.

Is it right, for example, that tax rules oblige people when they retire to take the full income from their occupational pension immediately? There might be a lot of sense in allowing people to take a rather lower income initially and to continue to accumulate savings in their pension scheme so that if later they need nursing home provision or greater social services provision, they can take a higher pension. I hope that, in his keenly awaited debut, the Minister will be able to address some of those questions.

6.42 pm

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): As my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) will confirm, I am too new a Member of the House to remember the beginning of the Select Committee's review of pensions. When I joined the Committee last October, many months of work had already been completed.

First, let me echo the welcome that has been given to the establishment of the pension law review committee, which I suspect has given rise to a sense of relief among those serving on the Select Committee. Had the Government not accepted the case for the establishment of that committee and had we been committed to doing the work ourselves, I for one would have felt many years older by now.

I have been comforted by the fact that members and non-members of the Select Committee alike have confessed to finding the subject complex. I enjoyed our interview with Sir Peter Webster two days ago. Sir Peter was able to tell us little—in fact, he came to tell us how little he could tell us, as it is in the nature of his job as mediator that he shares confidential information with the parties between whom he is mediating—but he did tell us that this was the most complicated affair that he had encountered.

I may not feel any less at sea, but it is a comfort to know that others also feel at sea in this very complicated affair. I commend Sir Peter's appointment as a mediator. I wish him success in his endeavours, and I feel that his role will be vital in persuading those who hold disputed assets to seek resolution of the disputes rather than allowing the matter to drag on in the courts.

The criminal aspects of the affair have greatly curtailed the work of the Select Committee and have caused us problems. I shall not refer to those aspects except to say that, as a member of the Select Committee, I am very concerned about costs. Thousands of hours are being spent by lawyers, receivers and administrators and their support staff on work that is clearly essential, and it is worth putting on record the real fear that the money being recovered on behalf of the various creditors—not just the pensioners—is being quickly eroded. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead explained, he estimates that the figure will reach £50 million. I think that that is a conservative estimate, although I hope that it will not greatly exceed that.

There are one or two people who regularly attend our open sessions, whose faces tell their own story—I refer to the representatives of the pensioners, who listen carefully to the comments of those whom we interview. I can see Mr. Ken Trench—the chairman of the Mirror Pensioners Action Group—in the Gallery, listening carefully to our debate.

We interviewed representatives of Price Waterhouse, Robson Rhodes, Buchler Phillips and Arthur Andersen—the four agencies referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead. We know the fees that are being charged by those four reputable and highly thought-of companies—fees no doubt commensurate with their standing—and I get the impression that the pensioners are not yet convinced that the labourers are worthy of their hire.

The people representing those four agencies must be able to demonstrate not just to the Select Committee but to the pensioners that the work that they are doing justifies the costs that they are bringing in this case. They have some way to go in doing that, although I particularly commend the representatives of Arthur Andersen, who have impressed me by the openness of their approach and their readiness to share with us the details of their work.

As a member of the Select Committee, my second concern is about the recovery process being undertaken in relation to Maxwell Communications Corporation. It became clear that the Law Debenture Corporation, as trustees for the pensioner group, is not being given observer status on the creditors' committee.

I accept that there is not an organised conspiracy among the other creditors to keep the pensioners' representatives off the committee; however, the thought that, in trading the millions and millions of pounds worth of debt related to this whole sorry affair, major banks—including Barclays and banks in America—are swapping places on the creditors' committee at a time when representatives of the pensioners cannot participate in it, leaves me with a bad taste in my mouth. I hope that that can be rectified in the near future.

I should like to touch on the situation in the north-west, where almost every constituency has pensioners or deferred pensioners who are affected, either directly through the Mirror Group or through the hundreds of other companies that Maxwell bought up.

As a member of the Select Committee on Social Security, I put on record my thanks to those hon. Members of all parties in the north-west who have worked to represent pensioners, although few pensioners in my constituency were affected. I am grateful to other hon. Members for the knowledge and expertise that they have brought to this matter.

I do not wish to score a political point, but Robert Maxwell did not lay the ground rules as to how pension funds could be raided. I hope that the Government will take that on board in their dealings with the pension funds of the state enterprises that they currently own and are considering privatising.

6.50 pm

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I would describe myself as one of the lay members of the original Maxwell pensioners group of Members of Parliament. More than 100 of us were active immediately the situation arose. Since then, much work has been done, particularly by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and by my hon. Friends the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) and for Dover (Mr. Shaw). On behalf of my constituents, I should like to thank them for their continuing work and assiduous approach.

I have a number of pensioners from a variety of Maxwell companies who were subjected to his blandishments, not only through written submissions to them when he took over their companies, but by his video film, which encouraged them to think that he, of all people, would look after them from the cradle to the grave. They faced an appalling situation and there has been real progress since those early days by the Government and the agencies that they established to deal with the problem. I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on that action.

Many points have been well covered in the debate and I shall not go over them again except to emphasise what has already been said: that the standing of the City took a terrible beating by the Maxwell example and it behoves the City to continue to play a full part in righting that wrong. The standing of particular companies in the City also took a beating, as did that of individuals. I support the strictures of my hon. Friend the Member for Dover concerning individuals who should not be running companies where they clearly carried out wrongdoing over the Maxwell pensions.

Equally, in addressing the broader issue of pensions, it is important that, ultimately, the independence of more trustees on pension funds from the companies whose pensions they are running is established. It is difficult for staff representatives, for example, or company directors, who may also be pension trustees, to stand up against even more powerful people in a company who may wish to take action that is not correct in pension terms. I ask for a better balance in trustees.

I used to work for Hambro's bank. All of us, as prospective pensioners, were grateful for the good offices of the senior people there who were trustees of the fund, because they handled it extremely well. We want to keep them doing that, but we also need to take action to deal with those who may not handle pensions properly. That needs to be covered for the future.

As I said in an intervention, hon. Members cannot rest easy until all those pensioners receive restitution in full for what they are owed. By that, I mean not only current pensions, but pensions in the future. The roll-up of interest would have enabled those pension funds to keep pace with increases in the cost of living, or other commitments that those pensions had in them when people joined them in terms of improvements over the years. These are big targets to achieve, but I believe that, on the progress achieved so far, their achievement is not out of our reach.

I congratulate the Government on their action so far. I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister who is to make his first contribution on this important issue. I hope that he will prove to us that the Maxwell pensioners' future will be safe in his hands and those of his right hon. and hon. Friends.

6.55 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I shall resist the temptation to be sycophantic towards the Government. That will not be difficult because, with the exception of the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), Conservative Members have spoken with an air of complacency and self-satisfaction which is misplaced.

The hon. Member for Havant valuably suggested that the demographic time bomb will not be as great as expected. At most, it will occur for a 10-year period, and after that there will be no problem. But that demographic

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

time bomb was the reason that the Government degraded SERPS. The Maxwell pensioners, the deferred Maxwell pensioners and everyone else are now in considerable peril. The great problem is that the Select Committee's report might well dissuade people from some of the advantages of occupational pensions and put them into the difficult waters of personal pension schemes.

Conservative Members have boasted about the 5 million in those schemes. When 4 million were in the schemes a distinguished actuary, Bryn Davies, said that at least 1 million had been persuaded against their financial interests and they should opt back into SERPS. Neither the Government nor anyone else will advise them on that.

The situation is far worse today. I gave examples of those who have not kept up their contributions. We know about only a tiny group in one quarter of last year who had been in schemes for fewer than two years. Of them, 44,000 have allowed their schemes to lapse. They have no personal pension scheme, no SERPS and no occupational scheme. They can look forward to the future with fear.

Choice is a fine thing, but it means nothing unless one can make an informed choice. It is virtually impossible to make the choices that are necessary now. On joining a personal pension scheme, the first matter to consider is age. Generally, a lower age should be a great advantage. Last week, the distinguished firm of actuaries Bacon and Woodrow produced the valuable expert calculation that the pivotal age was 47 for men and 39 for women. Even more valuably, it went through what advice was on offer from the insurance companies. That varied from 40 to 52 for men and 30 and 47 for women. That means that on that crucial decision, on the so-called best advice, many women will be going into pension schemes nine years too soon and others eight years too long.

But age is not the only factor when deciding whether to join the scheme. Other decisions and calculations have to be made that are impossible for a lay person. On the question of terminating contributions to a personal pension scheme—a serious matter because the schemes have been in existence for only a short time, a maximum of six years—Bacon and Woodrow said that many firms are charging two years' premiums for people to pull out. Those who have been bribed to come out of the scheme by all kinds of incentives, by attacking SERPS and denigrating its value, find themselves in that dilemma.

A fortnight ago, a financial adviser from Independent Financial Services in Paignton, Devon, gave a typical example of that. It is a remarkable story. He wrote:

"We are acting for a client who effected an Albany Life retirement annuity seven years ago for a monthly contribution of £40. So far the value built up within the contract amounts to just over £4,100.

The client wishes to transfer, because of changes in his circumstances, to another fund provider. The transfer value offered him is £2,700. A huge £1,400 is being deducted by the existing provider.

The firm concerned asks how the company could justify the equivalent of three years' contributions from a retirement annuity that has been in force for just seven years. It asks:

"Do the financial advisers selling Albany's products realise how high the charges are?"

The implications of that question are serious, because companies such as Albany Life are giving advice.

On Monday, while I was driving to the House of Commons, I heard a splendind programme, "Money Box", on which a man rang in to describe his situation. I was so surprised to hear it that I checked with the producers of the programme to see whether the figures given where right.

The firm that the person described was a reputable body, the Scottish Amicable Life Assurance Society, which was behaving in a rather less than amicable way with him. He is in business on his own; he took out a flexible retirement plan and paid £3,000 in the first year. He had trouble in the second year with the recession and his contribution to the flexible plan was £1,500. He has just discovered that the society deducted commission of £1,700 from the total because he had disturbed the scheme. That is little short of criminal, but it is not unusual.

Virtually all the 5 million people who joined personal pension schemes have seen almost the whole value of their bribe, the initial contribution given to them, disappear in the first year as a result of commission charges taken by commission-hungry salesmen and by administration charges. The pensioners' funds are virtually worthless after that period. They will live to regret their decision to join the personal pension scheme.

They will not look back with satisfaction, although the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) claimed that they would. By joing such personal pensions, they have been cheated out of SERPS, which was a sound scheme, which could have been amended and which would have got through the demographic changes in the next century.

We have a generation of people who should be looking forward to their retirement and to an income that is assured. Instead, there are 5 million people who are not looking forward to a pension scheme—they are not pension schemes—but who are contributing to saving schemes with no assured outcome. They cannot work out what changes there will be in the stock market by the time they retire. They could lose dramatically. We have a generation of people on personal pensions who can look forward to an uncertain future and a future of fear about their finances in their retirement.

7.2 pm

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I welcome the hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) to his first debate as Under-Secretary of State for Social Security. I think that I have worked out the significance of my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) immediately transferring him back to the Treasury team: it was to remind him to bring money.

This evening, the Government should take the reputed advice of the Foreign Secretary and do something for once just because it is the right thing to do. They should give justice to the victims of the massive Maxwell fraud. The members of the Maxwell pension schemes, especially the majority who are not yet pensioners, need us to continue to give attention to their plight. They are concerned that the impression is being given that their problem has been solved. That is far from being true.

I congratulate the Select Committee and especially its Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead, on their continuing effort to obtain justice for the members of the Maxwell pension scheme. The Maxwell Pensioners Action Committee is anxious that we and the public understand that enormous problems remain.

Those problems are the failure so far to recover the assets taken from the pension funds by Maxwell, which found their way into the banks and other financial institutions, the refusal of the insurance companies to settle the claims from the trustees, the difficulty of sorting out who is entitled to what from the common investment fund, uncertainty about section 58B settlements and the bulk transfer claims, such as that undermining the AGB scheme. One trustee pointed out that the returns so far have been small and has put the amount still outstanding at £440 million. He points out that pension funds that are being wound up need even greater assets than those that are continuing.

A considerable amount of the assets taken by Maxwell has been tracked down—to the value, I am told, of £188 million. However, it is one thing to discover where the money is and another thing to get it back. Except for NatWest, the banks and other financial institutions holding assets given as security against loans are reluctant to part with them.

The trading debt has increased the difficulties. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation, one thing is certain. On present form, the matter will take a long time to settle. No writs of claim have yet been issued by the trustees. The insurance companies appear to be adamant that they will not pay up the £75 million claimed by the schemes because of material non-disclosure. As the action group put it, that amounts to saying:

"fraud was going on at the time of the renewal. You did not tell the institutions about that fraud. Therefore the policy is void and you cannot claim for the fraud."

As I have said, there is even difficulty about the allocation of moneys in the common investment fund, although it is thought that that will be sorted out fairly shortly. I have been told that there are difficulties with the implementation of section 58B of the Social Security Act 1990 which makes any deficiency in pension funds that have to be wound up a debt on the employer company. Will the Minister clarify what payments have been made when he winds up the debate?

Given all the problems that threaten the viability of the Maxwell pension schemes, is it any wonder that those who depend on them, especially the deferred pensioners, are so worried? Their worries were not dispelled when they read that the trustees of the various Maxwell pension funds had told the Select Committee that they were guardedly optimistic that, within three to five years, recoveries would be sufficient to cover in full the pensions of all current pensioners and those of most deferred pensioners.

Those pensioners ask the obvious question. What happens until the recoveries are made? What about the annual increases? Which deferred pensioners will not be covered? What happens if, as at least one trustee believes, the hopes expressed by the other trustees are too optimistic? Whether one takes an optimistic or pessimistic view, it is clear that there is an obvious need for the Government to give substantial further aid.

Some help has been given by the Government which has been acknowledged by many hon. Members who have spoken tonight. A £2·5 million grant was initially given to tide over the funds, but that has now all gone. Help is now being given from a trust fund which was created under the chairmanship of Sir John Cuckney, to whom tribute has been paid by many hon. Members tonight.

The fund has raised just over £6 million from outside voluntary donations. When it was established, the chairman of the National Association of Pension Funds, Brian Macmahon, said:

"We hope that the trust fund will grow to make up most, if not all, of the eventual shortfall in the Maxwell funds."

I am afraid that the City has not been very generous.

The Secretary of State announced the deferral of state scheme premiums to the national insurance fund in respect of the payment of guaranteed minimum pensions for as long as he is satisfied that

"it would not be in the best interests of scheme members to enforce payment."

A press release claimed that that was equivalent to an interest-free loan of £100 million. However, according to outside experts, the value of that depends on whether it means postponement until after the liabilities to deferred members as well as those to existing pensioners have been met.

If it means only deferment until the liabilities of existing pensioners have been met, it will give nothing new—certainly not £100 million. To be helpful and for it to be something more than a public relations exercise, the Minister must defer payment until the needs of the deferred pensioners have been met. As the Minister has been asked by his hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), what is the situation? The Minister must clear this up today. If the Government's claim to have lent £100 million interest-free proves to be wrong, there is even more reason why we should question their refusal to do more to clear up the unholy mess.

The position of the Secretary of State has been clear from the start. He claims that no Government could accept a duty to make good losses resulting from fraud or theft of savings. Ministers have added the argument that in any case, if they were to underwrite those pensions, the banks and others who hold vast sums in security against loans would be under less pressure to make settlements. These arguments understandably are rejected totally by pension scheme members. They hold the Government to be as responsible for the loss of their savings as they were for those of the Barlow Clowes investors—who, incidentally, received £160 million.

The Government were responsible in two ways. They provided a useless system of controls and failed to implement an EC directive. On the first point, there can be no doubt that their dogmatic and doctrinaire encouragement of the self-regulation of the occupational pensions sector proved to be a disaster. Given the massive potential for fraud which Maxwell exploited, there is no justification for the self-regulation of the conduct of pension funds.

The Securities and Investments Board report showed that the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation's involvement with the Maxwell companies both before and after Maxwell's death was woefully inadequate. The SIB has not for legal reasons published the whole IMRO report. When it does so, pensioners believe that it will establish even further the responsibility of the Government.

The second reason for holding the Government responsible for the plight of Maxwell pensioners is their refusal to implement Community directive 80/987 of 20 October 1980, which requires, among other things, that EC member states ensure that necessary measures are taken to protect the pensions interests of ex-employees. I know that the Government will argue that they have

[Mrs. Llin Golding]

complied because there are provisions in the Insolvency Act 1986 and statutory instruments that provide for the protection of contributions to pension funds. But these do not give required statutory protection for pension benefits. In view of that neglect, the pensioners are determined to get justice from the EC if they do not get it from the Government.

Ministers will know that the European Court has made it clear that, if the Government have not implemented the directive, the employee is entitled to damages. They will also know of the several thousand petitions that were handed to the President of the European Commission in Strasbourg in January, and that Ivy Needham has now been awarded legal aid on appeal to have her case for damages against the Government prepared for presentation to the European Court. What nonsense it is that Ivy Needham, for a pension of £52 a month, should have to expose the incompetence and callousness of the Government before she can obtain justice.

The culpability of the Government is clear. They share with Maxwell responsibility for the disaster. Clearly, had they not been blinded by their phobia of giving protection to employees, that would not have happened. They ought now to be doing everything that they possibly can to remove the anxiety from the members of the Maxwell pension scheme and to enable them to have a secure retirement.

The Government must make it clear during the period of recovery of the missing money that they will make resources available to cover the pensions. Their argument that the financial institutions would be less likely to pay up does not hold water. Those banks, insurance companies and other institutions would be far more likely to pay up if they were faced by trustees who were actively supported by the Government. The need for the Government to accept responsibility goes to the heart of the matter.

I am told, however, that there are other smaller actions which the Government could take to give help to trustees. One is to reduce even further the difficulties of the trustees in obtaining information from the liquidators and others to tackle the problem of VAT payments for schemes where the company has gone into liquidation.

I know that the reference to the Occupational Pensions Advisory Service on the Order Paper is a peg on which to hang a wider debate. However, I would not like to miss an opportunity to thank that organisation for all the work that it is doing and particularly to those volunteers who do so much good work and give so much of their time and effort.

A reference to occupational pensions in general is also included on the Order Paper. I will not, however, repeat all that I have said previously about the need to provide security for and meet the legitimate aspirations of members of pension funds. I await the report of the Goode committee with great hopes that it will end the scandal of employers who milk pension funds for their own purposes without care for their employees and of the Government who let them do it. In the meantime, I appeal to the Government to give help to those who suffered and still suffer from the Maxwell disaster.

7.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. William Hague): This has been a wide-ranging and interesting debate with some fascinating features. Foremost among them was the fear of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who opened the debate, that it might degenerate into excessive sycophancy. A non-partisan atmosphere prevailed through most of the debate, despite the attempts of my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) to inject some acrimony into it. In the end it took the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), whom I thank for her welcome to the Front Bench, to bring some real acrimony into the debate.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House may think on reflection that to allege that the Government share with Robert Maxwell the responsibility for the problems of Maxwell pensioners is an allegation too far. It is certainly one that I wish to reject at the outset. The debate has also been interesting because some hon. Members have spoken up strongly on behalf of their constituents. I respect them for doing so.

Some called on the Government not to do certain things as well as to do certain things. One or two called on the Government to adopt a certain policy but not to say so —a requirement that presents particular challenges for me in making a response from the Front Bench. But I shall do my best in the time available to respond to some of the points that have been made.

The debate has highlighted some difficult issues and several aspects of occupational pension provision in which many right hon. and hon. Members believe that there is a case for changing the law. Not surprisingly, much comment has focused on the position of the Maxwell pension schemes, and I shall dwell on the Maxwell affair in some detail in a moment.

It is worth remembering that the debate also takes place against the background of greatly expanded pension provision in Britain in recent years. The growth of occupational pension schemes has been of huge importance in lifting the living standards of the average pensioner well above the levels in the 1960s or 1970s.

That is why the questions raised in the debate tonight are so important and why issues surrounding the future of occupational pension schemes—whether it be the equalisation of benefits for men and women, freedom of choice in pension provision, or the framework of regulation and law within which pension schemes operate —deserve detailed and careful consideration.

The Government have clear objectives for the future of pension provision. They include encouraging individual responsibility and enabling the working population to make adequate financial provision for retirement; encouraging freedom of choice between alternative forms of pension provision; ensuring equality between men and women following the decision of the European Court of Justice in the Barber case; and improving the security of pension rights in response to the widespread and wholly understandable public concern in the wake of the Maxwell affair.

Before I deal with what should be done in future, I remind the House that in recent years we have taken some significant steps in the direction of achieving the objectives that I have outlined. We have given individuals the right to opt out of their employer's occupational pension scheme,

to make voluntary contributions to improve their pension provision and to contract out of SERPS into an appropriate personal pension.

The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), who sadly is not with us for the moment, criticised the history of personal pensions. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention and that of the House to a leaflet, entitled "Thinking about a Personal Pension", which was launched by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State a couple of weeks ago. It was widely unpublicised despite the best efforts of the Department of Social Security. However, for all those contemplating a personal pension, it is well worth reading.

Millions of people have used the opportunity presented by personal pensions to enhance their pension provision in a way that they could not have done before. In addition, we have tried to ensure that individuals can make a more informed choice about their pension provision.

We may have further to go, but we have introduced regulations which place a statutory obligation on schemes to provide greater disclosure of information and there are more controls to provide for secure pension provision. Since 1990, employers have been unable to take taxable refunds from scheme surpluses if they have not first guaranteed pension increases in line with prices up to a maximum of 5 per cent. a year.

Regulations now restrict to 5 per cent. the amount that pension schemes can invest in associated or connected companies and individuals can now obtain more help if they are dissatisfied with their pension provider. I join the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme in paying tribute to the work of the occupational pensions advisory service, which represents extremely good value for money for the grant in aid that it receives from the Government. It has now been given secure financial backing and the first pensions ombudsman was appointed in April 1991 to provide an independent avenue of redress for people who have suffered injustice at the hands of their pension schemes.

The pensions registry has been set up to help scheme members trace past pension rights. The schemes must pay a levy which pays for the register and for consumer protection measures like the ombudsman. Considerable progress has been made on these issues, but I recognise that the principal concern expressed by all hon. Members has been the Maxwell affair and its aftermath.

The Government welcome the Social Security Select Committee's continuing interest in the recovery of the Maxwell pension schemes' assets. We share its concerns over the plight of the pensioners and the need for the recovery process to move rapidly towards a conclusion. I understand the anxiety that Maxwell pensioners suffer thinking about the uncertainty of payments in future. The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) referred to that anxiety. It is a considerable tribute to the hon. Gentleman's constituent Ivy Needham that, although I have not yet met her, her name is very familiar to me after only a few weeks in office.

The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South asked whether I would be prepared to meet Ivy Needham and other Maxwell pensioners in Leeds. In a way, that will save me writing a letter, as I was about to write to Ivy Needham to tell her that I would be very happy to meet her and her colleagues in Leeds. They are allowed to shout at me as much as they like, because I understand how strongly they feel about these matters.

The Government's response to the legacy of chaos left behind by Robert Maxwell has helped to facilitate considerable progress. We do not want—and have not tried—to give the impression that the problem has been solved. The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme referred to that impression. The problem has not been solved. However, the initiatives that we have taken have ensured that pensions continue to be paid while work continues to recover the missing pension scheme assets.

Last summer, we made available £2·5 million in funding, which the hon. Member for Birkenhead rightly insisted on calling taxpayers' money. I only wish that he could sometimes make those on the Opposition Front Bench as conscious as he is that Government money is taxpayers' money. We provided that emergency funding last year to help pension schemes pay pensions.

That role has now been taken on by the Maxwell pensioners trust which we set up under the chairmanship of Sir John Cuckney. The trust has raised more than £6·3 million—enough money to pay pensions for another three years. We have therefore created a substantial breathing space for the pension schemes to make further asset recoveries and to pursue such other claims for damages or against employers as the trustees and liquidators think fit.

Last October, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a further important measure to help the Maxwell pension schemes when he agreed to use his discretion to defer the collection of state scheme premiums. It may be helpful if I say a few words about that, because several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South and my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), have raised that point.

Currently, three of the Maxwell pension schemes, representing two thirds of all pension scheme members affected by Maxwell, have contracted back into the state earnings-related pension scheme. Currently some £2·7 million of annual pension entitlements of those scheme members are being met through SERPS. Those sums will increase as more pensioners reach pension age.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has exercised his discretion to postpone collection of the state scheme premiums that would normally be payable and which, for those three schemes, amount to some £100 million. That is important additional assistance to rebuilding the Maxwell schemes, particularly in the shorter term. As long as my right hon. Friend is satisfied that it would not be in the interests of scheme members to enforce payment, he can choose not to do so, but it would be quite wrong, and a considerable mistake on the Government's part, to give general guarantees or blanket assurances.

I would not want scheme trustees to think that they can relax their efforts to achieve anything less than the maximum possible restoration of their assets. We will continue to discuss the exercise of that discretion with scheme trustees on a scheme-by-scheme basis. However, we have no intention of enforcing the payment of state scheme premiums automatically when a scheme has covered its liabilities for pensions in payment.

As a result of the Government's initiative, the pension scheme trustees and the liquidators have not been left to untangle the web of confusion woven by Robert Maxwell alone. They have at their disposal the considerable services of Sir John Cuckney. Many hon. Members have referred to his outstanding work, and they were right to do so. He and the Maxwell pensions unit continue to encourage

[Mr. William Hague]

informal methods of dispute resolution, such as mediation, rather than lengthy and costly legal action in the courts. The Maxwell pensions unit continues to be available to assist the pension scheme trustees and the liquidators and administrators in any way it can.

Hon. Members have complimented civil servants on their good work in managing the Maxwell pensions unit. I can reassure those who raised the matter that the return to his native Department—as one hon. Member put it—of the civil servant heading the unit does not imply that the unit is ceasing its work. I expect its work to continue for some time. It is in very capable hands. The civil servant in question has become one of the trustees of the Maxwell pensioners trust and he will continue his work in that way.

Over the 18 months that have elapsed since Robert Maxwell died, I am well aware that the long-term position of some of the pension scheme members remains uncertain. However, we have made visible progress. The Headington pension plan, for example, which was unable to make any pension payments, has been able to resume paying 75 per cent. of its pensions. The remaining 25 per cent. continues to be provided by the Maxwell pensioners trust. For the longer term, the pension scheme trustees recently told the Select Committee that they were now guardedly optimistic about meeting their pension liabilities in full.

The Select Committee expressed concern in its report on the length of time that was being taken to release funds to the pension schemes from the common investment fund. Sir John and the MPU have given active encouragement to the trustees and liquidators who have recently been able to agree each scheme's minimum share of the £173 million currently held in the common investment fund. The minimum shares in total add up to 80 per cent. of the fund leaving only 20 per cent. in question.

That has enabled an initial advance of some £16 million to be made to the pension schemes and it has provided the first step in the solution to this problem. I hope that agreement will soon be reached on resolving the remaining issues. That will enable a full allocation of the common investment fund to be made and will clarify the long-term asset position of the schemes.

Some hon. Members referred to the gap and wanted to know what will happen when the extent of the gap is clarified. However, it is still too early to say what the gap will be. A substantial amount of work remains to be done. The Maxwell empire kept appalling records of what had happened to different transactions; they wove a very complex web.

I join the chairman of the SIB, who appeared before the Select Committee yesterday, in urging City institutions to resolve speedily disputes over pension scheme assets. I hope that all parties involved will work constructively with the trustees and the liquidators over the next few months to secure a speedy resolution of all these complex claims.

Mr. Frank Field: Would the Under-Secretary support the SIB if it paid over the fines of City institutions to the Maxwell pension fund?

Mr. Hague: All that I am prepared to say for the purpose of this debate is that I very much support what the hon. Gentleman said about urging everyone to come to a resolution as speedily as possible. For tonight, I must leave it at that. I know that other hon. Members wish to intervene and I do not wish to take too many minutes of the time that hon. Members are hoping to spend on education matters.

Clearly, there is much work still to be done before the pensioners' distress and anxiety can be relieved. The Government will continue to support Sir John Cuckney in his efforts to bring a speedy conclusion to this affair.

The Maxwell saga has contributed to the raising of wider issues about the regulation of pension funds, many of which have been touched on in this debate. The Goode committee is continuing its review of the framework of law and regulation within which occupational pension schemes operate. The Government look forward, as I am sure does the rest of the country, to receiving that report towards the end of September.

Some hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) and for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page), put strong views about what should happen after that. It would be wrong of me to second-guess that committee's recommendations or to comment on proposals that might pre-empt the committee's careful consideration of these important and complex issues, but the Government look forward to receiving and studying the report and hearing the comments of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House on its recommendations.

Within the lifetime of this Parliament, the Government and the House will need to take a number of decisions about different aspects of occupational pensions. Taken together, they will have far-reaching implications for tomorrow's work force, for future pensioners and for society as a whole, as we grapple with the consequences of demographic change. No doubt the Select Committee will play its part in helping us to cope with the intricacies of these decisions.

There are many things that we need to do. We must legislate for equal state pension ages for men and women. Once the European Court of Justice's decision in the Coloroll case is available, we will need to address the implications for occupational pension schemes and take account of the consequences for contracting-out arrangements.

Meanwhile, we are committed to ensuring that personal pensions remain attractive across the age range, and we are considering a structure of age-related rebates to achieve this. We also want to take into account recent work on the treatment of pension rights on divorce—a very important subject in its own right.

We shall be seeking to bring about a framework for occupational pensions which is stable, while allowing pension vehicles of various types to develop and flourish; which is secure, in order to give people confidence, whatever type of pension provision they make: and which is fair to employers, employees, pensioners and deferred pensioners.

This has been a constructive, though short, debate and has been helpful in setting the scene and identifying some of the issues. We are all indebted to the hon. Member for Birkenhead and the other members of the Select Committee for the careful attention that they have paid to pensions issues in recent months, and for providing the opportunity for this debate.

The debate was concluded, and the Question necessary to dispose of the proceedings was deferred, pursuant to paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates).

ESTIMATES AND SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1993-94

Class VII, Vote 8

Education Spending

[Relevant documents: First Report from the Education Committee of Session 1992-93 on The Department for Education's Expenditure Plans 1992-93 to 1994-95 (House of Commons Paper No. 305) and the Government Response thereto (House of Commons Paper No. 695); Report of the Department for Education and Office for Standards in Education: The Government's Expenditure Plans 1993-94 to 1995-96 (Cm. 2210)]

Motion made, and Question proposed.

That a further sum, not exceeding £15,520,183,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1994 for expenditure by the Department of the Environment on revenue support grant, on residual payments of rate support grants, on payment of non-domestic rates to receiving authorities in England, on a grant providing support to certain receiving authorities affected by changes in the calculations underlying revenue support grant as a result of population change, on a grant providing transitional support for certain local authorities, on a grant to compensate 75 per cent. of the expenditure incurred by them on preparation work for the council tax, on payments to specified bodies and the Commission for Local Administration in England, on payments for Valuation Office Agency rating and valuation services, on payments to meet the expenses of valuation tribunals, and on payments in respect of expenditure by the Local Government Commission.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

7.35 pm

Sir Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): This, of course, is a notable first for the Education Select Committee in so far as we have been able to secure our share of what is by any definition a very short period of debating time for two important subjects—the one about social security and now the one about education. I would like to see all Select Committee reports given time to be debated on the Floor of the House, so that the House would have the opportunity of sharing with the members of the Select Committees some of the evidence that they have received and the conclusions that they have drawn from that evidence.

I am particularly pleased to see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education on the Front Bench. With his customary courtesy, he dropped me a line to say that he had been able to rearrange an engagement for this evening as he was particularly anxious to share in what he, too, recognises as a notable first. I thank him for giving up what is, after all, a very precious Thursday evening when he could be elsewhere. I also thank my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who, I understand, will be contributing to the debate a little later.

Our report, which was published on 11 February 1993, followed the progression of reports which this Committee and its predecessor Committees made on Department for Education, formerly Department of Education and Science, expenditure. It follows, therefore, a pattern that has been established over the years, in which we have sought to do a number of things. Perhaps the most important has been to try to improve the presentation of the figures so that they can be more readily understood by more people.

As we discovered in our recent deliberations with the officials of the DFE, there is considerable difficulty in finding one's way through the tables of figures and the statistics which make up the running of a very intricate and complicated Department. I believe that my colleagues would wish me to pay tribute to the Department for the fact that improvements have been made in the presentation of the information. However, to use a term that we all know well, there is still room for improvement, and we hope to see continuing improvement in the future.

I want to draw attention to three points which arise from our report and which I believe are worthy of attention.

The first relates to plans. Although the total of local authority expenditure, nearly half of which goes on education, is now planned and controlled by the Government, the Department publishes no plans for spending by local authorities. We have recommended that the least that should happen is the breaking down of the total into sub-blocks—under-fives, primary, secondary, post-16, and other—and that we should be able to look at the outturn and spending for the coming year, which should be presented in terms of these blocks.

We also stress the point of accountability. This was a matter that exercised the Committee quite considerably. It is vital for people at every level, whether they be school governors, parents, local councillors, Members of Parliament or whatever, to be able to identify quite clearly who is responsible for the various elements of expenditure within our education system.

Questions have been presented to successive Secretaries of State on this subject which have left the Committee still unwilling to accept that this vacuum of accountability should be allowed to continue. The Committee is saying that there should be greater accountability and that efforts should be made to find out exactly who is responsible for what.

As a former local authority man, I can understand the difficulties as regards what comes from the centre and is hypothecated by statute, or whatever, and what is delegated to the rim, as it were, in terms of the local authority, and now, with the changed legislation, is delegated to yet another rim, the schools. I know that my hon. Friends who have been members of local authorities will share my view that there is a vacuum. We all know that it is exploited by hon. Members on both sides of the House, as they can point the finger at someone else.

In the crucial area of education spending, it is important that we should have direct accountability and the ability to ask those who make the decisions and are responsible for them some questions about the whys and wherefores. I hope that the Department will examine that issue so that we can anticipate some improvements next year.

The Committee experienced some difficulties with the statistics in the report and we have considerable sympathy with the Department. The collation of the returns from local authorities is quite unacceptably bad. The fact that, some eight months after the turn of the financial year, we have fewer than 50 per cent. of the returns is not acceptable by any standards. If Parliament—and that means the

[Sir Malcolm Thornton]

Select Committee—is to scrutinise the figures in any sensible way, we must improve the way in which the information is collected. That would allow us to look more critically at the outturn of education spending and examine accountability in a more sensible and meaningful way.

Another point in our report concerns the amount of capital expenditure on grant-maintained schools. We concluded that there was certainly an imbalance as emphasis had been placed on capital expenditure for grant-maintained schools, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said clearly that it was a matter of policy.

Although I accept that there are other means available to local authorities, such as the use of capital receipts being transferred from one area of expenditure to another, the constraints under which the vast majority of local authorities operate are such that, in reality, that option is seldom possible or available to them.

We are concerned about the disparity of funding as the gap is shown to widen over the next few years. That is unsupportable, given the state of repair of many of our schools—an issue which the Select Committee has considered for many years and which must be addressed.

The principle of grant-maintained schools is very much part of the Government's policy, but in order to have fairness we should ensure that state schools—the local education authority maintained schools—are at least given the same opportunities.

I ask my right hon. Friend to look critically at whether the expectation that the money will be there is to be realised. There was a distinct feeling among members of the Committee that the belief that that would happen was a triumph of hope over expectation.

I shall now make one of two wider remarks. I recognise that we are short of time and other hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate. The debate is essentially about the estimates, and we spend vast sums of money on education. Therefore, any comments which affect education and the way in which money is spent must be valid.

In recent months, we have seen problems right across the educational spectrum; problems arising from the main principles of the Government's legislation, the national curriculum and the issues that flow from it. I have said on many occasions and reiterate tonight that those principles are absolutely right. However, I find it inconceivable that, so many years after I believed the debate about the principles of a national curriculum, the principles of rigour, the principles of testing and assessment to be over, that debate still continues.

I believe that there is evidence of widespread support in schools for the principle of the national curriculum and that the excitement about the entitlement of every child in the country to a certain basic level of education can be taken as read.

Few people who work in education and in schools would dispute the need for rigour in the system and some means of testing and assessing. Those words assume different meanings for different people. Perhaps we all go back to our own childhood too often and try to relate to a world which, if it ever existed, is more in people's imagination than in reality.

Deficiencies have occurred in the detail and the implementation. I have said that putting legislation on the statute book is to some extent the easier part of the exercise. What is vital is how that change is managed and implemented. We have seen some polarisation in the implementation of the reforms which can be described only as unfortunate.

It cannot work without partnership—the partnership that we all recognise to be vital between school and home and the equally essential partnership that I believe also to be vital between the Government and schools and those who work in education. We have to do everything in our power to ensure that the polarisation that has taken place is reversed and we must bring people together to talk about the implementation.

A great deal is said about the Dearing review, which I believe is broadly welcomed. We await with great interest Sir Ron Dearing's recommendations. I believe that he is taking evidence from anyone who cares to give it, as well as seeking advice from various groups. At this stage, I have no reservations about the opportunities for people to contribute to that review.

Sir Ron Dearing has shown himself to be a man of independent thought, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked him to address four specific questions. I hope that the Dearing review presents more than just an opportunity to look at how the system is working; it should give everyone an opportunity to take one step backwards from the current confrontation.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will acknowledge that, while there is clearly a short-term problem that has to be examined by Sir Ron Dearing, there are other problems which perhaps need medium and longer term solutions. If Sir Ron Dearing does the first part of his job as well as I hope he will—indeed, he must if we are to make progress in this debate—there will be other matters he can address also by continuing the vital consultation processes.

As far as the reforms are concerned, we should see a continuous process of fine tuning and improvement. Above all else, the acid test has to be practicality. Will it work and, if it works, will it deliver what we want?

The Secretary of State for Education (Mr. John Patten): I am listening with care to my hon. Friend's remarks. He will be aware that, as chairman of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Sir Ron Dearing will, for the term of his office, have a continuing role in reviewing precisely the subjects to which my hon. Friend refers.

Sir Malcolm Thornton: I am aware of that, and I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for confirming the point. Seeing Sir Ron as an independent figure—as a bridge over which people can walk to transfer views from one side to the other—is critical. It is also important for my right hon. Friend to realise that if Sir Ron is to do his job, he must continue to show, as he has shown so far, his independence.

It is always open to Government to accept or reject advice. While that is right, so long as we can be sure that the advice is objective—I have in the past said that I have not always been sure that it has been objective—at least we shall know that the people concerned, about whom I have spoken, have had an opportunity to contribute.

If we are really serious about having a mass, high level system of education, we must recognise that the changes implemented over the years have been vital. But I make no

apology for reiterating my earlier point: that that cannot be achieved without co-operation. Secretaries of State have the right—I defend my right hon. Friend's right in the matter, just as I defended the right of a predecessor of his, Baroness Williams of Crosby—to put forward policies, and we and others have the right to challenge them. But once those policies have been put forward and the principles decided, it behoves everyone to try to make them work.

The Secretary of State must lead from the front in that exercise. He knows better than anyone that the polarisation that has existed for some time must be undone. We trust the Dearing review will produce sensible proposals. I hope that everybody—including people in the trade unions who have perhaps used the present situation to exaggerate matters and undermine some of the basic principles to which I referred, about which I thought there had been agreement years ago but which have been dragged back into the arena—is serious about wanting to achieve what we all wish to achieve. If so, we must take a step backwards so that we may take several steps forward to meet each other.

Too many people are adopting preconceived ideas about the reforms which most people agree are absolutely necessary. Teachers, Ministers, trade unionists and everybody else accept that only one group of people matters—not teachers or Ministers, but the children in our schools for whom the education system exists. If we can remember that, we shall make progress, and in doing so we shall achieve what everybody, inside and outside education, wants—a systematic and controlled improvement in an education system that must serve Britain into the middle of the next century.

7.53 pm

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): The debate is helping to highlight the difference of view across the Floor of the House. Education is described in the document in the language of management, finance, systems and constant tinkering. In contrast, my hon. Friend and I see education not just as a means of enhancing individuals' life changes but as an investment for society at large.

That is why we would have liked to see in the document a reference to spending on nursery education, because that would be giving the best possible start to all children. We want children to be taught by the best and most highly qualified teachers. We reject totally the notion of a mum's army. We want high-quality teachers and high-quality teaching, and we want people with the qualifications to bring that about.

We contrast that with the spectre of the profession now, laden with bureaucracy. I shall concentrate my remarks on the need for the accountability of funds in the system of schooling. After all, we are told in the document that next year nearly £17 billion of taxpayers' money will be spent on the education system. We want that money to be clearly accountable to the taxpayer in the proper manner. Even the document says that local authorities should be accountable to their electorates. We do not disagree with that.

We believe that if a local education authority can be voted in to do a job, people locally should also have the power to vote an LEA out, if that is what they want. To have effective accountability of the substantial sums of taxpayers' money about which we are speaking, it must be as near to the people as possible, and particularly near those who pay the taxes and receive the services. It is unquestionable that over the years LEAs have served us well, but unfortunately they are now being blamed for many of the supposed ills of the education system.

The Government have created a need for change in the funding arrangements, with policies for opting out, by creating grant-maintained schools. I shall not tonight argue the principle of GM schools, although we have not seen the predicted avalanche. The policy is now progressing at a snail's pace, despite the cajoling that has occurred and the bribes that have been given.

To fund the GM schools we need a funding agency, which is yet another quango to be added to the long list of quangos. In recent years, the Conservatives have found a new enthusiasm for quangos that was not shared by former Governments. For example, Baroness Thatcher, when Prime Minister, said in answer to a parliamentary question in 1980:

> "We shall hope to make more progress in the future by reducing further the number of quangos".—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1980; Vol. 995, c. 424.]

A few months later, the same Prime Minister, when again asked about quangos, said:

> "We were able to announce yesterday a further reduction of 140 or so in the quangos. That is very good news".—[*Official Report*, 19 May 1981; Vol. 4, c. 151.]

Yet today, in the post-Thatcher renaissance era of Conservatism, the greatest growth industry in Britain is quangos. Who are the unelected, independent-minded people who are free from party politics and who sit on quangos?

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, according to latest estimates, quangos are now assumed to be responsible for one fifth of all public expenditure?

Mr. Jamieson: I was aware of that and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing it out. This week, a question was tabled asking about the representatives on the Further Education Funding Council and about their political affiliations. I gather that two members of that body, a Mr. Bennett and a Mr. Fallon, were both Tory Members until 1992. Mr. Bennett is described by Roth in *Parliamentary Profiles* as a

"hard-Right Thatcherite educator".

When the Tories fail at the ballot box in local elections they then denigrate and undermine the work of councils. To regain local control, they dispose of the democratic institutions and replace them with quangos run by Tory placemen—in this case, failed Tory politicians. It is the new philosophy. If the Tories cannot gain the confidence of the people, they go through the back door and exercise control through quangos. Those quangos, freed from democratically accountable, meddling councillors, develop rather as the Welsh Development Agency has done.

Of course, I hope that organisations will not develop that way because a report from the Public Accounts Committee published today claims that the WDA is run like a private fiefdom. Is that what we are to expect of the funding agency, which is charged with spending £17 billion of taxpayers' money? Will it be run as a private fiefdom for the benefit of those who serve on it, paying consultancy fees for a study into the possibility of privatising itself, with massive golden handshakes to its former members?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Eric Forth): Do I assume that, because the hon. Gentleman says that the funding agency is responsible for a £17 billion spend, he anticipates that all schools will shortly vote to become grant-maintained?

Mr. Jamieson: That is the Minister's aspiration, not mine. Whether the figure is £1 billion or £17 billion, that is the hon. Gentleman's aspiration, not Labour's aspiration. We do not want any grant-maintained schools. Instead of a funding agency, we want councils to run their own systems, accounting for their own money, in the extremely good and democratic way that they have done that for many years.

In Committee on the Education Bill, it became clear that the funding agency would meet in private. The public, whether they be parents, governors or other interested parties, cannot attend its meetings. It will be unsullied by public scrutiny, faithfully performing the will of its political masters in Sanctuary house. How appropriately named is that building.

Much of the new legislation during recent years has resulted in a massive growth of bureaucracy, both in the classroom and in other aspects of school life. I have been a supporter of local management of schools for many years. Long before the Government introduced that, I felt that it would be a good system for running schools. It is a way of making better-quality decisions in schools, and where the system is running successfully that is happening.

Local autonomy is very valuable, but we must accept that it does not necessarily lead to a reduction in bureaucracy and overall administration. The theory is that local management of schools moves administration from local education authorities to the schools; the myth is that the overall amount of bureaucracy and administration is therefore reduced. The sacrifice is in the economies of scale that cannot be achieved.

Page 14 of the recent Audit Commission report states:

"A number of schools increased administrators' hours quite sharply as they took over their budgets."

Local management of schools has caused more duplication and administration. That is inevitable. In many cases, it is due to inexperience, so I accept that over the years there may be an improvement. The system was introduced too hurriedly, and there was too little training. Where is the evidence that the increase in administration in schools is matched by a reduction in the LEAs?

In so many areas of policy, we are sailing into uncharted waters and are unclear about where responsibilities lie. We had an example of that at a meeting of the Education Select Committee only a few weeks ago. Senior officials from the Department for Education were asked a simple question: what was the difference between an authority in which 74 per cent. of schools had opted out and an authority in which 76 per cent. of schools had opted out? The answer was:

"I think it might be wise if we offered a note on that question . . .we are at the edge of our expertise here, I think." *[Interruption.]* The Minister laughs. If he does not think that he is at the edge of his expertise, I hope that he will instruct some of his civil servants so that they can understand how the system will work.

It was made clear at that Select Committee meeting that even his senior civil servants did not know how the system would work. I look forward to the Minister giving us the answer that his senior civil servants could not. If senior officials from the Department for Education do not understand how the system will work, how can we expect local education authorities, governors, head teachers and parents to understand?

At that same meeting, it also became clear that the financing of the bureaucracy and administration of the funding agency would come out of the aggregate school budget, not out of that part designated for grant-maintained schools. Therefore, it will be a burden on all schools, both LEA and grant-maintained.

If the Government get their wish—which I doubt they will—pursue their policies and more schools become grant maintained, I fear that much of the £17 billion funding intended to be spent on our education system next year will fall into the hands of an unaccountable body. The education system needs clear, unequivocal lines of responsibility. With the way that things are going, we will not achieve that.

8.7 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Croydon, Central): Our debate began on the right lines by looking at accountability. The different notions of accountability are interesting. For many of us who are parents of school-age children in London, especially in inner London, some of the points made tonight about accountability will cause a wry smile. As many people are aware, until recently education in inner London was under the control of the Labour-controlled Inner London education authority.

That notorious authority had the biggest expenditure in the country per child, per teacher, per school, per anything we can imagine. Coupled with that, it consistently had one of the worst results in the country for GCSE and A-levels. Year in, year out, it had the highest expenditure and the second or third worst results in the country. Many of us saw that as a case of Labour local government playing progressive education with our children's future and using other people's money to do it. There was little or no real accountability.

Spread across inner London were neighbourhood mixed-ability comprehensives, the best of which were bad and the worst indescribable. There was no diversity and no choice. We had to take our children to the neighbourhood school whether or not we liked it. There was no competition between schools or within schools. To hear an ILEA primary school teacher complaining that even on sports day no child was allowed to come first in the egg-and-spoon race was a classic example of ILEA's attitude.

To cover those appalling results, ILEA decided to massage them and to introduce "disadvantage factors", to push that high-spending authority a little higher up the league. That meant nothing to the parents, when they thought about it—and even less to potential employers, who want to know about a youth's educational achievements, not about his or her environmental disadvantages.

Until ILEA disappeared, there was no real feel about individual schools, no results, and no choice except to opt out completely. That happened in one instance. In division 10, around 46 per cent. of secondary school children who should have been in those schools opted out. Twice the national average attended independent schools. They stayed away in droves. Many others stayed away by truancy.

Many outer-London areas—including my own of Croydon, which borders Lambeth—viewed accountability differently. They introduced variety with Church, comprehensive and independent schools and, recently, two city technology colleges. They pioneered standardised testing years ago and published results. That helps with accountability to parents, who can then choose the school that they wish. It involved not only accountability but limited competition, which tended to force up standards.

The demand for nursery education was also recognised and the number of places in Croydon is increasing from 600 to 1,800 next year. We anticipate that demand will be completely met very shortly. That will be done without any bleating for extra Government money.

With the division of ILEA, different boroughs took different approaches. Lambeth and Southwark continued as before—using ILEA methods, achieving ILEA results, and incurring massive expenditure. Division 10, however, took a hint from Croydon and introduced variety and choice, published results and created competition. There is no geographical tie, but a range of comprehensive, Church and magnet schools, independent schools with assisted places, and CTCs.

In that way, in just three years the 46 per cent. opt-out rate has fallen to 27 per cent., not including the CTCs; truancy is down; and every three or four-year-old child in division 10, in Wandsworth, is offered free nursery education. The budget has been cut by £20 million in real terms, to produce a better service. Schools are competing and results are improving.

In just three years, the number of children with no GCSE passes has fallen to one in 10, from one in five at the tail end of ILEA. The number of children gaining one or more GCSE passes at grade A to C has increased from 50 per cent. to 60 per cent. and the number achieving five GCSE passes at grade A to C has risen from 17 per cent. under ILEA to 27 per cent. Those results are not good, but they are a lot better than under Labour-controlled ILEA's unaccountable approach.

The United Kingdom is already spending more per pupil than Germany or Japan, but to produce poorer results. It is a question not of how much is spent but of the way in which it is spent, and of the abuse that we see in Labour-controlled inner London. The answer must be to take a leaf out of a book of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) and go for accountability.

There needs to be more variety and choice and schools must be encouraged to become grant-maintained. If they do, and we can move expenditure in such a way that those schools have revenue for capital plus revenue, they will be able to reverse the situation. I hope that there will be an opportunity soon to do that in such a way that we will be funding children, not schools, and that schools will be answerable to parents and children. We would then have real accountability.

8.14 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I congratulate the Chairman and members of the Select Committee on their excellent report, which primarily concerns state funding. The House may be interested to know that a predecessor of mine as Member of Parliament for Bath, Mr. A. J. Roebuck, was the first Member of Parliament to suggest, in 1884, state funding of education. It took him 18 months to persuade the House to agree, but it did so eventually, and provided a sum of money somewhat smaller than that spent on maintaining the royal carriages.

I suppose one could argue that from small acorns great oak trees grow. However, if Mr. Roebuck were able to return to the House today, I suspect that he would be very disappointed in state education. The great oak tree is beginning to lose a number of its branches through neglect and the increasing onslaught of Conservative policies.

The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir P. Beresford) hit the nail on the head when he spoke about competition. Many Opposition Members fear that Conservative preoccupation with competition is creating much of the strife within the education service and believe that the co-operation and partnership that has been such an important feature since the Education Act 1944 must be re-established.

The strife is such that many people wonder why the Secretary of State for Education kept his job in the mini-reshuffle while the Chancellor of the Exchequer lost his. Bearing in mind the fact that I defeated Mr. Christopher Patten in the general election, I explain it by paraphrasing Oscar Wilde's Lady Bracknell—to lose one Patten may be unfortunate, but to lose two looks like carelessness—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that Conservative Members liked that.

The Chairman of the Select Committee touched on another matter of concern to many of us—the need for much clearer information on which to base such debates. I am sure that that view is held by right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House. It is possible to interpret the report's figures in many different ways. They have been used by Conservative Members to argue that expenditure per pupil has increased since 1979 by more than 40 per cent. Equally, the same figures can be interpreted—taking into account not ordinary levels of inflation but educational levels—as meaning that expenditure has increased by only 21 per cent.

Furthermore, if one accepts that most costs are fixed or fairly fixed and do not vary significantly with a decline in pupil numbers, one can claim that, although expenditure per pupil has increased, additional expenditure since 1979 is, in real terms, only 2 per cent. higher. A more detailed inspection of those figures shows that the real-terms expenditure per pupil on secondary education has declined by 2 per cent. If we look at the funding in respect of further or higher education students, we can demonstrate a decline of 22 per cent. per student over that period.

I am making the point not in order to start a debate between both sides of the House as to who is right and who is wrong, but merely to agree with the Chairman of the Select Committee that it is important to provide accurate statistics, and accurate interpretations of those statistics, with which we can all agree.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): While the hon. Gentleman is talking about statistics, will he acknowledge not only that spending per pupil has risen by 45 per cent. since 1979, but that books and equipment are very important? Spending on books and equipment since 1979 has risen by 31 per cent. Both are real-terms increases and should be welcomed.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman has made my point for me. It is possible for all of us to select from the mass of

[Mr. Foster]

statistics in the way that he has. However, he has not contradicted the figures that I quoted—for example, that there has been a decline of some 22 per cent. in the expenditure on higher or further education students. We could spend a lifetime bandying statistics across the Chamber, but that would be of no great benefit to anyone.

What is more important is that we look at some of the specific areas of spending highlighted by the report. Much play is made in the report about expenditure on grant-maintained schools, one of the major planks of Government education policy. Very clearly stated in the report is the disparity between capital expenditure on grant-maintained schools and that on local education authority-maintained schools.

What the report did not make reference to—because the information did not come to light until recently, but was in respect of the years considered by the report—was the double funding of many grant-maintained schools. That meant that many grant-maintained schools were not only getting increased money because of the greater devolution by the LEA to individual schools, but already getting an increased element in their assisted maintenance grant.

Approximately 32 grant-maintained schools have received sums in excess of £100,000 per annum more than they would reasonably expect to receive because of that double funding. That, and double funding at lower levels, has meant that some 32 local education authorities have lost sums of money to those grant-maintained schools in excess of £250,000 each. In each of those local education authorities, there are many schools in desperate need of that money being spent on them and, more importantly, on their pupils.

Accountability has been mentioned. The Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), mentioned the difficulty of determining accountability for the different parts of the education budget. To be fair, the Department's response refers to its understanding of the Committee's frustration with the multi-layered nature of accountability.

I agree with the Committee that there is a need for a separate inquiry into the matter. It may surprise the Minister that I also agree with him about the need to devolve more and more responsibility to individual schools. However, I would go further and say "within a local democratically accountable strategic planning framework". But we agree that there is a need to devolve more and more power to given schools.

It is vital that we look carefully at the accountability of those responsible for making decisions within individual schools. I do not believe that that accountability can rely on governors' meetings—which can be, and often are, held in private—and on the annual governors' report that is very often presented to an empty school hall.

I hope that the Minister will say whether he would be willing to find ways of opening up the accountability of the governing body. Will he consider asking the Office of Standards in Education to look at the governors' annual reports in addition to their four-yearly inspections of the schools?

There are many other matters that we could address in this debate, but I shall not because many other hon. Members wish to speak.

It is not clear from the breakdown of the figures presented in the report precisely how the different tranches of money have been split up. We do not know what sums have been set aside for the implementation of the national curriculum in our schools. One thing is certain: a number of reports and studies have been undertaken to look at the true costs. Coopers and Lybrand has carried out detailed studies in this regard, and the figures that it has come up with demonstrate that sums well in excess of what is currently available will be needed for the overcrowded and over-prescriptive national curriculum to be successfully followed in both primary and secondary schools.

Has the Minister studied the figure that Coopers and Lybrand has produced? Does he agree with those figures? If not, what alternative figures is he prepared to make available to us?

Reference has been made to the absence in the budget of any significant sums for infant and nursery education. Many hon. Members—particularly Opposition Members—are concerned that there seems to be no real willingness by the Government to provide the significant boost to high-quality early-years education that is desperately needed.

Many hon. Members and people outside will be aware of the recent studies that have demonstrated the benefits of nursery education, not only to the individual child but to the nation as a whole. Those studies have also demonstrated that there is a financial benefit to the nation. A recent study in the United States, which was carried out over a 30-year period, showed that, for every £1 invested in nursery education, the nation benefits to the tune of £7. It makes economic as well as educational sense to invest in infant and nursery education.

May of us are concerned that not enough funds are currently being made available for spending on special educational needs. I should be interested to know if the Department has carried out any detailed costings of the money that would be necessary to carry out the recommendation in the report "Within Reach", which the Minister so roundly welcomed when it was published.

Repair and maintenance is another important area that is seriously underfunded. Across schools, further education and higher education, it is now estimated that some £4 billion will need to be spent to bring our institutions into a reasonable state of repair.

Let us consider areas in which money is wasted. They were referred to by the hon. Member for Croydon, Central. I ask the Minister to look again at the expenditure that the Department and the Government have wasted on the appallingly crude and inadequate standard attainment test. This year alone, some £35 million has been wasted.

The years 1992-93 have not been a happy time for the education service and, sadly, the evidence suggests that better times are not around the corner.

8.29 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): As a newly appointed member of the Select Committee, I am grateful for the opportunity to make a short contribution. I must declare that, as the husband of a primary school teacher, my household income is affected to some extent by the Government's expenditure plans.

In their document on spending plans, the Government have set their own test of the effectiveness of their expenditure programme. To use the jargon, they have said

that they wish to be judged on outputs as much as on inputs. That is a healthy sign. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) criticised what he called the language of finance, accountancy and efficiency. *[Interruption.]* He certainly talked about accountancy. I can answer that criticism by saying that good accountancy and good book-keeping are necessary to ensure that the large, but finite, sums of taxpayers' money spent on education are properly used to provide education of the highest standard for children in every part of the country.

In their document, the Government say that their paramount objective is to raise the standards of achievement across the curriculum. Over the past few years, that has meant a number of radical reforms, the most important of which was the introduction of the national curriculum and testing. They were enacted in the Education Reform Act 1988, introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker). I shall come to that later.

I welcome some of the other developments in the Government's policies. There is sufficient evidence, in terms of international comparisons of pupil achievement, to give everybody who is reasonably open minded cause for concern—I put it no stronger—about whether children in the United Kingdom could be achieving higher standards at school than they have on average in past decades. In a world economy that is becoming more competitive, Ministers are right to keep under permanent review the education system in this country and to be always vigilant and alert for new ways of ensuring that that system is better suited to the challenges that face our country.

With that in mind, I welcome the Government's approach to teacher training which stresses school-based rather than college-based training. I welcome also the Government's insistence over the years on more information being made freely available to parents and the general public about the performance of schools. That involves HMI reports, school prospectuses and examination results. It is interesting that, on other occasions, Opposition Members are proud of their support for the principle of freedom of information, yet, whenever that principle has been tested in education policy, they have been, in their voices and votes, in favour of secrecy and against openness.

I have the honour to represent a constituency in Buckinghamshire. Since my election, I have made a point of visiting as many schools as possible within my constituency. It is a diverse area. I have visited nearly 40 schools. I have been to village schools with one teaching head and a part-time teacher, large primary schools in an urban environment with a large ethnic minority intake, and grammar schools and upper schools taking many hundreds of pupils from within and outside the county. I have found dedicated teachers who enjoy the confidence and support of their governors and of the parents of the children in their charge.

There might be cross-party agreement on the fact that one does not seek militants, revolutionaries or bolsheviks in Buckinghamshire. *[Interruption.]* I will disappoint the hon. Member for Devonport by saying that one had to search hard and long to find a notice from the National Union of Teachers in any of the common rooms that I visited.

From talking to the heads and staff in those schools, I found a yearning for a constructive partnership with the Government to ensure that the national curriculum and the system of testing work. That yearning has been coupled with a growing sense of frustration at the cumbersome and bureaucratic way in which the curriculum and, in particular, the system of testing have been implemented in practice.

I believe that my right hon. and hon. Friends are aware, from the representations that have been made to them, of the fact that those concerns are not confined to their political opponents. They are felt widely, not just among moderate and responsible members of the teaching profession, but amongst governors and parents who have been life-long supporters, and often members, of the Conservative party. It is important that, through the Dearing review and the Government's response to it, we get the balance right for next year.

The Government have a duty to insist that certain key skills—a core of basic knowledge—are taught consistently to a high standard in every school in the country. They have a duty to introduce a system of rigorous testing that ensures that measures of achievement can be made. I have found few teachers in Buckinghamshire who object to that as a matter of principle. However, that must be set alongside the fact that, in a thriving school, which attracts the loyalty and support of parents, and one in which the local community feel a sense of pride and identification —the Government wish to see that, and it is evident throughout my community—there must be room for the spontaneity of the enthusiastic teacher to explore other areas of learning that may not always require to be tested. Those two important principles must be balanced. I believe that the Dearing review and the Government's response to it will ensure that that balance is struck appropriately.

We need a diverse curriculum but it must not be so prescriptive as to turn into an education straitjacket. For example, even in Aylesbury there are first schools in which the teachers are struggling with children from family backgrounds of material poverty, where there may not be many books or where there may be instability. Those teachers have to work hard to teach the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy which are essential if those children are to take advantage of the education opportunities available in the country later on.

I know that teachers in such schools will want to include elements of history, geography and other subjects in their teaching. However, they may fear that too prescriptive an approach to those other subjects might make it more difficult for them to give adequate attention to the basic tasks and set the children in those schools at a disadvantage compared with other schools in neighbouring districts where there is perhaps greater parental support for the traditional academic route.

There is an opportunity for my right hon. and hon. Friends in the next year to build upon the tremendous willingness that I find within the teaching profession and amongst governors and parents to forge a constructive partnership such as that mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton).

I find no wish to return to the old days of the secret garden when information was kept within the confines of the classroom but a ready acceptance of the duty that the schools and the teaching profession have to the wider community. There is also a belief that practical and sensible reforms of the national curriculum and testing are necessary to make the system work as the Government

[Mr. David Lidington]

wish it to work and in a way that would be in the interests of pupils not only in my constituency but across the nation.

8.40 pm

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): The report of the Select Committee on Education observed that the Government's plans for capital spending on schools appear to favour grant-maintained schools over local education authority schools. The Minister freely admitted that that was indeed the case, reflecting the Government's commitment to the success of grant-maintained schools. It makes me wonder about the Government's commitment to the success of local education authority schools—to the continuing success of the those which are working well and to the improvement of those which have problems.

For 1992-93, the difference in capital expenditure breaks down nationally into an average of between £110 and £116 per pupil per annum in the grant-maintained sector compared with £88 per pupil in the local education authority sector. It will fall to £75 per pupil in the LEA sector in 1993-94, to £71 in 1994-95 and to £66 in 1995-96, which is a serious decrease in funding. There is deliberate discrimination in capital funding, which ignores the pressures on local education authorities to replace and renew major elements of post-war education buildings which are predominant in many authorities.

In Tower Hamlets, emergency repairs are necessary to some of the prefabricated and system built units. The delay in the repairs has exacerbated longer-term maintenance problems. The estimated backlog of repairs is more than £2 billion nationally. In 1992-93, London authorities received only 35 per cent. of the £86 million that was identified as needed for the basic building work.

The decline in the school environment has a considerable impact on pupils' learning. I know that from personal experience, as I have taught in prefabricated huts which are freezing in winter and boiling in summer. Such conditions are not conducive to getting the best work from teachers or pupils. We hoped to do away with such temporary buildings, but the present capital funding regime means that they will remain until they rot.

The Secretary of State claimed that local education authorities have access to capital receipts as a way of increasing scope for capital expenditure, but there has been a steady decline in local authority receipts which are deemed to derive from educational assets. They have decreased from £285 million in 1988-89 to a forecast of only £60 million in 1992-93.

That is primarily due to the downturn in the property market, the residue of surplus assets being less straightforward in terms of disposal because of planning consents, location, lack of money and mortgage problems, and, above all, the threat of transfer to grant-maintained status when local education authorities want to reorganise and rationalise their schools. They are left with schools with a limited number of pupils and wasted space, and they cannot carry out plans which have been wored out in advance for the benefit of the whole education service—schools which are planned to close then opt out, and the plans are thrown into chaos.

At the same time, the Government restrict spending by capping controls which are forcing down LEA expenditure. They are limiting the use of capital expenditure which is funded from revenue. As a result, the scope for enhancing future credit approvals has been substantially limited, so the argument that LEAs have free access to capital receipts is false—that access is severely restricted and declining.

Mention has been made of the double funding for grant-maintained schools. An answer to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) revealed that more than half of the 492 grant-maintained schools are being double-funded through their annual maintenance grant for activities such as advisory and library services which were previously provided by the LEAs.

The higher level of grant which grant-maintained schools receive to cover the costs of services formerly provided by the LEAs has been maintained. The LEAs still have to provide those services, and the duplication is costing them nearly £2 million in London and, I believe, nearly £14 million across the country.

The Government recently released two consultation documents on the common funding formula, in which they state that they intend to continue to allocate additional money for grant-maintained schools' extra responsibilities. The funding agency will be a quango and centrally controlled by the Government. It will increasingly transfer funds from the local authority sector to the grant-maintained sector, which will put the squeeze on local education authority schools.

Schools that need funds for various reasons will be tempted, bribed and pressured to become grant-maintained, and the local education authority will be starved of funds. They will nevertheless have to maintain services for children with special needs and fund welfare officers and educational psychologists out of the continually decreasing funds. The services are bound to suffer, to the disbenefit of all children.

In many areas, classrooms in local authority schools now have more pupils than before. I believe that there are advertisements in New Zealand and Australian newspapers for instructors. Hard-pressed schools have found a loophole—if they employ untrained instructors, they can pay them less than teachers. We have all heard the Prime Minister's advocacy of mum's army. Increasingly, unqualified people will be teaching our children in order to spin out the money. Experienced teachers are being given the push; they are being pressured and made to feel that it is time that they took early retirement because older teachers cost more and they are being replaced by new teachers.

It seems strange to me that although a recent school inspectors' report said that in the past few years the crop of students who have become teachers are of an extremely high standard, we shall now have licensed teachers—we used to call such people unlicensed teachers—in our schools, and "instructors" from New Zealand and Australia. I have nothing against New Zealand or Australia, but I have something against the idea of unqualified people teaching our children.

Sir Paul Beresford: Is the hon. Lady aware that the school system, certainly in New Zealand, and I believe in Australia, too, has taken into the primary schools non-university qualified but trained teachers, along the

lines that are now being suggested here? It might be relevant to mention that those two countries have a higher standard of literacy than this country, despite having the same sort of difficulties involving non-English speakers, especially from the Pacific.

Ms Gordon: The hon. Gentleman may be correct. I do not know about the standard of literacy in New Zealand. If the standard there is higher, I should say that that must be despite the fact that there are unqualified teachers in the schools, not because of it. What is the pupil-teacher ratio? Are the unqualified teachers assisting qualifed teachers? We need to know the whole picture.

The Government's doctrinaire approach to education clearly plans to set the clock back to before 1945, when we had a two-tier system of education. There were elitist selective schools and a much lower standard of education, with a lower proportion of highly qualified teachers, less money and worse school buildings for the average child. The funding agency and the move towards grant-maintained schools take the system in that direction again towards an elitist education for the minority and low standards of education for the majority.

To that end, the Government are wasting a great deal of badly needed money. Perhaps the Minister will tell us how much it cost to pay external examiners to mark the tests that the teachers would not use—those tests that the teachers so clearly proved were badly designed and ill timed. How much money was spent on the publicity campaign to denigrate teachers and governors, and to try to convince parents that they were wrong? The campaign failed. That money was badly needed for books, buildings and other education purposes, yet the Government used it to bolster their doctrinaire approach and to try to push their policies forward.

Yesterday, with other members of the Select Committee, I visited a city tech. Of the £12 million that had been spent to refurbish the school building, 20 per cent. came from business, but 80 per cent. of it was taxpayers' money. There were 170 computers for 400 children, and as for the pupil-teacher ratio, I saw one class of 13, but most classes consisted of two or three or seven children at the most. That was great. It would be wonderful if we could have those ratios throughout the country, but when resources are limited, there must be some quality and some fairness in sharing.

The Government's policies, especially their funding policies, are designed to limit quality and to reduce fairness, to provide a good education and wonderful provision for the elite and very little for the rest.

8.53 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): To someone who does not serve on the Select Committee, the one fact that emerges most clearly from the two documents—perhaps not surprisingly, as over the past four years the Government have increased expenditure on behalf of the taxpayer by no less than an annualised rate of £100 billion a year—is the enormous amount of money being spent on education by central and local government. The spending of the Department for Education, which has already increased by 5·8 per cent. since last year—more than the rate of inflation—is planned to increase by a further 11 per cent. over the next two years. Local education authority expenditure has risen from £13·2 billion to £17·6 billion—an increase of 30 per cent.—over the past four years. Those are very large increases, given the general state of the economy and inflation.

I agree with the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), that the way in which the figures are presented needs to be improved significantly, if there is to be real accountability for parents, especially in individual local authorities. For instance, it is not right that we have to rely on standard spending assessments across the board and cannot break education spending down between the various local authorities. In particular, we cannot break down within education heads the sums that ought to be spent by individual education authorities. Of course, it is unacceptable that it takes eight months for local education authorities' outturn figures for current spending to emerge so that parents can use them as a performance indicator.

Sir Paul Beresford: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the difficulties is that many authorities, such as Lambeth, Southwark and Haringey, are years behind with their outturn figures anyway, in spite of the efforts of the Audit Commission?

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend anticipates me slightly. I shall have something to say about Lambeth later.

The average taxpayer, and indeed the average parent, does not want to know exactly how much has been spent on education; rather, he or she wants to know how effectively it has been spent and the kind of results that are being achieved in our schools. There is no doubt that expenditure at local and central Government level has risen significantly in real terms over the past five years—although there may have been a slight reduction in 1992-93—while pupil numbers have not risen significantly. Pupil numbers have risen by perhaps 5 per cent., whereas the real financial increase has been closer to 20 per cent.

Pupil-teacher ratios have significantly improved. Early education has been mentioned in the debate, and over the past 10 years it is in early and primary education that the most significant improvements have been made, from 27:1 to 21:1. The latest social trends survey reveals that significant improvements have been made over the medium term—for example, in the number of under-fives who have had both playgroup and nursery education. The number of children being taught in large classes has fallen significantly in secondary schools, from 30 per cent. in 1977 to 24 per cent. now, and even more significantly in primary schools.

Mr. Don Foster: I should hate the hon. Gentleman to mislead the House. I think that it was the Under-Secretary of State for Schools who told us at Education questions recently that the number of pupils in large classes, in primary schools had risen—albeit by a comparatively small proportion. Does the hon. Gentleman also agree that only 24 per cent. of children in this country are in nursery schools or nursery classes, and that that is the lowest percentage in any EC country except for Portugal?

Mr. Coombs: It is also fair to point out that, over 10 years, there have been significant improvements, and that 90 per cent. of young people under the age of five now have the opportunity to attend either a playgroup or a nursery. That is a record figure. Similarly, teachers' salaries are better than they have ever been. An average classroom teacher now earns £20,600 a year. We spend a

[Mr. Coombs]

greater proportion of our gross domestic product on public education than Germany and Japan, which produce much better results.

Labour Members are in no position to lecture us on the resources given to education. When Labour was last in government—thank God, that is a long time ago—expenditure on education dropped by about £1·1 billion in real terms and fell as a proportion of GDP. Moreover, instead of rocketing as it has under the Conservatives, the number of people in higher education fell.

Mr. Jamieson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government can make that claim because Labour authorities have spent more on education than Tory authorities? Nursery places are much more likely to be available under Labour authorities than under Tory authorities.

Mr. Coombs: The point that ought to be made concerns the return that the charge payers are getting on that money. That additional expenditure is in direct proportion to Labour authorities' propensity to waste rather than their propensity to achieve higher educational standards. If one examines the increased expenditure and absolute levels of expenditure of authorities across the country, it is difficult to see any correlation between the level of expenditure—per pupil or not—and the kind of educational results that are being achieved.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby talked about working against the polarisation that he saw in many education matters. My view is that parents want the school that their children attend to be more accountable to them and that, whether that happens by local management of schools, with a greater proportion of the local authority's budget going to individual schools, or via the grant-maintained route, the kind of system whereby local parents have more control of their own schools is likely to continue.

I recall the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster)—I know that he will intervene, although I am not necessarily saying that he was supporting grant-maintained schools—saying on 6 May 1992:

"We would be very keen to see the benefits of grant-maintained status"—

in terms of greater ability to control the expenditure at local expenditure—

"being passed to all schools . . . Maybe what we should do is have all schools opt out instantly."

Whether they opt out or whether they actually get a greater control of their own expenditure, they will wish to have more devolved power, more local control and more local responsibility. The hon. Gentleman looks as though he is itching—

Mr. Don Foster: Let me set the record straight. I thought that I had explained my position. I do indeed believe that more power and responsibility should be devolved to individual schools, but those schools should remain within a strategic planning framework that is local and democratically accountable. I thought that I had made that clear.

Mr. Coombs: The fairly non-controversial point that I seek to make is that, in a context in which more power and responsibility are being devolved to schools, local education authorities will have to rethink their role in a very fundamental sense; indeed, many authorities, including Labour-controlled authorities, are doing that. They may not have education committees; they may devolve power through social services. The authorities will retain certain functions, such as special education, psychology, school attendance, transfers, transport and so on, but if they are to adapt to the new philosophy whereby the Government are steering rather than rowing, they will have to get used to a partnership with schools based on a new maturity—whether the schools are grant maintained or locally managed. If they do not, they will suffer the kind of fate that the National Association of Head Teachers talked about in connection with Lambeth, when it described it as a

"classic example of an authority that may wither and die because of its own incompetence"

and its inability to face the future.

The standards of schools are what counts to parents, and there have been significant improvements in standards over the past few years. Since 1979, the number of people getting one or more A-level has increased quite dramatically—from 15 to 22 per cent., an increase of about 50 per cent. The number of people getting five GCSEs has also increased significantly.

According to a national institute study recently acquired by the Library, we do not compare as well as we should with our competitors, Germany, France and Japan. In Britain, 27 per cent. of 16-year-olds reach the equivalent of GCSE grades A to C in mathematics, the national language and one science, compared with 62 per cent. in Germany, 66 per cent. in France and 50 per cent. in Japan. Such a record applies to mathematics for 13-year-olds.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Those statistics are interesting, useful and fairly well known. However, we do not have standardisation across the countries, which is important; otherwise, we may draw the wrong conclusions and concentrate on the wrong areas. We should concentrate on science—that is absolutely clear—but we need standardisation and a proper comparison.

Mr. Coombs: The Select Committee will embark on precisely that. It will be worth while. Those are some of the arguments that it makes in its report. That is the difficulty of comparability. Nevertheless, the statistics cannot just be ignored. They come back to the culture that exists in many schools. Many teachers are not guilty of those problems, but, too often, they regard testing as discrimination and believe that it encourages a climate of failure.

In the words of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), too many people regard measurement and reporting as unjustified criticism and too many regard league tables as divisive. I do not thing that they are. Most parents want to know how their children are doing compared with other children, and not just the absolute standards, which may or may not be rigorous.

So far as the tests are concerned, it is interesting that the Office for Standards in Education talked about the quality of teaching and learning going up significantly. The Institute of Directors also shared that view, and——

Ms Gordon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Coombs: Let me finish the sentence.

Although we wish to see Ron Dearing streamlining the national curriculum and making the assessment procedures much more simplified than they presently are, the

one thing that would damage education more than anything would be if we went on to pick and mix testing, whereby tests were associated with the children who took those tests, rather than set a rigorous test across the country that all children had to take and that would produce precisely the uniform standards that the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) mentioned.

Ms Gordon: The hon. Gentleman mentioned that parents like to see how their children perform in league tables compared with other children. Does he not feel that our first concern should be for the well-being, education and development of children? Does he not know that those comparisons can severely damage those children who do not appear in the top 25 per cent. of the tables, whichever way they are counted or published? Has he not heard of the terrible damage that the 11-plus examination did to the confidence and development of 75 per cent. of the children in this country?

Mr. Coombs: I believe, as do the vast majority of parents, that that is the greatest myth in education at the present time. Children are more naturally competitive than the hon. Lady gives them credit for, and I do not believe that they will be damaged in any way if we let parents know how their children are doing in comparison with other children.

One of the problems that we have with reports from many schools is that they do not give parents any idea of how their children are doing in an absolute sense, and certainly not how they are doing in a relative sense. As evidence, I have a report here—I will not mention from whom it comes, except to say that it is from a child aged 10 in a midlands school. It is the year report, July 1993. On science, it says:

"In the investigations carried out, she has shown that she can complete a task, observe accurately and record the results in a variety of ways."

On history, it says:

"She is beginning to develop the ability to sequence events over a long period of time, to look at evidence and draw conclusions about the past."

On geography, it says:

She has continued to build upon skills already experienced and develop those, including physical, human and environmental geography."

That is the only information that that child's parents will receive on that child in that year and I do not believe that such a report is sufficiently rigorous. If the Government wish to see the kind of improvements in accountability between schools and parents that we all wish to see, they will have to issue advice on reporting which makes such reports more specific and, I hope, encourages greater competition between children than is evident at present.

If we are to improve standards in schools and maintain that improvement where it occurs, it is vital that schools do not focus on the lowest common denominator but become beacons of excellence for the children whom they serve.

9.10 pm

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): Not being a member of the Select Committee, I too welcome this opportunity to discuss education expenditure on the Floor of the House, and I congratulate the members of the Select Committee on giving us the opportunity.

I shall concentrate on a narrow subject that does not receive the attention it deserves, but which is of growing importance in raising standards in schools today. I in no way condone or condemn education policy during the past two decades, but there can be no doubt that there has been a revolution in our schools. People who suddenly find themselves going back to school, not having been there since they were pupils 20 or 30 years ago, barely recognise what they see.

During the past 20 or 30 years, there has been a revolution in the breadth of subjects studied, in the aspirations of parents from all social and economic walks of life for their children to succeed and to have career opportunities that they did not have, and in the aspirations for girls as well as for boys.

There has also been a revolution in the relationships in education today. The relationship between teachers and pupils, between parents and teachers and, most significant of all, between the school and its community is not what it was 20 or 30 years ago.

I approve of most of that revolution, but I am critical of some of it. It can be summed up in a phrase that I like but which, in itself, does not say a lot—the entitlement curriculum. In education, we have started to consider the curriculum that children are entitled to receive and say that that is the entitlement curriculum.

But we must move on to consider the entitlement curriculum in terms not so much of what is being taught as of how that teaching takes place. It is that difference on which I wish to concentrate. The case that I want to make is that we have put far too little expenditure into support staff in schools in order for the entitlement curriculum and the teaching of it to be as successful and effective as it might be.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Morris: I am conscious of the time, and I do not want to deny hon. Members the opportunity to speak. I shall happily talk to the hon. Gentleman after the debate.

One great change is that we cannot go back to chalk and talk. Schools now use technology and computers. Children watch television outside the classroom and teachers must make the way that they teach as effective as the messages that children receive from various media outside school. There was the day when a poster of a dinosaur in a classroom was meant to motivate children to learn about prehistory. *[Laughter.]* It was not I who smiled at the mention of dinosaurs and looked at the Minister. Now that children watch films such as "Jurassic Park" and see dinosaurs alive in the streets, the poster in the classroom is a most ineffective means of getting the message across. That is another revolution that has taken place.

According to the report that we are discussing, £40 million has been spent by the Schools Examinations and Assessment Council, the National Curriculum Council and other research institutions. I welcome that, but I bet that that money has been spent mainly on researching what should be taught. I bet that it has not been spent on helping teachers in schools to teach the national curriculum and I bet that it has not been spent on helping those teachers to come to terms with the revolution in content and methodology that they are being asked to implement. I maintain that insufficient funds are given for staffing in schools to reflect the changes that they are being asked to implement.

[Ms Morris]

A Coopers and Lybrand report some time ago found that only 50 per cent. of a teacher's working week was spent in contact with the child. I worry greatly about that, because I still believe that the sign of a most effective school is that conversations between teachers and pupils are of a high order and of great frequency. It worries me that 50 per cent. of teachers' time takes them away from talking to and working with pupils in the classroom. A teacher now is a typist, a printer, a laboratory assistant, a designer of work sheets and booklets, a form-filler, a ticker of boxes and a sender of returns to faculty heads, to head teachers, to education authorities and to the Ministers at the Department for Education.

In terms of the effectiveness of expenditure on education, we are spending an awful lot of money on training our teachers to do jobs that they should not be doing. We boast—and I welcome it—that, over the 80-year period covered in the report, there has been a 70 per cent. increase in graduates. Can we justify spending millions of pounds on increasing the number of people who leave education with degrees and then putting them into a workplace where we expect 30 or 40 or 50 per cent. of their working week to be taken up with photocopying, printing, filling in forms and conducting other basic administrative tasks?

I contacted two schools in my constituency for which I have a high regard to find out what sort of support staff they have. In a primary school, 29 secretarial hours a week are allocated for all the local management of schools, for keeping accounts, for secretarial duties to the head, for answering the telephone and for working for the teachers in an administrative capacity. In a secondary school with almost 1,000 pupils, there are three staff members to do all those tasks.

The reality is that in schools today teachers do not even expect administrative support for those tasks. They naturally think that their job includes a whole range of administrative and bureaucratic tasks that are needed to support them in their jobs. I also worry that the environment in which we ask teachers to carry out those tasks is not a professional one that is conducive to good teaching. In secondary schools, no one but the most senior staff, and in primary schools no one but the head teachers, has office accommodation.

Other staff have nowhere to keep their books or to spread out their papers. They have no classroom of their own that they can use as a base from which to be effective teachers. The normal sight in schools today at the change of lessons is of teachers scurrying across the playground with their arms full of books, equipment, videos and even tape recorders which they move from one classroom to another. Our education system does not give them the stability of a classroom of their own.

Money is wasted because teachers do not use the skills that we have enabled them to develop during their teacher training. There is a fall in teacher morale. Teachers go into teaching to teach pupils and not to be bureaucrats and administrators. They are constantly frustrated by the pressures to draw them out of the classroom and away from teaching.

Most worrying of all is the fact that we have deprofessionalised teachers. That does nothing for teacher morale, it does nothing for the way in which other people perceive teachers and it does nothing to make teachers more effective. I ask the Minister to consider any other professional body, whether politicians like ourselves, doctors in their surgeries, people in the legal profession or civil servants. The Minister should consider the support services that we give them to enable them to do their jobs. He should then consider the support services that we give teachers to enable them to do their jobs. Not one of us could claim that we could be effective Members of Parliament if we had the level of support with which teachers are expected to manage in schools. We had such a debate on our profession in the House almost a year ago this week.

When we draw up expenditure plans, we concentrate far too much on developing policies on the curriculum at a distance from the classroom and on producing reports. We talk far too much about policies at middle and senior management level, and we concentrate far too little time and far too few resources on what teachers need to do the job as effectively as possible in the classroom. My criterion is that teachers should be left in the classroom to teach and to work with pupils for as much as possible of the working week and for as much of the child's time as is commensurate with good administration, good in-service training and a good professional regard to teachers working, meeting and talking with other teachers.

The whole range of tasks with which the Government have landed teachers in terms of increased administration has served only to make wider the division between the fact that we train teachers to teach and put them in the classroom and the fact that we then take away the time in which they should be teachers and fail to give them the support that they need to be more effective teachers. Perhaps, in future reports, the Select Committee may draw that point to the Government's attention and may seek assurances that we shall begin to address that point seriously in financial terms.

9.22 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): We spend much time inside and outside Parliament discussing changes in our society. One thing that does not change is the argument about money. We have heard Opposition Members tonight talk about the great golden age that must once have existed when every school, every local authority, every special interest group and every body in the country had all the money that it required. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) peddled that line in his speech today. It was the speech to which he treated the Education Bill Committee a number of times and at length. There was no golden age, and I do not not suppose that there ever will be.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford) and other hon. Friends have said, it is not how much money is spent but how the money is spent that matters in the debate. In some schools, the cart has come before the horse. Many schools have long had fund-raising as part of their budget requirement. They are geared up to raise money effectively throughout the year. A number of schools raise money and appeal at an emotive level for parents to support their children's education. Having raised the money, they then decide how to spend it. That may be the wrong way round.

I confess that from time to time I join in the general clamour to spend more money. Here I make common

cause with the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) and others in the cry for nursery education. It is self-evident that, if we made a little investment now, the gains in educational value and in social terms later would be significant. I add my voice to that.

The main burden of what I want to say is about spending and investment across the age range, and how we assess its value. In education, as with everything else these days, we are happy only when we are surrounded by jargon, acronyms, euphemisms and buzz words. One that I welcome with open arms is the phrase "added value". In education that is an all-purpose, all-embracing, all-things-to-all-people term. I suspect that, even in the fulness of time, it may not replace that strange creature of our times, the level playing field.

In the light of the testing problems, boycotts and league table disagreements that we have had, it is obvious that raw examination data to lever up standards is not enough on its own. There has to be a context of wider home, school and community influences. We must also add the ability, experience and performance of teachers, and the stability, motivation and morale of the teaching service. So the assessment and appraisal of the profession by the profession becomes even more urgent both for its own sake, and as an ingredient in the "added value" as a tool in professional development.

It is clear that the basic and constituent part of any "added value" has to be children, and what has been added to them and what potential they have developed. No apology is needed when we conclude that testing and monitoring their progress is self-evidently quintessential. I have heard no teacher, no union and no hon. Member say that they are against testing itself. Even testing at stages before the final testing at the age of 16 is no longer an issue. But the damage done by the boycott has been considerable. The damage has been to the continuous monitoring of children.

Having won concessions on league table publications and also achieved the Dearing review, some teachers had the taste of blood and of flexing their muscles, which they liked. As a former teacher, I understand that feeling. But hon. Members must look beyond that. We showed the papers and we raised the question, "What was all the fuss about?" People asked how easy the tests were. People said, "Look at the way that standards have declined in our country that we can present such papers. How can teachers argue that they are overworked?"

Of course, we did not win the argument with the parents, who tend to believe teachers and head teachers in the way that patients believe doctors rather than politicians. Many schools set their own key stage 3 English papers last month. Many of those papers were virtually identical to the Government's papers in style, structure and content. That proves my point about teachers tasting blood. Exam results, tests, monitoring—call them what we like—must be better defined. We are trying to show the progress that children make in time through each key stage.

Key stage 1—the summer birthday children who have completed less than six full terms—must be borne in mind. Key stages 2 and 3—the different transfer ages of children at two and three-tier schools, high and middle—must also play a part. Special educational needs, socio-economic and demographic make-up of the area and problems of urban and rural deprivation all must be taken into account when processing the raw data from schools. Other things such as extra-curricular activity must be added.

But it is wrong to presuppose that most parents cannot make a judgment of sorts about their children, their schools and their teachers. To make that supposition is the equivalent of talking down to children. Research is going on apace into the "value added" concept, but I will not weary the House with it. The Library has provided me with an excellent summary of that research, with studies, papers and learned opinions from all over the country. That is one area that the Select Committee could look at in future.

Having said that, let me add that there is a danger of over-intellectualising the debate with indices, indicators, snapshot determinators, residual deviation scores, expertise which becomes self-perpetuating and science which becomes deliberately blinding. In education, nothing is agreed for ever. Periodically, we rediscover the wheel, chalk, and the closed classroom door. We also rediscover bringing parents and business people back into schools. A lot of it goes round in circles, but when children leave our schools and go into the world, they find that the world has not gone round in circles at quite the same speed.

The children will have to make their own way in their future life without the adjusted results of whatever value the education system has added to them. All I am saying is that we should keep the matter in perspective. The survival, prosperity and well-being of our children in school will depend on their ability to compete with their peers from other nations which are more determined to succeed than we are. That is the bottom line. If we strip away the self-interest and expertise, that is the only thing that matters.

9.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I join other hon. Members on both sides of the House who have welcomed the fact that the debate is taking place. It is a step forward. The Secretary of State, whom I welcome back to the Chamber, missed some good speeches by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I hope that he will take the opportunity to read them in detail in *Hansard*.

The debate has been wide-ranging. I begin by mentioning a few facts from the report. The first was mentioned by the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton). He talked about the difficulties that the Select Committee experienced in defining lines of accountability. That is a real problem, and one which should give cause for anxiety to both Opposition and Conservative Members. I hope that we all agree that in future greater attention should be paid to accountability. If we cannot have accountability, the House is failing in its job.

We need accountability on two scores. First, there needs to be financial accountability. Secondly, there should be full accountability of decision-making because in education it is so much in the public interest.

I have noticed that no one has mentioned that the report says that in real terms education spending fell between 1989-90 and 1990-91. That fall is significant. We shall look with interest to see what happens in future years and the extent to which the Secretary of State is able to defend the essential spending within his Department against the Treasury cuts which I am afraid loom over us all.

[Mrs. Ann Taylor]

The other fact which has come out of the debate is that not only the level of spending but the nature of that spending and the priorities that the Government choose to emphasise are important. The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) made an interesting speech. He was the only hon. Member present from a Tory shire county. He reminded us of the salutary fact of our position in the international league tables.

Only a few weeks ago, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research published its league tables. They showed that the number of French and German 16-year-olds who gain the equivalent of GCSE grades A to C in essential subjects is double the number in Britain. After 14 years of Conseryative government, the Government would be wrong to be complacent about the direction in which standards are going.

The problems that we face in education are widespread. Many hon. Members concentrated on the Government's priorities. I wish to say a word about them too, even though time is short. The Government have made it clear that one of their main themes and priorities is the centralisation of all decision-making in education in the hands of the Secretary of State. In the past few years, we have seen an increasing and unhealthy concentration of power in Whitehall. We shall soon consider the final stages of yet another Education Bill designed to give the Secretary of State more powers. That is a regrettable move.

The concentration of power is wrong in principle and also clearly wrong in practice. It has become evident that those schools which have become grant-maintained—or Government-maintained, as Ministers now like to describe them—are finding it extremely difficult to deal with a central Department in all decision making. It was significant that in the middle of last month, 88 per cent. of all grant-maintained schools had not yet received their final budget for the current year. That could not have happened under the local authority system. That shows that the Secretary of State cannot even run 500 schools, let alone the 24,500 that he seeks to run.

Returning to the specifics the report mentions the position of grant-maintained schools with regard to funding. Sometimes Ministers are quite honest and tell us openly that they intend to favour grant-maintained schools. Sometimes they say that there are bribes and sometimes they say that the extra money is simply there to reflect the extra administrative burdens facing grant-maintained schools. The report shows clearly that, with regard to capital, the Government have made a straightforward political decision to favour the schools that suit their particular political ideology.

However, there are other issues involved in terms of ongoing expenditure. The point was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon). Recently, we have seen that many grant-maintained schools are receiving double funding. The problem is not simple because schools which have become grant-maintained in the first instance receive the highest level of double funding. I understand that grant-maintained schools in one authority are funded on eight different formulae. That must be a recipe for chaos.

One of the difficulties is that there is no proper accountability for grant-maintained funding. The Audit Commission's writ does not run that far. It is important that the Select Committee should consider that point in future because it is an area of significant expenditure.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On the specific point of double funding, I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that Tory-controlled Calderdale council has decided, as a result of the implications of grant-maintained funding and the way that is sucking money from the local education authority, to spearhead a national campaign to try to persuade the Government that the present formula is simply pumping money into grant-maintained schools at the expense of other schools.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that many people outside this place, including Conservative councillors, are appalled at the priorities that the Government have given to grant-maintained schools because they understand the practical problems and what is happening on the ground. At the moment, the Government are creating a hierarchy of funding according to the political correctness of a school as defined by the Secretary of State.

I want to refer to another area of funding which has not been touched upon today, but which is extremely important. That is the amount of money which the Government are spending on propaganda. The Government have recently spent more than £500,000 on producing booklets and glossy folders in an attempt to persuade schools to opt out. Indeed, the Government wasted £17,500 recently on a revised booklet which will be out of date before many people receive it because of the new Education Bill.

The publicity budget of the Department for Education has risen dramatically in recent years. In 1979-80, the publicity budget was £103,800 which was just over one tenth of a million pounds. The publicity figure last year was more than £8·8 million. That shows the scale of the increase in the budget. There has been a staggering increase of 8,455 per cent.

The Government are now spending more than £370 per school simply on publicity and just to tell the country what the Government believe should be happening. Such a sense of priority is wholly wrong; it shows that Ministers are not in touch with the reality of the problems.

I would have liked to raise many problems. I would have liked to have referred to the Government's failure to stand by their promises on section 11 funding to provide additional help for some of the schools that need it most. I would have liked to comment on the fact that the Government have cut the budget for drug education, which could do so much to help young people and keep them away from the appalling tragedy that could befall them.

One of my main criticisms, which I want to mention despite the shortage of time, is of the way in which the government deal with education expenditure as it relates to provision for the under-fives. The junior Minister who is to reply to the debate this evening has made his position clear. When I asked him at Question Time recently whether he agreed that nursery education provided the best start in education and should be available to all three and four-year-olds, he refused point blank to agree.

The Secretary of State has kept very quiet on this matter. His predecessors had commitments to nursery provision. Surely Ministers can see that, if we spent more

on pre-school education and nursery education, we would be identifying problems at an earlier stage, helping children to settle better at school, helping them to perform better throughout their educational career, giving them a better chance of finding work later, and, indeed, ensuring that there was less chance that they would end up engaged in criminal activity.

The Government seem incapable of viewing education expenditure as an investment in our future. Unless the Government can change their attitude; unless they can see that if they fail to spend money at certain crucial stages they will have to spend even more later on many of the problems that will arise, I do not believe that we will make real progress.

I thought that the contributions from the hon. Members for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton) and for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), talking of partnership, saying that there should not be confrontation in education, echoed very clearly things that hon. Members on this side of the House have said on many occasions.

During the last 12 months the attitude of Ministers, who seem to have adopted a confrontational approach whenever possible, has been extremely damaging to education. If other Conservative Members were vocal in the way that those two hon. Gentleman were tonight, we could make more progress in education. I am sure that members of the Select Committee from all sides of the House have an important contribution to make.

9.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Eric Forth): This is an important and, regrettably in many ways, a rare opportunity for the House to consider this vital part of Government activities, education, in a thoughtful way. I congratulate the Chairman of the Education Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), on initiating this debate, and all those who have taken part, even though over the past year some of us have become fairly familiar with each other's arguments. It may well be that the odd remark that I make will have been heard before. Nevertheless, the arguments are of such quality that repetition will not necessarily damage them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby asked some important and fundamental questions arising from his Committee's report and reflecting my Department's response to it. I will deal with them as quickly as I can, but try to do justice to them.

My hon. Friend—and, indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs)—asked why we could not use the sub-blocks, or control totals, of expenditure on which our provision for local education authorities is based for planning purposes. The difficulty is that these control totals do not represent a planning breakdown of education standard spending; they are derived exclusively for the rather technical purpose of calculating standard spending assessments.

They do not represent an indicative breakdown of how education should be deployed. They are not read or regarded as such by local education authorities. Therefore, I do not think that it would be right to attempt to compare outturn data with them. Although there might be a temptation to make that connection, I believe that it would be wrong to do so. I am certainly not persuaded that this would be the right way to use that information.

The Committee Chairman and other hon. Members made quite a point about the accountability argument. I believe that in many ways accountability—someone used the expression multi-layered; it is not a very elegant term, but it will do for this purpose—exists in a number of different forms in education expenditure. It certainly exists in a global sense, because the Secretary of State is responsible, through the normal procedures of the House, for establishing the correct and appropriate level of expenditure overall, and for the distribution of that expenditure.

As for accountability, local education authorities, and, increasingly, grant-maintained schools are accountable in their own way and through their different procedures to their own electorates. That is as it should be. We cannot expect—and I would be surprised if hon. Members on either side of the House asked for it—the Government to accept accountability or responsibility for the details of how local education authorities spend their money in their own areas.

In almost every regard, local education authorities are given a lot of discretion in how they spend money on education, and they are accountable for it to their own electorates. Equally, grant-maintained schools are accountable to parents and local communities through their audits, annual reports and elected governors, and that is as it should be.

The accountability systems and mechanisms are strong and robust. It may be that it is not as easy as everybody would like it to be to draw direct lines of connection between the global figure and that established by local education authorities. One must make the point in passing that many local education authorities do not produce the returns of information as quickly as one would like, either to the Secretary of State or to their own electorate.

My hon. Friends the Members for Crosby and for Wyre Forest asked why we do not receive information on education as quickly or comprehensively as we would like. We continue to strive to make that information available. We have strengthened the procedures and reminded local authorities of the need for accurate and timely returns, and we continually chase latecomers for information.

The House may not believe it, but for the first time ever, we received a full return in respect of the 1990-91 financial year, and in respect of the 1991-92 financial year we received returns from all but five authorities by March. However, even by March, five authorities still had not returned their figures.

In the Department we do our best to gather, collate and disseminate the information that the Select Committee and hon. Members want so much, but we rely completely on local education authorities to provide us with the basic information. If they cannot or will not, due to either inefficiency or recalcitrance, there is not much that the Department can do. We will continue to strive to improve, but we hope that the House will understand that we continue to rely very much on local education authorities.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Does the Minister acknowledge that the reason for the delay in setting grant-maintained school budgets was not the tardiness of local authorities in the majority of cases?

Mr. Forth: I have discussed this with grant-maintained school heads and others, and if they want their budgets to be based on the most up-to-date information, inevitably

[Mr. Forth]

there will be some delay in establishing the final figures. They can have the figures much earlier if they want them to be based on previous year's information, but from the soundings that I have taken, it seems that they are content with the pace so far. We have improved on last year and we will seek to improve next year, but the truth is that, if we respond to their requests for basing their budgets on the most up-to-date information, the outcome will be as it has been. I believe that the balance is right, and the grant-maintained community accept that.

I welcome the comments that the Chairman of the Select Committee made about the national curriculum, and in particular the work being carried out by Sir Ron Dearing at the invitation and request of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in reviewing the curriculum and the testing regime. My hon. Friend said that he had no reservations about the opportunities that Sir Ron has provided for people to contribute to his review and to the conclusions that he will draw from it. We welcome and admire the way in which Sir Ron Dearing has gone about the important and responsible tasks that the Secretary of State has set him.

I emphasise—because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made the point in an intervention—that the fact that Sir Ron Dearing will soon take up his position as chairman of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority means that he will have a continuing role. He will be in a position to continue his review of the curriculum and testing regime on an on-going basis in precisely the way that the chairman of the Select Committee requested. We can take reassurance from that.

We are looking forward to Sir Ron's report, which will be available soon. The Secretary of State will then make his own judgment of what Sir Ron says, and my right hon. Friend will come forward with his response as quickly as may be. At that point everybody will be able to assess for themselves the way forward suggested by Sir Ron, and my right hon. Friend will then be in a position to bring forward his own proposals.

A number of hon. Members, not least the chairman of the Select Committee, raised the point to which the House returns from time to time, namely, the concerns expressed about capital allocations to grant-maintained schools. I shall, as I have done on previous occasions to the Select Committee and elsewhere, quote from two letters. The first was sent by the Prime Minister in August 1991 to a gentleman named Mr. Doug McAvoy, in which my right hon. Friend wrote:

"We have made no secret of the fact that grant-maintained schools get preferential treatment in allocating grants to capital expenditure. We look favourably at grant-maintained schools in order to encourage the growth of the sector and I am delighted to see that numbers are continuing to grow rapidly."

The former Secretary of State wrote in a letter to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in May 1991:

"On capital, I made clear at the time when allocations were announced for grant-maintained schools in January that my intention was to ensure that schools becoming grant-maintained were set up on a sound basis. In 1991-92 the sector as a whole has received relatively rather higher capital allocations than the LEA sector as a whole. I make no apology for that."

We have said time and again, without apology, that grant-maintained schools will be given the capital allocations that the Secretary of State deems necessary and desirable for those schools to operate on a sound basis. In doing so, we must make our assessment of the very rapid rate of growth of the grant-maintained sector in making capital available to it.

In that context, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), as usual for Opposition Members, could not quite decide whether he wanted to deride the small number of schools that had become grant-maintained or whether he was fearful of the large number that were becoming grant-maintained. When I bring him up to date and tell him that nearly 1,000 schools have voted yes to become grant-maintained, I leave him to decide whether he is afraid of that as a rate of progress or whether he finds it a derisorily small number. I leave him to explain his position on that.

A number of important points were raised during the debate. For example, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) referred to my Department's budget for publicity. We have an obligation under the citizens charter to provide the maximum information to parents throughout the country. We have an obligation to tell parents about the availability of the grant-maintained school option. We shall continue to discharge in full our responsibilities to parents and taxpayers for the moneys that we spend on informing them and keeping them up to date on the rapidly changing environment.

This has been a useful debate. Some important questions have been asked. I have done my best, in the short time that has been available to me, to answer them. I welcome this and future opportunities to debate those matters and clarify them further.

9.55 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, and to the Minister for arranging the debate in such a way that a member of the Select Committee has the privilege of replying to it, as is perhaps appropriate, albeit briefly.

In reviewing the Government's estimates for expenditure on education, I have the same problem as the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), the Chairman of the Select Committee, in finding my way through the statistics. I share the concern of the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford) that we do our best to find our way through them because it is important that we have a full picture of how the Government are investing in our nation's education system. I invite the House to see the picture that I see, which is one of incompetence, waste and a failure to invest in the nation's schools. In short, it is a failure properly to address the educational needs of the nation's children.

The Government may defend themselves by pointing to increased expenditure in certain areas, but in many cases that is misdirected. For example, there is the obscene luxury of Sanctuary house, which is like a set for a Hollywood epic—a disaster movie in the context of the debate: "The Towering Fiasco" perhaps——

Mr. Jamieson: "Jurassic Park".

Mr. O'Hara: Yes. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) also said earlier, "Jurassic Park" is an appropriate title for a Government who think the way to the future is backwards.

Department of Education accommodation costs are especially difficult to work out; they are opaque. However,

It appears that there has been a 75 per cent. increase between 1987-88 and 1992-93. The costs of Sanctuary house appear to be double those of its predecessor, Elizabeth house. However, it is staff costs that have risen most dramatically, by some 68 per cent. I note that current expenditure plans allow for a further increase of 67 new staff, on top of an increase of 200 between 1989-90 and 1992-93. The precise number is difficult to work out when we take account of Ofsted and the staff who have transferred to the Department of National Heritage.

It is clear that central administration is the one area that is sacrosanct. Perhaps that is why it has taken refuge in Sanctuary house. All those extra millions are not available for allocation to schools, but there is no hint of performance indicators to justify the mushrooming of central expenditure, despite the Government's predilection for indicators in every other area of the education service.

I expected to hear the justification—and the Minister has just given it—that the extra staff are needed for important Government reforms such as the national curriculum and the increase in grant-maintained schools. If the Secretary of State listens carefully, he will hear a hollow laugh throughout the country.

On the national curriculum, I invite him to visit any school in the country to see for himself the accumulated outpourings of documentation and other literature, much of it piled up in cupboards or even filling whole rooms. All of it is expensively produced, much of it is redundant and much of it is unread because teachers cannot keep up with it.

There is so much sheer waste, but no expense is spared on it. The Secretary of State had the opportunity to repent and not publish the redundant key stage 3 tests, but he went ahead and wasted a further £35 million on that. All that outpouring of literature is expensive not only in terms of money but in the damage that it does to morale, motivation and good will across the whole area of education.

What about the increased numbers of grant-maintained schools? Perhaps there is a justification for increased central administration costs as those schools become the direct responsibility of the DFE. We cannot know, because we do not know the performance indicators, but we can do some calculations—as my hon. Friends have done. The Government estimate, probably optimistically, that by 1995-96 there will be 2·25 million pupils in grant-maintained schools and 5·2 million under LEA administration, yet it is projected that GM schools will have more than £250 million spent on their capital programmes compared with £342·5 million for LEA schools.

That is scandalously disproportionate. It is all about bribing schools, often against their better judgment, to follow the Government down an ideological yellow brick road, away from the imputed disadvantages of LEA administration and towards direct control from the centre, albeit by an agency. It will be remote control with no local knowledge and no local accountability—those essential elements of LEA administration. It has nothing to do with investing in the education of the majority of the nation's children.

I describe that as misdirected expenditure. Meanwhile, the picture of massive, widespread dilapidation of the nation's schools will continue to worsen. Figures are not available, but the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) gave an estimate of £4 billion. Certainly the shortfall can be counted in billions of pounds. Then again, the education of the majority of the nation's children does not figure highly in Government priorities—few of its members use state schools.

Expenditure on the assisted places scheme is set to rise inexorably, to provide for increased take-up, revised forecasts of parental contributions and fee increases at participating schools—no belt-tightening there. The scheme has become a lifeboat for the independent sector, funded from the hard-pressed budgets of state schools. It is argued that it provides a ladder of opportunity for bright children of impecunious parents.

It being Ten o'clock, MADAM SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, and the Question necessary to dispose of the proceedings was deferred, pursuant to paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates).*

MADAM SPEAKER, *pursuant to paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates), put the deferred Questions on Estimates and Supplementary Estimates, 1993-94 (Class XIII, Vote 4 and Class VII, Vote 8).*

Class XIII, Vote 4

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £1,505,632,000, and including a Supplementary sum of £810,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1994 for expenditure by the Department of Social Security on administration, for agency payments, and for certain other services including grants to local authorities and voluntary organisations.

Class VII, Vote 8

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £15,520,183,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1994 for expenditure by the Department of the Environment on revenue support grant, on residual payments of rate support grants, on payment of non-domestic rates to receiving authorities in England, on a grant providing support to certain receiving authorities affected by changes in the calculations underlying revenue support grant as a result of population change, on a grant providing transitional support for certain local authorities, on a grant to compensate 75 per cent. of the expenditure incurred by them on preparation work for the council tax, on payments to specified bodies and the Commission for Local Administration in England, on payments for Valuation Office Agency rating and valuation services, on payments to meet the expenses of valuation tribunals, and on payments in respect of expenditure by the Local Government Commission.

MADAM SPEAKER *then, pursuant to paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates), put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the remaining Estimates appointed for consideration this day (Estimates and Supplementary Estimates, 1993-94 (Class X, Votes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6).*

Class X, Vote 1

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £362,633,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1994 for expenditure by the Department for Education on the assisted places scheme, voluntary and special schools, City Technology Colleges, grant maintained schools, music and ballet schools, direct grant schools, youth services, grants for miscellaneous international and other educational services, administrative costs of the Student Loans Company, research, information, publicity and central government grants to local authorities.

[Mr. O'Hara]

Class X, Vote 2

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £3,399,269,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1994 for expenditure by the Department for Education on payments to the Higher Education Funding Council (England) and the Further Education Funding Council, other payments for or in connection with higher and further education, and payment of certain licence fees to the Home Office.

Class X, Vote 3

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £1,769,824,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1994 for expenditure by the Department for Education on student awards and fees; provision of loans to students; reimbursement of fees for qualifying European Community students; compensation payments to redundant teachers and staff of certain institutions; and payments to the Further Education Funding Council.

Class X, Vote 4

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £44,369,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1994 for expenditure by the Department for Education on administration.

Class X, Vote 5

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £546,513,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1994 for expenditure by the Department for Education (Teachers' Pensions Agency) on superannuation allowances and gratuities, etc in respect of teachers, and the widows, widowers, children and dependants of deceased teachers.

Class X, Vote 6

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £38,607,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1994 for administration and programme expenditure by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools.

FINANCE (NO. 2) BILL

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the practice of the House as to the intervals between stages of Bills brought in upon Ways and Means Resolutions, more than one stage of the Finance (No. 2) Bill may be taken at any sitting of the House.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Broadcasting Act 1990

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): I am grateful for this opportunity to initiate this Adjournment debate on the operation of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

I am pleased that the bongs have sounded as usual tonight for ITN's much-admired "News at Ten", and long may they continue to do so. The early-day motion that I tabled supporting the continuation of "News at Ten" has attracted the signatures of more than 90 hon. Members. That is an understatement of the strong feelings that exist on both sides of the House.

ITV chiefs should bear that in mind, as well as the Select Committee report, before reaching a final decision on the future of "News at Ten". They would be unwise to ignore Parliament's views, because I believe that the country wants "News at Ten" saved for the future. Parliament has a wider responsibility, however, to consider developments in ITV as a whole and to engage Ministers in examining the working of the Broadcasting Act 1990, notwithstanding the short period of its operation.

As a former television producer, I want to speak up tonight for ITV's millions of viewers and for its employees, who are dedicated to maintaining its standards of public service broadcasting. Unquestionably, we still have one of the best broadcasting systems in the world. When ITV was introduced, some thought that the BBC's standards would be impaired. The opposite occurred. British television has been greatly enhanced by regionally based ITV.

The reason for disturbing the ITV system with the 1990 Act was not that its programmes needed improving or that its management needed shaking up—although both might have been true in certain respects. The reason was the application of mistaken dogma to ITV at a time when it was flourishing and rightly regarded as a pillar of public service broadcasting. However, the Government and the then Prime Minister thought that ITV could be improved if the old way of doing things were discarded and if its franchises were merely sold to the highest bidders, who would then have to recoup the price that they had paid irrespective of the resulting quality of service.

What Mrs. Thatcher wanted was to take an industry that was already in the private sector and to privatise its values and ethos even further. She was only partly restrained in doing so by her then broadcasting Minister, the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor). Making a colossally incompetent Bill into a temporarily less destructive Act will be his epitaph, or at least one of them.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman managed to inject into the Act a bit of the old world of public service broadcasting to mitigate the new system of pure financial return. However, this legislative cocktail did not strike the right balance, and now the commercial pressures created by the Act are starting to come into sharp conflict with ITV's public service commitment. That conflict between market forces and public interest lies behind the attempt to axe "News at Ten". It is also reflected in a host of similar, albeit less prominent, scheduling decisions throughout the ITV companies.

Hon. Members have drawn attention, for example, to worrying developments in Granada Television and other ITV companies, whose cuts in programme-making capacity, it is feared, will affect the companies' ability to fulfil the conditions of their licences. Undoubtedly there is mounting pressure on a range of programmes—not just news but all factual programming, documentaries, education, regional arts, minority entertainment and many others, which are popular but which may not maximise audience share and advertising revenue, and therefore help ITV to compete with its rivals.

As yet, ITV is far from collapsing. This year, £515 million is being spent on the programme schedules. In most parts of the country, viewers are still seeing the programmes that they are used to on ITV. Nevertheless, there is a growing recognition of a threat to ITV, and a real danger of a downward spiral of programme quality, brought on by the commercial burdens on ITV.

When the highest-bid ITV auction was carried out in 1991, the present Prime Minister passed immediate judgment on it. He said:

"I don't think it has been an optimum success."

When asked whether the system should be abandoned, he added:

"We will have to wait and see."

I doubt whether his confidence has grown since then.

After an inauspicious start, three developments have taken place to frustrate the intention of the Broadcasting Act to protect public service broadcasting on ITV. First, the ridiculous auction has resulted in franchises costing between £2,000 and £43 million apiece, producing an income for the Treasury, and a huge fixed cost for the companies, of £231·6 million per annum. Advertising revenue is available to cover these purchase costs, although it also has to cover programme making.

Secondly, the recession has been deeper and longer than anyone expected, and that has drained ITV of anticipated income. Thirdly, and most important for the long term, the competition to ITV from satellite, cable and Channel 4 has grown faster than many predicted. The satellite and cable systems now reach more than 3 million homes and have sources of income, such as subscription television, that are denied to ITV. Those systems, along with Channel 4, are eroding ITV's market share, thereby threatening to reduce its advertising revenue year on year.

Further rapid technology changes will greatly accelerate the spread of this competition. In 1989, when the Act was being considered, digital technology seemed to be at least a decade away, yet BSkyB is planning to use digital technology in Britain in two years' time. That will bring films almost on demand. Pay-as-you-view television will be here in profusion. In 1989, high-definition television on a commercial basis was seen as the technology of the 21st century. It could now be the technology of the mid-1990s.

This is the crux of the issue. As ITV loses revenue due to technology-driven and unregulated competition and rivalry from Channel 4, the ITV companies will be forced to cut costs. Because of their high fixed costs, chiefly the franchise bids, the axe will fall on programme budgets. That will weaken the programme schedule, depressing audience ratings and revenue still further, creating the danger of a descending spiral of programme quality.

What should Ministers be doing to respond to that threat? First, the Government must recognise that the problem exists. The Secretary of State for National Heritage—I am glad that he has joined us for the debate—told me last month that his job is merely to listen to the debate. That is not encouraging. It is necessary for him to think again and carry out a thorough review of the Broadcasting Act, which should take place in tandem with a review of the BBC's charter and the subsequent legislation.

The review needs to embrace a number of aspects of the operation of the Act. First, it needs to examine the possibility of reducing the cash burdens on ITV created by the franchise auction. At the moment, that is planned for 1999. Consideration should be given to bringing that forward by two or three years. Next, the review should look at the balance of regulation between ITV and the satellite and cable systems in order to put competition on a fairer basis. BSkyB has almost no public service obligations placed on it, whereas ITV has a requirement, for example, to carry 51 per cent. British or European originated production.

The review also needs to look carefully at Channel 4. Paradoxically, Channel 4's success has been a worry for ITV ever since the Broadcasting Act separated it from the ITV system. Channel 4 has taken full advantage of its licence conditions, which are looser in some respects than ITV's, and its flexible remit to provide a service that is able to compete advantageously with channel three. The problems posed by that for ITV need to be examined by Ministers. I am not inviting the Government to consider privatising Channel 4 because of its success or to eye the money it makes to ease the Treasury's current problems. Perhaps the Minister will reassure us on those matters.

Last but not least, there is the issue of ITV's business structure. At the beginning of next year, under the Boradcasting Act, it will be permissible for large ITV companies to merge with smaller ones, but not with each other. Foreign companies of any size will be able to take over British companies, large and small. We are all rightly concerned at the impact that mergers can have on the regional identity of our television stations. Most Members of Parliament, including myself, are instinctively hostile to them. When Yorkshire Television tried to swallow up Tyne Tees during their merger last year, I campaigned to ensure that the interests of the viewers in my constituency and throughout the north-east were not sacrificed precisely because of that concern for regional identity and production.

As a result of the way in which the industry is structured and the way in which the Broadcasting Act operates, financial reality is driving the major ITV companies towards consideration of mergers. In the face of overseas competition, which operates without restraint on merger and acquisition, the pressure to reduce costs and overheads through coming together is now becoming inexorable. I regret that, but at present it is a commercial fact. The risk is that, in the absence of a level playing field, we may end up with the bizarre situation in which foreign-based companies have a significant advantage over home-based ones. At the very least, it now merits serious scrutiny by the Government.

Any changes must, however, preserve the regional licences, production and local identity of ITV. Yorkshire Television's crude attempt to absorb Tyne Tees shows the fragility of local identity and control and the immense dangers of giving excessive latitude to ITV companies. However, the prompt intervention of the Independent Television Commission in the north-east—we have seen

[Mr. Peter Mandelson]

the ITC acting again over ITN's "News at Ten"—proved how firm regulation can protect the interests of regional viewers. In this as in other matters, a strong role for the ITC to protect the public and regional interest needs to be upheld. Such interest, the maintenance of programme standards and the whole ethos of public broadcasting must underlie any review of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

The crisis in ITV is not yet on us, but it is not far off. The Act, born in prejudice, must now fit new realities as well as maintain the traditional standards of British broadcasting. I hope that the Minister will state how the Government intend to proceed. I am sure that he shares my concern and my commitment to the strengthening of public licence broadcasting on ITV. That would certainly reflect the reputation and record of the Department of National Heritage to date. I hope that he will respond vigorously and imaginatively.

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) on his good fortune in securing the debate. I also congratulate him on the thoughtful way in which he presented his comments. As he will discover, I do not agree with all that he said, but it is nevertheless excellent that such sharp and well informed comments should be directed at the Broadcasting Act 1990 and, indeed, at all Acts, from time to time. I am sure that nothing but good can flow from it.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the subject is extremely topical. It is also a very large subject, as the Broadcasting Act 1990 is one of the longest passed by the previous Parliament. It has 10 parts, 204 sections and 22 schedules. The hon. Gentleman has, fairly enough, concentrated on a few issues and I begin by setting them in context.

The Act was a significant move towards deregulating what had hitherto been a highly regulated industry. There were good reasons for it: it was in line with the Government's general policy of trying to remove unnecessary shackles in the operation of commercial enterprises. Moreover, conditions were changing. In the past, it had been thought necessary to regulate broadcasting fairly closely, but, with the possibility of many more services, a new framework had to be created to take account of those changes.

By the late 1980s, it was clear that more services could become available through satellite and cable television and through the BBC releasing some radio frequencies so that more independent radio stations could be opened. The old framework, the cosy duopoly of the BBC and the Independent Broadcasting Authority, could not cope with the likely multiplicity of services; nor could it accommodate the move towards a global market for broadcasting services. Services may now be transmitted to one country by an organisation based in another country, using a satellite owned in a third country for reception in a fourth country, or, indeed, on another continent.

The aims of the Broadcasting Acts were to create diversity, choice and competition in the provision of broadcast services. It set out to create a new pattern for broadcasting, opening the way for many more services. It created two new regulatory bodies, the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority, to licence broadcasting services.

The Act has enabled a huge range of services to be licensed. At one end of the scale there are the terrestrial television services available throughout the United Kingdom, the new national independent radio services and the satellite services. At the other end of the scale are the local delivery services to bring television and radio services to 1,000 or more homes through a cable or microwave system, and the Radio Authority's restricted licences, which allow local events to be covered by a temporary radio service in a limited area.

The Act also establishes different levels of regulation for different types of service. For programmes it sets out standards of taste, of decency, of accuracy and of due impartiality for all services licensed by the ITC and the Radio Authority. Most services are regulated more lightly than would have been possible in the past.

Only Channel 4, and S4C in Wales, are required to broadcast programmes as public services of information, education and entertainment. Channel 4 has to ensure that it broadcasts programmes likely to appeal to tastes and interests not catered for on ITV and has to encourage innovation and experiment in the form and content of programmes. S4C has to ensure that a substantial proportion of its programmes are in Welsh.

Channel 3—ITV—is no longer required to provide programmes as public services, although the Act places some public service obligations on Channel 3 licensees. Those include providing programmes calculated to appeal to a wide variety of tastes and interests, regional programmes, religious programmes, programmes intended for children, and news and current affairs.

I shall now make some specific points, the first of which concerns the competitive cash bidding for ITV licences. Not all licences under the Act are awarded by competitive bidding. Licences awarded in that way are those that are potentially the most valuable—the licences for Channel 3, Channel 5 and the new national independent radio services. As the licences constitute permission to use a public asset—the frequencies—for commercial purposes, it seems right that the Treasury and the taxpayers should receive their share. That was the purpose of the bids.

For ITV there was a quality threshold, too, and some applicants fell at that hurdle. Not all the successful applicants had been the highest bidders. Whatever the criticisms, the process was open and the criteria for applications were known. That seems preferable to the awards behind closed doors that were a feature of the earlier arrangements. The same processes will not happen again. ITV licensees will be able to renew their licences after six years, but the ITC can withdraw licences if promises are not kept.

With regard to the ownership of ITV companies, there is a balance to be struck between conflicting objectives. There are economies of scale to be achieved if fewer but larger organisations provide a service, but there are also benefits in competition. Those benefits are obtained by allowing a number of organisations to compete in providing a service and by preventing concentrations in the ownership of the media in any area.

During the passage of the Broadcasting Act, the Government were persuaded to provide for a period of stability when the new ITV licences came into force. That was the background to the so-called moratorium, which is

due to expire at the end of the year. It does not prevent all takeovers, but it means that any takeovers or mergers have to be approved by the ITC.

The Broadcasting (Restrictions on the Holding of Licences) Order 1991, made under the Act, prevented Channel 3 licensees from acquiring two licences in contiguous areas as part of the initial award of licences. It did not prevent subsequent mergers. However, the order designates nine areas with the largest advertising revenues, and the licensee for one large area cannot hold the licence in another large area. That licensee can, however, own a licence in a smaller area, a 20 per cent. interest in another large licensee, and a 5 per cent. interest in the holders of other regional licences.

Concern has been expressed, both by the hon. Member for Hartlepool tonight and by other hon. Members on other occasions, about takeovers from organisations based in other EC countries. Any organisation taking over an ITV company will be bound by its licence conditions, including those requiring local programmes and local programme production.

There is a debate between the licensees as to whether it would be desirable for those ownership restrictions to be relaxed further or whether the moratorium should be extended. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—here with us tonight—met representatives of all the ITV licensees on 14 June so that they could put their views to him face to face. It was a very helpful meeting, and my right hon. Friend is now reflecting on what was said to him on that occasion. I am not able this evening to say what the outcome of those reflections will be.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool, mindful of the interests of his constituents, has been concerned—and he properly expressed that concern this evening—about the merger of Tyne Tees and Yorkshire Television. This merger was allowed by the ITC under the provisions of the Act. I understand that, earlier this year, the commission held a series of meetings with representatives of Yorkshire and Tyne Tees and is now satisfied with the new arrangements for the structure of the companies, with two organisations operating under a hold company.

The hon. Gentleman was concerned about the regional programming in the Tyne Tees area and the continuation of programme production there. The commission clearly shares his anxieties. As he knows, the main provisions on regional programming and production are set out in the licences that the commission has issued. It is for the commission to monitor compliance with those licences and there is every indication that it intends to take those duties extremely seriously.

Under the terms of the Act, the commission will in future include in its annual report to Parliament an assessment of the extent to which the holders of ITV licences have failed to comply with the conditions included in their licences. The first of those reports should be available to the House next summer. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about job losses in the Tyne Tees area—that concern is entirely right and proper—but in the longer term inefficient concerns will not survive. The restructuring of broadcasting is creating new opportunities, as well as job losses. There has been an increase in independent production companies and facilities companies.

Let me now deal with the question with which the hon. Gentleman began his speech—ITN and "News at Ten". ITN has been nominated by the ITC as the news provider for Channel 3 under the terms of the Act. Both sides of the House were agreed that it was important that Channel 3 schedules should include high-quality programmes of national and international news, which could compete effectively with the news services provided by the BBC.

In the past, ITN was wholly owned by all the ITV companies. The Broadcasting Act requires that ownership should be more varied. No one can have more than a 20 per cent. interest in the nominated news provider, and the holders of regional ITV licences taken together should have less than a 50 per cent. interest. Obviously, time has to be allowed for changes in the ownership of ITN, and those requirements do not come into effect until the end of 1994.

Earlier this year, ITN was taken over by a new consortium, which included a number of ITV licence holders and also Reuters. One of the major partners in the consortium was Carlton Communications and the chairman of Carlton Communications is Michael Green, who is also the chairman of Carlton Television, holding the weekday Channel 3 licence and now the chairman of ITN.

I understand that, when the bid was made, it was considered by the Office of Fair Trading. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade subsequently concluded that there was need for a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. There are, of course, many other providers of broadcast news services, including the BBC, Sky News and CNN for those who receive cable services, as well as the independent radio services.

I do not intend to comment at any length on the view that Mr. Green should stand down as chairman of ITN just because he is a declared supporter of and donor to the Conservative party. The Act requires news programmes to be presented with due accuracy and impartiality. It also requires due impartiality on matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy. We can expect the commission to monitor compliance with those requirements.

During the past two weeks, considerable concern has been expressed in the House and elsewhere about the timing of the main evening news bulletin on ITV. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote to the chairman of the Independent Television Commission expressing his concern about the proposed changes in the timing and stressing the importance of ITV providing a high-quality news service, and providing effective competition with the BBC in peak hours. The Leader of the Opposition also wrote.

The National Heritage Select Committee, which by chance was examining witnesses from the ITV companies last week, produced, with commendable speed, a report with its views on the proposals for changing the scheduling of the main news bulletin. In the face of that barrage, it is hardly surprising that the ITV companies are planning to discuss the issue at their annual meeting with the ITC on 14 July.

The main responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the provisions of the Broadcasting Act which governs ITV rests with the Independent Television Commission. Those provisions came into effect only at the beginning of this year.

The Act establishes a new relationship between the commission and the ITV companies. Until this year, the commission was the broadcaster, providing a public

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service of information, education and entertainment, with programmes supplied by the ITV companies under contract. Now the ITC is a regulator and the ITV companies operate under licences which it has issued.

It is understandable that it will take some time for that relationship to settle down. In the past few months, there has been some jockeying for position and some flexing of muscles on both sides, but the commission seems determined to be an effective watchdog.

We shall keep the working of the Act under review, but it is far too early to consider major amendments. Amending the Act will not alter the changes in the global market—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 9 July 1993

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Tourism and Deregulation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

9.33 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I very much welcome the chance today to talk about the important subject of tourism and deregulation. Before I do so, there are two general points to make about tourism. First, I emphasise the importance that we at the Department of National Heritage attach to tourism and the real seriousness with which we take it. One of the reasons why the Department of National Heritage was set up was that too many subjects in Government were not given enough weight and emphasis in the Departments in which they were located. We set up the Department of National Heritage so that the arts, sport, tourism and other matters would be given proper weight within Government thinking.

In some areas, tourism has been for too long an underrated industry—perhaps the most underrated industry in the country. It employs roughly 1·5 million people. Some £25 billion a year is spent on tourism, of which £7·7 billion comes from foreign tourists. We had 18 million foreign visitors last year and the figure for this year is likely to be even better. Some 4 per cent. of our gross domestic product is accounted for by tourism. However, because the industry is so fragmented—it is made up of so many small businesses which vary from one part of tourism to another—it has not always been taken with the seriousness that it requires. I assure the House today that our Department will be the champion of the tourism industry.

Secondly, before I turn to aspects of tourism and deregulation, I stress that I have no plans at this moment to hold yet another review of tourism. We want to get some certainty, security and stability into the tourism industry. Over the next few months, I want every regional tourist board to tell me what it has in mind for its own area. Before the House returns in October, I shall go to every region to see what the boards are doing on the ground.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): When the Minister goes round the regions, will he ask them what impact there would be on tourism within the regions if we opened regional airports more so that people could fly directly to places such as Manchester rather than always having to come via London?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely good point. I give him a pledge that I will ask that specific question of every relevant tourism body. Later in my speech, I shall come to the question of direct flights from abroad to this country.

I have a small idea on which I do not want to place too much weight. Hon. Members will know of the community action projects which, roughly speaking, are for people who draw unemployment benefit and who get an extra £10 if they work for the money that the taxpayer gives them. When the debate is over, I propose to write to every regional tourist board saying, "Will you look at your area and see what opportunities for community action projects there are to improve tourism projects?" There is a great deal of clearing up, cleaning, painting and archive research to be done. I should like the regional tourist boards to come back to me with half dozen or perhaps 10 suggestions of specific projects. We will then consider them and put whatever shove and push we can behind them.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): On the importance of tourism for employment, will my hon. Friend confirm that one of the best things about the expansion of the tourism industry is that over the past 10 years employment in the industry has grown by 28 per cent., compared with only 1 per cent. growth in employment in the country generally? That reinforces the importance of tourism, which is a great contributor to the development of this country. Is it not remarkable that although the Conservative Benches are so full, the Opposition Benches are almost completely empty? Does that not reinforce the fact that the Conservative party is the only party which cares about tourism and the jobs that it produces?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is right about the importance of jobs in tourism. As I have said, about 1·5 million people in this country are involved directly or indirectly in tourism. The figure is even greater in the world as a whole. The WTTO—the world travel organisation or whatever it is called—has produced figures which show that one in 15 people around the world and 6 per cent. of world GDP are involved in tourism. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) has made a very important point.

However, all of that is simply background to the central subject of this debate which is tourism and deregulation and the important link between them.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Hear, hear.

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend says, "Hear, hear." I am afraid that the laws and customs of the House will not allow a Parliamentary Private Secretary to intervene in this debate. I am very sorry about that. However, I pay a sincere tribute to the great lead and contribution that my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) has made to the whole question of deregulation and tourism. He has introduced two ten-minute Bills and he has another to come. I am indebted to him for all that he has done.

The House will recall that during the first Question Time in which I had the honour to represent the Department, I said that I intended to conduct an urgent and detailed inquiry into the effects of regulation, interference and general bureaucracy on the tourism industry. I should like this morning to make an interim report on that important subject.

When I invited hon. Members, members of tourist boards, hoteliers and restaurateurs to let me know what they felt about bureaucracy and regulation in tourism, little did I know what I was doing. I have been overwhelmed by an avalanche of letters, requests for

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meetings and evidence of bureaucracy from the tourist trade. If I were asked whether the situation is as bad as I had suspected, I would have to say, "No, it's far, far worse."

We have uncorked an explosion of fury and frustration at the pettifogging burdens, bureaucracy, costs, waste of time and damage to tourists themselves. Every time an environmental health officer comes along and says, "You've got to spend another £4,000 smartening up your kitchen", that £4,000 is added directly to the price that the tourist pays and it lowers our competitiveness vis-à-vis other countries.

I want to give the House some idea of the initial findings that my civil servants and I discovered as a result of inviting the industry to let us know its feelings. I must emphasise that what I am about to tell the House—for what it is worth—is personal experience related to my civil servants and myself. It has nothing to do with newspaper cuttings or second-hand information. What I am about to recount is news directly from the battlefront.

Before I elaborate on the details, which will enrage and perhaps very occasionally entertain the House, I must stress that what has become clear is that regulations come in many forms and many guises and from many sources. It is not a matter of one monster coming from one place. With regard to the sources of regulations, we must take a great deal of the blame, because many of the regulations come from Parliament. Many of them come from the European Community—although, I am bound to say, not quite so many as people believe. The regulations come from local authorities, quangos and very often they come from individual officers of quangos who exceed their instructions.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Sproat: I will give way in a second.

The regulations come from quangos and often from officious and offensive officers of quangos. Sometimes, as I will show, they come entirely from the land of rumour and ignorance.

Mr. Allason: Does my hon. Friend accept that it is not so much a matter of the rules and directives as the way in which they are enforced? Is it not the case that many people in the tourism industry in this country believe that we are the only country in Europe in which there is over-zealous regulation and enforcement of those regulations?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, my hon. Friend has made a very good point. I was about to dissect and analyse the different forms and guises that regulations take.

Sometimes regulations are just stupid, absurd and wrong. Sometimes enforcement between one part of the country and another is ludicrously inconsistent. Sometimes regulations are well meant in theory, but grotesquely impractical. On other occasions, they are just heavy-handed, officious or completely disproportionate to the alleged offence. Sometimes, they spring from a lack of knowledge and I will touch on that in a moment.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) has made the point so correctly and strongly, perhaps I should run through some of those headings and give examples, not of the worst or most expensive things, but simply to give the House some understanding of the range of absurdities, intrusion and offence and the range of regulations from which the burdens spring.

I said that, in the view of the tourist trade, some regulations are simply completely wrong, stupid or absurd. An example of that is the package travel directive. I am not sure whether I would have set up such a package. None the less, the package travel directive was set up to catch large organisations through which people travelled from abroad and were not absolutely certain what would happen in the country to which they were travelling. However, the package has extended far beyond that and small hotels in this country now suddenly find themselves involved in extremely expensive bonding exercises. That disrupts their cash flow or, in many cases, ruins their profits.

There is also a problem with signing. We seem to have a paranoia about signing in this country.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): My hon. Friend may be unaware of the fact that I act as an adviser on parliamentary affairs to the Association of British Travel Agents, which has been considerably involved with the implementation of the package travel directive to which my hon. Friend has just referred. There is considerable debate about the definitions that lie behind the directive. That affects the hotels to which my hon. Friend has just referred and the difficulties that they may face if they happen to offer extra facilities such as golf weekends or pony trekking.

If my hon. Friend could have those definitions examined and changed, because I do not believe that hotels or business travellers should have been caught by the package, he would incur the greatest debt of gratitude from the tourism industry and, by that one stroke, he would do more to deregulate the industry than any other action.

Mr. Sproat: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Gratitude is a rare commodity in politics and if I can catch a smidgen of it, I shall be very grateful. I entirely agree that we should consider the definitions to see whether the wrong people are being caught. In addition, the Foreign Office might like to consider the matter in relation to subsidiarity.

I referred to signing. We have an extraordinary attitude to signs in this country. It is very difficult—indeed, almost impossible—to erect a hotel sign on or near a road. Tourism is a very important industry, but if somone tries to put up a sign, he will almost certainly not succeed. Indeed, since 16 June, I have learnt of a hotel which had a sign up for 50 years but has been made to take it down.

I have to be very careful in this debate not to be too disagreeable about other Departments. I must keep my tongue under strict control. However, I believe that the Department of the Environment recently wrote to a hotelier who wanted to put up a sign. The matter was rejected on the grounds that the sign was in ugly black and white and that that would look nasty against the green fields behind it. That is the kind of absurdity that we must stop.

This country is the sixth—or perhaps the fifth, depending on one's definition—most visited country in the world.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): It seems astonishing for the Department of Transport to suggest

that signs outside hotels distract drivers. How can a sign which gives positive information to a passing driver be distracting?

Mr. Sproat: I do not think that we should be as strict on signs. Too much is made of the distraction element. As a champion of the tourist industry, I will take up the matter with the Department of Transport and with local authorities—it is not always the Department of Transport; it is also local authorities—and say, "For goodness sake, get this sorted out."

Ours is the fifth or sixth most visited country in the world. From memory, the most visited country in Europe is France. Anybody who has been to a French town or village will remember that large signs outside the village actually direct people to hotels. If one wants to stay at the Hotel de Paris or the Hotel Plage, one will see the sign for it. If we are serious about tourism, we must do that too. I will look at what the French are doing during the recess —*[Interruption.]*—by photograph, and I will let the House know what progress we make.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Has my hon. Friend noticed, as he has driven around the country, how many farmers' fields have vehicles parked in them advertising hotels or giving directions to certain places? The law is so strict that people with imagination and initiative are trying to get around them by using such schemes. Is it not better to have sensible rules and regulations that can be properly applied, rather than making it impossible to erect signs and force farmers to do such things?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is exactly right. It is sad if the laws come into such disrespect that people who would otherwise never dream of breaking the law feel impelled to do so. I shall return to that point in a different context.

There is the famous sign of the zoo, which must be indicated by an elephant symbol. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) has rightly made a great fuss about the fact that he has a flamingo park in his constituency but was told that it had to be indicated by an elephant symbol. That is the kind of grotesquerie for which there can be no excuse, and it must go. I do not want to weary the House with too many examples. I was trying to give a spread of the difficulties and the stupidity. We have signposting that is stupidly in error, and we have the package travel directive.

Last year, a hotel in Gloucestershire wanted to hold a dance on new year's eve—a very simple addition to the tourist calendar. To be allowed to do that, the hotel had to fill in no fewer than 88 detailed forms before it could obtain permission to have its dance. That is another stupid example, which gives a flavour of the problem that was raised by one of my hon. Friends at Question Time recently.

If one likes Camembert cheese, one probably likes it reasonably warm and reasonably soft and runny. Under our batty regulations, one has to keep even Camembert cheese in a refrigerator so cold that the cheese comes out not warm and runny as it should but cold and hard like a piece of refrigerated rubber.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): That is how it should be eaten.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to his views, but they are unusual.

Inconsistent enforcement has been mentioned. That is a serious point. A famous London hotel, which has been established for more than 100 years, had its air conditioning system passed by Westminster council with no problems at all. Last year, along came a new environmental health officer who said, "I don't like this air conditioning. You will switch it off. Not a room in your hotel will be allowed to be air conditioned by this air conditioning system." The hotel could not operate. It took 100 hours of management time just to sort out that piece of officious, offensive little Hitlerdom. That is another example of inconsistent enforcement.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I do not disagree with several examples that the Minister has given, but does he recognise that there are circumstances in which inefficient air conditioning systems can be a serious threat to people's health? Legionnaire's disease has been caused by contaminated water coming out of inappropriate systems. Does the Minister recognise that it would be a disaster for the tourist industry in London or, indeed, in Britain if there were rumours of disease being caused by malfunctioning air conditioning systems?

Mr. Sproat: Indeed, it would be. I certainly take the hon. Gentleman's point, which he properly made at a recent Question Time. There are regulations relating to fire and so on, and indeed air conditioning, that have to be properly enforced. My point was that, after years of environmental health officers passing the system and saying that it was perfectly acceptable—as, indeed, it was and has been so proved—an individual can come along and, off his own bat, cause the destruction of a hotel, restaurant or whatever.

There is the famous case of certain local authorities stopping restaurants using wooden spoons or wooden boards to chop tomatoes on, so they had to use plastic equipment or something else. They installed new chopping boards and so on, but it turned out that wood is better, because it includes an enzyme which makes it more hygienic than plastic or stainless steel. Thousands of pounds have been spent to implement regulations that have turned out to be faulty.

There are hundreds of examples. Some local authorities do not allow hotels to have a washing machine in the kitchen, whereas others do. We have done some research on this matter. It can cost £2,000 to £4,000 to build an extension to accommodate a washing machine. Those are petty burdens. For Trusthouse Forte, £2,000 for a new place for a washing machine is not a lot of money, but for a small hotel in the west country, it is an important part of its bottom line.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Is my hon. Friend aware that in some parts of the country such as mine, which is a national park, one would not get planning permission to build such an extension? Local authorities are incredibly strict on such matters. A hotel could therefore go out of business because, on the one hand, it is told to build an extension and, on the other hand, the authority refuses to allow it to do so.

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend makes another good point about inconsistency. In some parts of the country, hotels are told that they have to put fly-screens over the kitchen windows, but my Department then comes along and says,

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"This is a listed building—you are not allowed to put up fly-screens anyway." There are so many contradictions, which makes it even more worrying for the tourist trade.

I was reviewing the different guises of the regulations —the stupid ones, the inconsistent ones, and the ones that might be well meant but which in practice turn out to be absurd. For example, there are the electricity at work regulations. When one mentions them to hoteliers, strong men go pale. A hotelier said to me that the electrician who looked at his hotel sucked his breath betwen his teeth, shook his head sadly and said, "It is going to cost you £17,500 to have all the regulations checked." By the way, after he said that, he added, "I know that you can't afford it, so why don't I Just give you a certificate, and you give me £500 cash?" That is the criminal element which is encouraged by these mad regulations. They breed corruption and the attitude that my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) mentioned in respect of signs attached to vans in fields and so on.

Lady Olga Maitland: It costs £2·50 to have each electrical appliance checked. One hotel could spend £4,000 or £5,000 a year. That emphasises that small hotels go out of business because of just one tiny matter.

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. It must be remembered that it is not just regulations such as those in respect of Camembert, which might seem piffling or not so piffling, but the accumulation of regulations—the fire officers, the environmental health officers, the small company audit requirements, and all the immigration forms that have to be filled in. I have yet to find, although I daresay they exist, a hotel that has been asked to send to the Home Office the forms that they have to fill in for every visitor and keep for a minimum of 12 months. The accumulation of regulations adds to the absurdity and the difficulty of the matter. There is heavy-handed, officious and disproportionate treatment. A publican was actually threatened with a criminal charge and possible imprisonment for smoking a pipe while he pulled a pint. Things have become fairly bad when one is threatened with imprisonment for smoking a pipe in one's own pub.

There are regulations saying that refrigerators must be tested three times a day for their coolness and those tests must be logged. In some parts of the country, every action of washing and cleaning in the kitchen must be logged. The action carried out must be logged and one must prove in writing that the person who washed the sink had been trained to do so. For heaven's sake! One must keep a list of the chemicals used and, if asked by the local authority, one must produce it.

Mr. Tony Banks: Did I miss the bit about tourism?

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): The hon. Gentleman misses most things.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): The hon. Gentleman is a bit slow this morning—he should be put in the fridge. My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that I have asked several parliamentary questions about electricity at work legislation. Over the past five years, between 10 and 16 fatalities have occurred from general electricity incidents throughout British industry. Is not the real point about these regulations that when a new regulation is introduced —or, indeed, when we withdraw an existing regulation —we should consider the cost benefit to the tourist industry and to British industry in general? It seems that we have got the whole ratio wrong in many of these regulations.

Mr. Sproat: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Later in my speech—if I am allowed time with not too many interruptions—I will turn to the whole question of compliance cost assessments, risk assessments and the necessity that the interests of tourism be taken into consideration when any new regulations are made.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who apparently likes his Camembert cheese cold and rubber hard, asked what all this has to do with tourism. We are trying to make our tourism industry competitive. We have been falling in the international league in getting visitors. We are still about fifth or sixth, which is very good, but we are falling. One of the reasons why we are falling is that we are not competitive. One of the reasons why we are not competitive is often because of the grotesque and absurd burden of regulation which so often adds to the cost of the holiday for the tourist and also lowers the quality.

Mr. Tony Banks: I apologise for missing the beginning of the hon. Gentleman's speech. A long series of humorous anecdotes about regulations, many of which his Government have been responsible for over the years, does not seem to address the fundamental problems of tourism. It is not simply a question of competitiveness. People come to our country because of the things that we can offer them. One of the things that happen when they come here is that they get ripped off by some of the most expensive hotels in the world.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman used the word "humorous". I must tell him that these regulations are far from humorous for the people who suffer under them.

I shall give one more instance. I said that many of these regulations originate in the land of rumour and ignorance. A classic only this week came from a district council, which said that it was now apparently the law that one was not allowed to sell a sandwich with ham and tomato in it because one was a cooked substance and the other was an uncooked substance. I said to my officials, "Surely it cannot be against the law to sell a ham and tomato sandwich". They said, "It certainly did strike us as surprising".

Here is an efficient and competent district council. It was an official letter, not simply an individual, so we looked into the matter. For a long time, we were baffled —we could not find out whether it was against the law or not. Eventually, the latest advice from my wise officials is that it is not against the law to sell a tomato and ham sandwich but it is against the law to chop the tomato and the ham on the same board, which is possibly not even a board because one is not allowed to use wood in certain places.

That is the absurdity. It shows the difficulty for those people. If my officials and I find it difficult to discover whether one is allowed to have a ham and tomato sandwich, think how difficult it is for a small hotelier trying to serve in the hotel, run the books, get the immigration forms right and deal with the environmental health officers and the fire officers.

I have dealt with some of the regulations that emanate from this Government. I make no bones about it—in the view of the tourist industry, in many cases the Government have regulated too much, too often, too officiously and too stupidly. The regulations I have already mentioned were specifically and knowingly directed at the tourism industry.

The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who intervened earlier about Manchester airport, raised a good point when he said that there are some areas of regulation where tourism is not considered at all. He said that there are regulations, laws and statutory instruments which are passed by the House that sharply, directly and forcefully affect the tourism industry but tourism is not allowed to make an input. He raised such an example in relation to aviation policy. I am about to say what the tourist industry has said to me on this matter. I do not directly criticise the Department of Transport in any way. Undoubtedly, it has good reasons and we shall come to them when the industry makes representations to it.

I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is a keen reader of the Conservative party's manifesto at general election time. If he is a wise and comprehensive reader, he will remember that in our manifesto we pledged that we would put an end to the situation in which too many people who wanted to cross the Atlantic and who lived in the Manchester or Birmingham catchment areas had to leave Manchester or Birmingham, take a plane or train to London and fly across the Atlantic from Heathrow. We said that we wanted more direct flights point-to-point across the Atlantic. However, that still does not happen.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Manchester. I spoke to representatives of Manchester airport this week. They told me of no fewer than eight different routes across the Atlantic alone—not even mentioning the middle east or the far east—from which foreign airlines would love to fly into Manchester. They estimated that the traffic on each of those routes would be in excess of 100,000 passengers. That would mean another 1 million journeys coming into Manchester.

The same is true for Birmingham. The House may know that Birmingham is twinned with Chicago, yet the Government do not allow direct flights between Birmingham and Chicago. It is a question of the Government allowing them—it is a regulation. American and British airlines must get permission from the Government if they want to fly between the two points.

In the past, things such as aviation policy have been conducted almost entirely without proper tourist input. I wish to take the matter up with the Department of Transport. Undoubtedly, we shall have a constructive discussion about it and it will give me the powerful reasons why it thinks that we should not have quite so many tourists coming into Manchester, Birmingham or Stansted.

I have a letter from Sir John Egan saying that exactly the same thing is true of Stansted. He gave me an example of, for example, Nashville to Stansted which was turned down. He estimates that the decision to turn down a regular American Airlines flight from Nashville to Stansted cost the East Anglian tourist board £10 million. I do not know how he arrived at that figure, but it is the one that he gave me. Another TWA flight from Chicago to Stansted was turned down. Therefore, the hon. Member for Burnley makes an extremely important point about this matter.

My Department intends to examine those issues where tourism has not made an input in the past to see whether we can improve things for tourism so that matters are not always considered on the basis of whether they will affect an individual airline. They must be considered on the basis of whether they will affect tourism and places such as Manchester and the hinterland.

I shall give another example where the actions of other Government Departments, which were taken with the best of intentions, affect tourism without meaning to. I am sure that many of my hon. Friends on the Back Benches will be aware of use class orders. I shall explain use class orders, although there is probably no one in the House who does not know exactly what they mean. Basically, they mean that an existing hotel which sells up can be turned from a hotel into a hostel without the local authority having any chance to say no. This has become epidemic in places such as Eastbourne, Bournemouth, Clacton, Bridlington, Scarborough, Torquay and Blackpool. What was once a good small hotel becomes a hostel. It is filled not with guests who stay by the night or the week but with people, usually DSS claimants, who stay for months on end. It is essential that we find proper accommodation for DSS claimants or unemployed people, but it is idiotic to place a hostel next to a good hotel that is bringing in good tourist money and jobs to an area.

It is a disagreeable thing to say and it is a disagreeable phenomenon to contemplate, but is is important to consider the consequences of such a change of use. My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay has told me of the regular traffic between places such as Liverpool and the south coast. People who are unemployed, no doubt for sad reasons, come down from Liverpool to Torquay. They move into a hostel, create disturbances and make a lot of noise at night. Such hostels attract drug addicts and become little nests of crime.

People who retire to somewhere like Scarborough hope to spend their retirement in peace and quiet. They suddenly find, however, that their home is next door to some noisy, drunk-infested, drug-infested hostel.

We should not say that the unemployed and DSS claimants should not have a proper place to live—of course they should—but it should be up to the local council to say no to such a hostel and to say that it will not give planning permission for a hostel. If a local council says it will welcome such a hostel, that is fine. That is local democracy and that represents proper accountability. At the moment, however, there is no control. The tourist industry believes that that control must be returned to local authorities.

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend will be aware that this problem concerns not only my constituents in the tourist business in Blackpool, but many of my hon. Friends, who represent similar tourist areas. Will he accept my thanks for addressing the issue as he has today? Does he also accept that the tourist industry will be greatly heartened by his remarks? A balance must be struck and I look forward to the day when local authorities have the power to control the problem by requiring an application for change of use.

Mr. Sproat: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. I assure him that my Department will take this matter up with the Department of the Environment at the earliest stage.

[Mr. Sproat]

I have gone for longer than I intended as a result of interventions and my tongue running away with me. We shall never overcome the nightmare of over-regulation just by picking off the problems one by one and dealing with each regulatory conundrum and absurdity as it comes to light. Across Whitehall there must be a change of attitude in favour of not regulating rather than regulating. There will, of course, be occasions when we must regulate, but we must change the automatic reaction that dictates, "If in doubt, regulate". The opposite should be the case.

Changing that attitude does not, of course, mean lowering safety standards or giving the consumer a worse deal. Our regulatory approach must be governed by common sense. At this interim stage I suggest five guidelines and principles that I should like to see adopted.

First, before the regulator starts to draft he must be certain that he understands the nature of the problem or evil that the regulation is designed to curb. It is not enough to regulate "just in case". We should remember that old American saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it". That should be the principle to follow.

Secondly, every new regulation should be subject not only to a cost compliance assessment, but to a risk assessment. Together, they will form a cost benefit analysis. Furthermore, each of those analyses should make particular reference to the impact that the regulation will have on the tourist industry specifically.

Thirdly, we need to know how each new regulation will fit into the body of existing rules. Will it be consistent? Will it complement those rules? Why are the existing rules insufficient? Can the new regulation replace some of the old ones? What will be the cumulative effect of related regulations? Will this be the last straw that breaks the camel's back?

Fourthly, we need a system of back checking. After each new regulation has been in force for some time, we should review it, root and branch, to see what good it has done and at what cost. We should consider whether it has achieved its original purpose and whether it is still necessary.

Fifthly, to follow those guidelines we need proper consultation machinery, which is not in place now. I want to know what the small hotelier, the entrepreneur running the small specialist restaurant and other members of the tourist trade have to say. Those people are the mainstay of the tourist industry. They must be consulted. They must give their views to Government and Government must take them seriously. Those views should be given to the respective trade association, the regional tourist board or the English tourist board—or individuals can come to see me or write to me directly. I promise the House that I will deal swiftly with anyone who brings a problem to me.

With those few but heartfelt words, I invite the House to comment on my speech.

10.15 am

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box in his new role. The Opposition did not disagree with everything that he said in his long speech. If he considers himself to be the champion of the tourist industry, however, that comes rich from a Minister of the Department of National Heritage, which has just cut the grant to the English trourist board and the British Tourist Authority. The hon. Gentleman said that that was a fine act by his predecessor, but I hope that he will retract that remark in due course.

The Opposition welcome what the hon. Gentleman said about signposts, because I am sure that we have all experienced problems with them in our constituencies. My council, Tameside, is taking on the Department of Transport about that.

The hon. Gentleman should not be surprised that he has received an avalanche of letters from those in the tourist industry since his invitation to them on 14 June to write to him. We have received such letters for months and that is why we are having such a meaningful dialogue with the tourist industry.

I welcome the fact that this is the second debate on tourism within four months. The debate in March was the first in five years. It is obvious to the Opposition that something is stirring within the Department of National Heritage. I suspect that that is due in some part to those Conservative Members who have recognised the Government's lack of concern about tourism. They are kicking from behind because they are obviously concerned about their marginal seats. After yesterday's poll, however, what is not a Tory marginal seat these days?

Most importantly, I believe that we are having this second debate because the Labour party has expressed a deep interest in the problems in the tourist industry. The Opposition have spearheaded the attack on the Government's disastrous policy towards the ETB and BTA, which has resulted, as the House is aware, in cuts in grant, the redundancies of key personnel and the loss of many valuable services to the tourist industry.

How can the Minister claim that the Government support the tourist industry when they have allowed such destructive cuts to it? As the chief executive of the ETB has said, unless the Minister gives a clear commitment to restore the damaging cuts made by his predecessor, there will be no meaningful services beyond 1994.

I also welcome the fact that this debate is concerned, primarily, with the regulations with which the tourist industry must live. In many cases, as the Minister said, those regulations are unreasonable. But not all regulations are bad. What the House must consider is the detrimental effect that some regulations have on consumer choice and the quality of the product on offer. Indiscriminate regulation, for example in the tour market, will lead to less consumer choice due to the restrictive practices in pricing and the inadequate consumer protection.

Although I welcome the debate, I must caution the Minister on extolling the virtues of a war on red tape. He must first tell the House why so much additional legislation has been passed by the Government since the introduction of the White Paper of 1985, entitled—wait for it—"Lifting the Burden." It is a bit rich of the Minister to complain about that burden when, since that date, many more regulations have been passed through the House. The industry was entitled to expect some reductions in bureaucracy and regulation before now. Conservative Members may condemn the Minister for some of his statements today. He has attacked many of his ministerial colleagues for their role in that problem.

As the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) said, the industry has had to wade through a multitude of complex measures with little guidance or clarification from the Ministers concerned. As the Minister rightly said, not all the regulations stem from Brussels. They include the

Electricity at Work Regulations 1989, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988, the food temperature monitoring regulations of 1990, the reporting of injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences regulations of 1985 and the Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991. The Opposition welcome legislation that benefits the consumer, especially in areas such as food hygiene and health. The Minister's speech will send the wrong signals to those concerned about that subject.

Which? magazine of June 1993 asked, "How safe is food?" It said:

"Food scare stories may not seem to be hitting the headlines as much just lately, but problems with the safety of our food have not gone away. There were 65,000 cases of food poisoning reported last year—11,000 more than in 1991. Experts believe that the real total may well be more like two million—many cases don't make the official statistics."

It was, therefore, wrong of the Minister to make light of those regulations.

The main problem with the measures that I have mentioned is that the Government have not clarified their effects to the industry. It has been largely left to the English tourist board to do that by producing a number of advisory publications on bed and breakfast, business rates, package travel regulations and the recent pink guide, which covers a wide range of legislation. But how much longer will that be possible, given the cuts that have been imposed on the ETB by the Department of National Heritage? In any case, it is up to the Government, not the ETB, to provide the industry with the necessary information. If the Minister intends to do something about that, we shall applaud him.

The Government must look into ways of cutting red tape and reducing form filling, but the Minister, who is a deregulator par excellence—that fact came through this morning—might throw out the baby with the bath water. He must not be obsessed with deregulation for its own sake. By now, he must have received enough responses from within the industry, following his request for information on 14 June, to show the overwhelming desire for clarification rather than deregulation. He cannot expect the industry to comply with regulations of which much of the industry is not fully aware.

I should have liked—I shall not do so because of lack of time—to recite the wide range of regulations for which the Government have provided no help or guidance for the industry. That must be corrected. The Minister cannot escape blame because, having been the Minister responsible for tourism within the Department of Trade and Industry, he was directly responsible for setting in motion a review of the BTA and ETB, which resulted in the loss of the BTA's last tourist information centre in 1983, as well as 12 highly skilled staff. The Minister gave the BTA so little notice of that cutback that all its promotional material for that year referred to the Centre for Tourist Information which, incidentally, covered the whole of Britain. Imagine the impression that that left our overseas visitors when they arrived in this country to see the centre boarded up.

That review was responsible for the savage cuts in 1983, implemented by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), to the ETB and the BTA, resulting in 50 jobs losses. With that backgoound, is it any wonder that the tourist industry feels a little apprehensive about the new Minister?

When talking to London taxi drivers, most hon. Members get the usual agenda of chat. It includes, first, the nonsensical proposals to deregulate taxis in London, adding to congestion and confusion in the capital. Secondly, and not unrelated, taxi drivers say that they will never vote Tory again. Thirdly—more relevant to the debate—they complain about how many foreign visitors will not return next year because of the high cost of London hotels. The reason for that is not because hotels are paying high wages to their staff. Indeed, they should be subjected to the minimum wage legislation enjoyed by workers in our competitor countries, where the hotels are effectively doing much better.

For example, the owner of an hotel not far from here, which many of us frequent when we attend briefing lunches, has told me why Britain is perceived to be an expensive destination. He tells me that his hotel has cut prices to the bare minimum and his room rates are lower than in 1989. The few hotels that are still trading profitably are recording their lowest profits since the 1927 recession. His hotel made more profit in 1968, charging £5 a room, than it does today charging £170 a room. He says that VAT at 17·5 per cent. is a direct tourist tax because tourists do not benefit from the compensatory reduction in council tax and PAYE enjoyed by British subjects. France has a standard rate of 18·5 per cent., but, for hotel accommodation, it has a rate of 5·3 per cent. He points out that the cost of tour agents, foreign representatives and a flat £10 per person booking implant fee and a 2-5 per cent. card and transaction fee, all add up to a hefty burden on the hotel industry. He argues that, in addition, the red tape and how regulations are implemented and over regulated are a burden on time and money.

I do not wish to create the impression that all hotels in London and elsewhere act as honourably as that one. There are too many rogue hoteliers around, but I am convinced that the vast majority are playing the game.

The Minister must be aware of the low morale within the industry. That fact has come through in his speech. After all, the industry employs between 1·5 million and 1·6 million people and some 10 per cent. of our national work force. It is larger than the Scottish whisky and car industries put together. But it has had seven different Ministers responsible for tourism, all with their different approaches to the industry. It is no wonder that people within the industry are turning away from it in large numbers.

The Minister recognises that by far the most controversial measure within the industry is the EC package tour directive or, more specifically, the Package Travel Regulations, which came into force on 1 January. However, it is rich of the Minister not to take the blame for what has happened as a result because, since the regulations' introduction, there has been little short of a disaster within the tourist industry. A trade survey showed that 50 per cent. of independent travel agents do not know their legal position under the directive and 66 per cent. do not know how to interpret the directive in dealing with customers. Even the former ABTA president—I see that its adviser has left the Chamber, we hope, temporarily—was forced to conclude in a recent speech to British travel agents at a conference in Palma:

"Lewis Carroll at his most imaginative could never have invented anything as topsy turvy and through a cracked looking glass as Her Majesty's Government has concoted in enacting the European Directive on Package Holidays."

If introducing flawed legislation were not enough, the Government have failed outright to publicise the

[Mr. Tom Pendry]

measures. The problem has arisen from the most radical element of the new regulations—article 7—which require all operators, whether domestic or not, to have bonding protection for their customers. Originally, the DTI, in its consultation document of 24 July 1991, intended to implement that requirement by setting up a new licensing system for all organisers of packages with a requirement to be bonded, as well as establishing a national back-up fund to help out with the additional costs that those measures will inevitably impose on companies. Yet, to the utter dismay of ABTA, the Consumers Association and trading standards officers, the Government decided not to establish an authority to license all operators or, for that matter, a back-up fund and instead left it up to each organisation to have its own security for refunds and repatriation in the event of insolvency—*[Interruption.]* I should have thought that Conservative Members would be a bit more attentive, especially if they or their constituents are affected by the measure. The absence of an overall licensing system for all organisers of package holidays has left many companies unclear on how to implement the proposals and whether the new legislation applies to them.

Both the ETB and the BTA confirm the widely held view within the industry that many of the implications of the European Community package are simply not understood by domestic tourist operators, many of which will find them impossible to comply with. Perhaps the simplest solution at the time was to expand the air travel organisers licence to include packages involving overland travel arrangements. Many companies are finding it impossible to comply with the new regulations because there is no bonding product available for non-air travel packages and no regulatory organisation for bonding. Perhaps the Minister's colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry were biased against the measure because the successful scheme was introduced by a Labour Government in 1974.

I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to explain exactly why the licensing measures outlined in the original consultation paper of July 1991 were not introduced as initially intended. I hope that he will give a firm undertaking today to look at the proposals again. It is not just the domestic tourist operators who remain in the dark over the implications of the new proposals. According to the National Consumer Council, many customers are also ignorant of the regulations.

In April this year the chairman of the Association of Independent Tour Operators was quoted in *The Times* as saying:

"The Government admits that the only way for a member of the public to find out that his money is not protected is when a company goes bust and he does not get a refund."

All hon. Members must recognise that that is a disgrace.

ABTA and the Association of Independent Tour Operators estimate that only 5,000 of the 30,000 travel organisations are known to provide financial protection. Only a few small companies are able to raise the money to participate in bonding schemes, while many others are unable to make the necessary arrangements through banks and insurance companies. That failure to provide insurance has been blamed on the speed with which the regulations were initially drawn up and implemented. Companies were give just three months to provide legal financial protection for holidaymakers in the form of insurance and bonding arrangements.

I hope that the Minister will explain why the Department of Trade and Industry has failed to provide a way of enforcing the legislation. Is he aware that trading standards officers who were handed the job of policing the regulations do not have the manpower or resources to do so? The Government should be taking steps actively to protect the consumer by introducing sensible measures without placing exorbitant costs on the small businesses in the industry which are already struggling to keep afloat in the recession.

Mr. Hendry: I am encouraged by the fact that the hon. Gentleman is taking advice from taxi drivers. Scarcely a day goes by when I am not told by a taxi driver that he had Tom Pendry in the back of his cab the other day. Conservative Members would find it encouraging if the Opposition started to promote the views of taxi drivers, which are normally more sensible than those of the official Opposition.

The hon. Gentleman talks of the costs on companies —in his consultation process did he consult hoteliers and others about Labour's policy for a minimum wage? Has he asked them whether that policy will create jobs? Every hotelier in my constituency with whom I have raised that issue—I have done so with many of them—says that the policy will destroy jobs rather than create them.

Mr. Pendry: It is always a mistake to give way to the hon. Gentleman, who was only elected because his constituents thought they were voting for me. I have answered his questions on many occasions. If what he says is true, why is it that all the hoteliers in France, Germany and other places in Europe are knocking the spots off our hoteliers while paying the right wages? That was a silly intervention, but doubtless the hon. Gentleman will tell his constituents that he was listening to me in today's debate. I am sure that the matter will be described in next week's edition of his local paper.

The hon. Gentleman has thrown me off course a little —I was making a serious point to which I shall return. I said that the Government should be taking steps to protect the consumer. Instead, the Department of Trade and Industry has undermined the new regulations to the detriment of 600 people who were left without a holiday or a refund when the French self-catering specialist, SFV Holidays, collapsed in May of this year.

In view of that collapse, I should like the Minister at least to give his view on the incorrect advice that the President of the Board of Trade gave in two letters to the Secretary of State for Education in which he said that the Oxfordshire-based holiday company was a borderline case, and so did not have to comply with the EC directive and ensure that travellers' deposits and payments were returned. If the DTI is confused about what constitutes a prearranged package holiday and which companies are covered by the legislation, how on earth can tourist organisations be expected to know?

On 28 May this year, the chairman of the Association of Independent Tour Operators was quoted in *The Financial Times* as saying that if the President of the Board of Trade's arguments were accepted,

"most of our members would not require bonding."

On 13 June he was quoted as saying:

"I find it alarming that the Government can allow already flawed legislation to be cracked wide open so soon after implementation—consumers' money is seriously at risk."

Those are the issues which the Minister must address when he considers the responses to his review on the problems facing the industry that arise from over-regulation. Will the Minister confirm that the results of his review will, in his words, be made

"known before the House rises."—[*Official Report*, 14 June 1993; Vol. 226, c. 619.]

If that is true, why did the information desk at his Department state only a week ago that the review's findings were for the exclusive use of the Minister and were not to be published? Who is right? The House and the industry demand to know, and I am sure that hon. Members from both sides of the House will look forward to discovering whether the Department's initiative has duplicated the work of the retail, tourism and other services task force.

Surely, the terms of reference of the DTI task force are to simplify measures and to minimise costs to business. I raised that issue with the Minister at the last National Heritage Question Time. He said that there would be no duplication. I hope that he will expand on that statement as it seems obvious that there will be some duplication. Why is the Minister asking those in the industry to take further time off to answer questions that should already have been covered by the original task force initiative?

It is a pity that the Minister did not include a question on the deregulation of British Rail in his letter to the trade associations. I am sure that he would have received some interesting replies had he done so. He must agree that the provision of good public transport is vital to the tourist industry. Plans to deregulate British Rail threaten the existence of rail rover tickets and British Rail's present inclusive tour ticketing arrangements. That could result in a considerable loss of income to the tourist industry.

The overseas visitor and the domestic traveller may not represent much income per route mile to the private sector rail finance operator, but the Minister must be aware of the considerable consumer expenditure that that brings to the United Kingdom. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has raised those issues with the Minister in parliamentary questions, but perhaps the Minister will be able today to give some more satisfactory answers than those that he gave to my hon. Friend.

Will the Minister also consider one of the more controversial recommendations of the working party of the National Economic Development Council on competitiveness in tourism and leisure which was put to the Government in June 1992? I refer to its proposal for the Government to implement a compulsory grading and classification system of hotels which may well serve to protect the good hotelier from the unscrupulous one which besmirches the reputation of the tourist sector, particularly with foreign tourists. As the report states, there are many communication problems between the existing different national rating systems, particularly between EC countries. Those problems have caused much chaos and confusion among tourists.

The council also suggests, as the Minister must know, that a mandatory scheme would be to the advantage of the industry, as it would enforce minimum quality standards. As I am sure the Minister also knows, the Development of Tourism Act 1969 provides for a compulsory scheme, should such a proposal be taken up.

I realise that this issue has caused some debate in the industry because of the fears of possible price controls being imposed—although it should be observed that other European countries, such as France, have statutory systems of hotel regulation, without price controls. The subject certainly needs further consideration, which I hope the Minister will undertake to give it in greater depth. He should also take note of the confusion and antagonism generated by the Fire Precautions Act 1971, as it affects the provision of bed spaces, and fire certificates. There is a good deal of unfairness in the application of the regulations. The Minister must agree that hotel fire precautions are far too important to be left as they are, the more so given the Government's controversial delay in implementing EC fire regulations for offices and businesses. These regulations are in need of urgent clarification, to ensure that no one's life is put at risk in an attempt to save money. If small hotels and boarding houses are forced to comply with the 1971 Act, grants to assist them with adapting their premises should be forthcoming from central Government.

Another subject for further ministerial thought is that of the tourist tax. The Minister may know that the Association of Metropolitan Authorities has circulated a green paper for consultation among its members, on the merits of a tourist tax. Although I sympathise strongly with local authorities that are being hammered by the Government with tighter and tighter expenditure controls, I am not convinced at this stage that a tourist tax is the answer. But a consultative paper on the subject is no bad thing, and I hope that the Minister will make a contribution to the debate that the AMA has initiated.

Mr. Tony Banks: I hear what my hon. Friend says about a tourist tax. He must recognise that, in places like London, which attracts so many tourists, conflicts of interest may arise between those who live here all the time and those who come here as welcome visitors. That applies especially to charges for museums or to see Buckingham palace or the crown jewels. It might seem unfair that residents should have to pay the same prices as those charged to tourists, given that the former already make a contribution through their taxes. Does my hon. Friend have any thoughts on that?

Mr. Pendry: That is precisely why I have said that this consultation exercise should include a genuine debate, which would cover important points such as those that my hon. Friend has mentioned. I should like to listen to that debate and to take part in the exercise. Certainly, there are pros and cons in this argument—my hon. Friend has listed some.

I hope, too, that the Minister will take part in the exercise and not dismiss it out of hand, so that we will be able to reach sensible conclusions at the end of it all.

While we are on the subject of additional taxes, will the Minister confirm or deny a rumour to the effect that he is looking into the possibility of introducing a departure tax? A sum of £5 per person has been mentioned—it could yield about £150 million. Will the Minister guarantee that the money will be earmarked for the tourist industry, not swallowed up by the Treasury?

[Mr. Pendry]

The Minister rightly pointed out how well this country has done in attracting record numbers of overseas tourists in recent years. We all applaud that. Although Britain remains fifth in the world in terms of tourist earnings, our position is under threat from competitors, which are recording higher levels of growth. According to the British Tourist Authority, Britain recorded an average growth of about 7 per cent. between 1980 and 1990 *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) should listen to this, because it is of interest to him.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pendry: No, I am in the middle of saying something—indeed, I am prepared to repeat it for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman, who was not listening. We recorded an average growth rate of about 7 per cent. between 1980 and 1990. That compares with 15 per cent. for the United States, 9 per cent. for France, 9 per cent. for Italy and 10 per cent. for Spain—they are all pulling further ahead, and Austria and Germany are close on Britain's heels, so the recent reduction in ETB and BTA funding will inevitably lead to a reduction in our market share, although there could be a time lag of between two and three years. Unless the grants are restored, especially the grants for the BTA which, as the Secretary of State recently recognised, is doing a great deal of good work, all this will undoubtedly come about.

The BTA made this very point by illustrating how Britain's share of American visits to Europe fell during the 1980s, as the BTA's ability to maintain investment in the United States market declined. Without adequate resources for the BTA, the United Kingdom cannot compete effectively for the international tourist trade—a fact underlined by the Select Committee on Employment report of 1990.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne) *rose*——

Mr. Pendry: I conclude by welcoming this debate. I hope that the Minister will take note not only of what I have said but of the important points emanating from the industry and from other hon. Members today. Tourism is too important an industry to be ignored any longer by any Government. The Opposition have every intention of ensuring that the industry is neglected no longer. The Government have neglected it; the industry knows that it has been neglected. We are making inroads, as never before, into the tourist industry's thinking, and we shall continue to do so—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where are Opposition Members?"] Some hon. Members are muttering that they are all off to Christchurch for the by-election, where this morning the Tory candidate refused to turn up to talk to hoteliers and small business men. The Labour party is the champion of the tourist industry and will continue to be so.

10.46 am

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): The speech made by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) represents a considerable change in the Opposition's thought processes. I recall that when I made my maiden speech during a tourism debate, an Opposition Member rose to say that the tourism industry was not a real industry: it was a Mickey Mouse industry. Today, the hon. Gentleman said that the industry is too important to be ignored. I wholly agree. In that debate five years ago I said that the Opposition Member who described the tourist industry thus was entirely correct. The height of professionalism—the acme of service in the tourist industry—is to be found in Disney World and the Epcot Centre in Florida. Those places show exactly how the tourist industry should be run.

I welcomed many of the Minister's remarks, and I am grateful for the time that he has spent with me when I have made representations to him. I would ask him to put himself in the position of a small business man trying to run a hotel who, before he can open his doors for business, has to comply with 44 regulations. When hoteliers make representations to the Minister I hope that he will consider the burden of bureaucracy that they have to endure.

In the past, I have brought to the attention of the House several examples of daft regulations—for instance, the food hygiene regulations, which certainly need to be looked at again. I have mentioned the case of the hotelier who was required to check the temperature of his fridge and deep freezers four times a day, and to log the results. I have mentioned how another hotelier told me that the ceiling of his kitchen had to be painted with disinfectant twice a day. We have already heard about the wooden chopping boards, but what about basins? Often, the basins required by the environmental health officers are knee operated. When environmental health officers are asked why hands cannot be washed in the existing basins in which food is prepared, they will say, "That is all right as far as I am concerned—but only after you have put in an extra wash basin. You can ignore it when I have left the room"

Over-regulation has gone to absurd lengths when hotels have to enforce crazy rules such as not allowing guests to bring their own electric shavers or other electrical appliances into hotel rooms. I have examples of health and safety at work and access for the disabled regulations being enforced in a crazy way. A property in a neighbouring constituency had to have a lift installed at great expense. It will never be used because nobody on that floor is disabled. That enormous investment had to be made, and the cost continues because, although the lift is not used, it has to be inspected every year. I welcome the fact that the debate is about deregulation.

Mr. Hendry: Does my hon. Friend agree that to tackle the cases that he has identified we need a strong Minister leading a strong Department? That would be much better than an independent commission, which is the Liberal party's proposal. Many Liberal Members represent tourist areas. Has my hon. Friend noted that the party has been represented in the debate by only one of its Members and sometimes by nobody?

Mr. Allason: That point was made during the last tourism debate when many of us from the west country were unable to be present. My neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), was here throughout the debate, but, today, his elevated position in the Government prevents him from contributing. In the previous debate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) castigated the Government and made some unfair points. I welcome his presence, but he has not been here throughout the debate and did not hear the Minister's speech. What is good for the goose is good for the gander.

I hope that when the Minister considers the question of deregulation he will also consider the hazards of deregulation. He spoke about use class orders, which have had a detrimental effect on many tourist areas. In Belgrave road in my constituency marvellous guest houses have in effect become doss houses. It is regrettable that no applications were made to the local authority for permission for the change to hostel accommodation. My local paper sought the views of the other hoteliers in Belgrave road and found that they were afraid of intimidation. Hoteliers were not prepared to make their views known because they feared that they would get a brick through the window. They have expressed their anxieties to me.

That is a manifestation of the criminal behaviour of people who take advantage of the welfare state and use guest house accommodation throughout the summer, thus preventing tourists who would contribute to the economy of the area from using that accommodation. I deplore that change and I urge the Minister to bang heads together in the Department of Social Security and the Department of the Environment so that we may have straight thinking on this issue.

I am worried about another aspect of deregulation. Many guest house owners who comply with the six-bed space rule feel that there is insufficient enforcement by the Inland Revenue of property owners who are thought to be cowboys. Rogue operators who flout the rules make life difficult for the respectable operators who provide a proper service for visitors, especially in Torbay.

I welcome the Minister's five principles. I suggest that he examines carefully the practical application of new legislation. I remind him of the draft regulation from Brussels that would have prevented smoked meat from being sent through the Royal Mail. That extraordinary measure would have put out of business all the salmon smokeries that rely on mail order. I asked the Department of Health whether at any time there had been a significant number of cases of poisoning as a result of eating contaminated food sent through the post. I was told that there had been none.

Why was the draft regulation produced? It was certainly drafted without any thought for the operators or for the fact that small businesses would be driven to bankruptcy. Therefore, we must have practical examination of legislation before it is introduced. Secondly, legislation should be reviewed with tourism in mind because what may be appropriate in one part of the country may be quite inappropriate for a small operator in another part who caters for just a few guests and struggles to run a small kitchen. It is absurd to require him to have two or three deep freezers and fridges and to have meat separated from vegetables. Such regulations are driving people out of business.

I have some special pleading. When new legislation is being reviewed, will the Minister bear the west country in mind? This issue has been raised with the Prime Minister. All too often, regulation and legislation that are appropriate for one part of the country are wholly inappropriate for the west country. We do things well there, but we depend on our tourist industry and any handicap to our efforts must be deplored.

If the Minister needs advice, I suggest that he sends a questionnaire and conducts a survey either through the regional tourist boards or through the chains of hotels. He could even approach the appropriate small operators and ask the straightforward question, "Which regulation costs you most? What handicap prevents you from being profitable and from being a success and employing more people?" Employment is the key to the future success of the industry.

The Minister should also look at dual rate VAT because the principle has been accepted by the Government and will clearly be applied next year. An examination of that would be welcomed by the tourist industry. There are many other issues that I should like to bring to the Minister's attention, but time is short. I thank him for his five principles and for his commitment to cutting red tape and slashing bureaucracy. I urge him to get rid of the May day bank holiday and respond to the tourist industry by introducing a holiday in the autumn to extend the season. Will he also consider British summer time? Extending it may not be of enormous benefit to lollipop people in the north of Scotland, but it could be enormously important to our tourist industry.

Mr. Nigel Evans: My hon. Friend speaks about scrapping May day, which has proved to be extremely unpopular. Perhaps we could replace it with deregulation day which could be held on 9 July to celebrate this debate. Bonfires could be lit throughout the country and could be used to burn all the forms that have to be completed by small businesses and hoteliers, and could include the speech by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry).

Mr. Allason: I would welcome a deregulation day; and I would regulate to have one.

My hon. Friend the Minister made some robust remarks and I welcome everything that he said. There has been a long tradition of rhetoric without a great deal of action and I look to him to go in there and cut the red tape, to slash bureaucracy and to light the bonfire on deregulation day.

10.59 am

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On many occasions when I have spoken in debates about the importance of manufacturing industry, I have been wrongly accused by Conservative members of not being concerned about the tourist industry.

It being Eleven o'clock, MADAM SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday Sittings).*

Sports Council (Restructuring)

11 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the restructuring of the Sports Council of Great Britain.

My right hon. Friend and I have decided, following consultation with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland, and with the chairmen-designate of the proposed United Kingdom Sports Commission and the Sports Council for England, that we should no longer proceed with work to put those bodies in place of the current Sports Council GB from 1 October.

For some time now, the Government Departments involved, the Sports Council GB, and many other bodies involved in sport have been giving close attention to how a restructuring of the present arrangements would best deliver the overall objectives set out in our December 1991 policy statement, "Sport and Active Reaction". In particular, we have been looking at whether the original proposal for a United Kingdom body as envisaged in that report is still the best vehicle by which to deliver those objectives.

We shall therefore be considering other options, with the Sports Council, with a view to announcing fresh proposals as soon as possible. In doing that work, I shall have in mind the objective of maximising the expenditure that goes directly to sport rather than to administration, and the need for effective management of the new stream of income for sport that will follow the introduction of a national lottery. In the meantime, the Sports Council GB will continue its work. I look forward to working closely with the Sports Council. Our shared concern is to develop a structure which best serves the interests of British sport.

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): First, I must register a protest from this Bench that this statement is being made on a Friday, with so many Members on both sides of the House with sports interests who are away from the House and also at its being made in the middle of an important debate on the tourist industry. From a personal level, as the Opposition spokesman for both tourism and sport, I am left to deal, at very short notice indeed, with this statement, at a time when I am dealing with a major tourist debate. The statement was handed to me at 9.15, 15 minutes before the commencement of the debate and I have hardly had time to digest its contents.

The statement represents to me a great opportunity lost. For some two years of discussion, we have had nothing to show for it. I put it to the Minister that had his Department introduced into the consultation process his colleagues the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, for Scotland and for Wales earlier, and had he brought in all parties in the House to discuss the issue in consultation with them, as well as talking to those at the sharp end of the British sporting scene, he would today, instead of this nebulous statement, be giving us a positive and forward-looking statement about the structures for sport. Surely the way forward is to have a realistic dialogue with all those responsible for sports administration and obvious interested parties, and to get talks going on the road again.

I should like to ask some specific questions of the Minister. He said that he would consider other options. It was originally the Sports Council which proposed the structure for the commission in October 1991, so I find it a little odd and rich for him to be going back to the Sports Council to discuss other options. What other options has he in mind? How much time and money has been wasted? Here we have a Minister who, as we heard earlier in the debate, abhors wasteful bureaucracy, wiping clean a year and seven months of hard work in this field. How much money and time have been wasted in the process?

Perhaps the Minister will clarify what he means by "maximising the expenditure" in relation to the Sports Council, which

"goes directly to sport rather than to administration".

I hope that the Minister will explain rather more what he meant by that, and will not be taking the grossly overestimated figure that the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) mentioned in the sports debate recently.

What will happen to those, Mr. Ian Beer and Sir Peter Yarranton, who have been appointed to the new commission? What will happen to them and any other appointed personnel? Has he taken into account the grief and anxiety that the new proposals have caused staff in the Sports Council over the past 19 months? What will this latest example of Government failure do to the morale of the council?

As I said, we have had little time to consider the full implications of the statement. I hope that the Minister will not take this statement as being a retreat from what the Government and the Opposition said was a good way forward to rationalise the sports structures in this country. I hope that he is not going to throw that baby out with the bath water.

Therefore, I hope that the Under-Secretary will enter meaningful talks with all the bodies that I have mentioned so that we can strive for a better structure for sport. Certainly, with the lottery coming on stream, we shall need a structure to ensure that that money is fed into the areas of sport and recreation that are necessary. I hope that the Minister will take a positive step forward and involve more people in sport in any proposals that will come forward as a result of further consultation.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman began by protesting because I was making the statement on a Friday. The original proposition was that the information should be put out in a written answer, and I said that, as a courtesy to the House, although it is only one day before the next National Heritage Question Time, which is on Monday, I would make a statement so that there would be some information on the table if hon. Members wished to raise the issue then. I was trying to do the House a courtesy, and I thought that a statement on a Friday was better than no statement at all, which is what would otherwise have happened.

As to giving the hon. Gentleman maximum notice, I appreciate the difficulties. We both had to make a speech on another subject early this morning. However, when my civil servants got in touch with the hon. Gentleman, he asked when he could have the statement and I well remember that my answer was, "He can have it as early on Friday morning as he cares to pick it up." I do my best to be courteous to the hon. Gentleman and to the House, but we are all in a slightly difficult position because of the sitting hours of the House on a Friday.

The hon. Gentleman asked me, perfectly fairly, whether we would undertake to have a realistic dialogue with all the

sports bodies that he mentioned, and we will do that as swiftly as possible over the next few months. I hope that we shall be able to give the answers to the House before the year is out. He asked what other options we had and the answer is that they are what will come out of the discussions that we shall have.

The hon. Gentleman asked me what I meant by "maximising the expenditure that goes directly to sport". When I look at the distribution of the £51 million that the Sports Council GB gets—that is not all the money that sport gets from various public sources—I am bound to consider the statement that 37 per cent. of that money goes on the adminstration of the Sports Council. I know that the council says that it depends how one defines administration, but I will gladly look at the matter to see whether the claim that 37 per cent. of the money is spent on the council rather than on sport directly is fair. I want to make sure that when we give money to encourage sport, it goes to the people at the sharp end and not to bureaucrats.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the position of Sir Peter Yarraton and Mr. Beer—an important and fair question. Both of them support what the Government are doing, and will be coming along with us as continuing members of the Sports Council GB.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that we have come a long way since the heady days of the 1960s and the so-called age of leisure, when full employment was still on the agenda? The Sports Council was established to take advantage of that age of leisure. I remember serving on the east midlands Sports Council as a local authority representative. We were presented with a map with blue flags showing golf courses and red flags for swimming baths all over the place. I managed to get a swimming bath for Clay Cross. I suspect that the Minister's statement is made against the background of an age of mass unemployment, with the Government looking to make cuts wherever they can.

I ask the Minister not to indulge in cutting expenditure where it provides facilities. If the Government proceed with privatising the coal industry, thousands of welfares in every coalfield throughout Britain—cricket grounds, football pitches, tennis courts, bowling greens and the rest —could be at risk. I hope that those facilities will not be lost if ever the Government privatise the coal industry but that the Government will look after them.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman asked whether my statement was a consequence of the Government's need to make cuts. That is not so. I have not even discussed the matter with the Treasury. It is a case of not being convinced that a United Kindom overarching body, with another supporting bureaucracy, is the best way to spend money.

The hon. Gentleman made a fair point about the need properly to support local cricket grounds and bowls clubs. I entirely agree. It was so that more money could be diverted to such facilities rather than to sports administrators that we decided to re-examine the problem.

As for properly supporting facilities such as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, I hope that funds will be available not only from the Sports Council but in due course from the national lottery also.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am disappointed that the United Kingdom sports commission concept seems to have been put on ice, if not abandoned. This country's sporting structure is already considerably fragmented, and I thought that the commission was a positive proposal. This has nothing to do with the Sports Council, but I should like to see a United Kingdom soccer team representing this country at international level. If we could use the talents of all the home countries, we might actually win a few matches.

Will the Minister say from where the original proposal for the commission emanated, and what has changed the minds of Ministers, who at one stage were very supportive of the proposal?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman asked what changed our mind. The original concept was to find a better way of delivering cash and advice to sportsmen and sportswomen throughout the country. It was thought that a United Kingdom sports commission with an overarching United Kingdom responsibility might do that. However, those excellent ideas—as they seemed—were so fleshed out that it seemed likely that we would get only another vast bureaucracy, taking up more funds that could be devoted to facilities of the kind mentioned by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

When one gets down to it, Scotland and Wales would have no intention of giving up their grip on their national sport—rightly, I believe—and there would not be a proper job for a United Kingdom sports commission to do. It could represent Britain overseas on certain occasions, and issues such as doping must be examined on a United Kingdom basis. However, although there were good reasons for a United Kingdom commission, there are better reasons for spending money not on bureaucracy but on sportsmen and sportswomen throughout the country.

Tourism and Deregulation

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

11.14 am

Mr. Pike: I was saying that I have been wrongly accused by Conservative Members of dismissing the importance of tourism to the nation by concentrating at times on manufacturing industry. That is not true, and I welcome this opportunity to contribute to this debate.

While I do not in any way dismiss tourism's importance from the point of view of jobs and the economy, I may point out, as a Member of Parliament representing a constituency in the north-west, that we had 971,000 jobs in manufacturing industry in 1979 but only 525,000 in 1992. Tourism will, of course, never fill the jobs lost in the manufacturing base.

Having said that, I point out that tourism is important to the north-west, as it generates a large amount of money and provides employment for a substantial number of people. I am glad that the Minister, in response to my earlier intervention, placed emphasis on my point about regional airports. Although I was referring specifically to Manchester, my comments apply equally to other regional airports.

It is nonsense that people from the north-west who want to go abroad are forced to fly from London, and that people entering the United Kingdom are also forced to arrive in London. That compounds London's problems. That is no way meant as a criticism of London, because, as my mother came from Burnley and my father from London, I have a foot in both camps. Too many people are unnecessarily forced to fly to London, causing additional problems with the transport system, and so on. If that can be avoided, it will benefit not only London but the regions. I am not making an anti-London point, but we all know of the nonsensical situation. There are problems even within the London airports, and the present regulatory regime should be changed.

Anyone who knows Manchester airport will have seen the results of the massive investment made there over the years, including the new second terminal that was opened recently and the rail link for which I fought, together with a number of colleagues, a few years ago. It, too, is now open and is an important added feature.

The Minister's speech focused on deregulation and he gave examples of stupid controls and regulations. Everyone agrees that if there is no useful purpose for a regulation, it should be abolished. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) stressed the importance of ensuring that anything done is not at the risk of safety. We must ensure, for example, that the incidence of food poisoning is minimised. That must be done sensibly, but the Minister made the point that certain regulations are not sensible and cannot be justified, although he accepted the need for safety.

As for fire safety, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde also mentioned, one is often confronted in a hotel with a maze of corridors, which should be adequately signed in an emergency. Obstructions caused by furniture, for example, must be avoided, because if the way is blocked there could be a major disaster. The standards in this country are far better than those in many others, but we must ensure that they are maintained and improved to avoid the tragedies that occur in other parts of the world. It is a question of sensible regulation.

No doubt the Government would describe the wages councils, which are now being abolished, as an unnecessary regulation. I do not agree. A report produced by the Manchester low pay unit for Lancashire county council shows that in Blackpool—where many people are employed in hotels and catering—the wages council underpinned the lowest incomes, while those incomes were even lower in parts of the county where wages councils had already been abolished. Low pay is a scandal, and it is disgraceful that the Government should be hell bent on preserving it. Unless we provide fair pay and working conditions, employment in tourism and other sectors will eventually be destroyed.

Tourism is very important in the north-west, and in Lancashire in particular. The county council has worked hard to promote tourism for a number of years, and has published a profile of every district council in Lancashire describing what it has to offer. The six local authorities in north-east Lancashire—Blackburn, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale—have got together, along with the Red Rose tourism consortium, to promote the area's hill country.

Some Conservative Members—and other people who appear regularly on television—seem to believe that they would need a passport to travel north of Watford gap. They will no doubt be surprised to learn that such places as Burnley have a tremendous amount to offer. The era of tall, dark chimneys, smoke and soot has gone; indeed, it was never as bad as it is said to have been. In Burnley, my constituency, the green hills of the Pennines and the surrounding country can be seen from every point. It is possible to walk from the central station into the countryside without crossing a single road, via a footpath that was constructed along a mineral railway, now long closed.

In 1991, a total of 469,620 tourist nights were clocked up, and £9·457 million was spent. That is not bad, and it can be built on. A total of 2·3 million nights and nearly £44 million was spent in the Lancashire hill country. Early this century, Burnley council acquired Towneley hall, which attracted 234,000 visitors in 1990-91. It was difficult to persuade the Department of Transport to allow the erection of a sign on the motorway showing drivers where to turn off for Towneley hall; the Department said that that could be done only if the hall attracted 300,000 visitors a year, changing the figure later to 600,000. The sign was eventually allowed, but only as a result of the efforts of the then chief executive of the council, Brian Whittle, who pursued the issue vigorously through me.

I do not advocate a proliferation of distracting motorway signs like the advertisements that appear on some countries' motorways and autoroutes; however, it would be sensible to produce a limited number indicating local tourist attractions. The current regulations are nonsensical, although I accept that some control must be exercised. Surely it is worth signposting such attractions, even if they are visited by only 50,000 people each year.

Burnley also contains Gawthorpe hall, a National Trust property. It is possible to walk along the Bronte trail through Burnley and Pendle into Haworth, in Yorkshire, where the Brontes lived. They were also connected with Gawthorpe.

The Leeds-Liverpool canal runs through Burnley. I have said many times that the Government should pay more attention to the canal system, which brought the nation prosperity at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, but has been neglected for many years. A positive approach could make the canals an asset again. The weavers triangle could be developed and an old wharfside museum can already be visited.

Burnley has pursued the policies advocated in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance", published in 1989-90. In its efforts to produce a sustainable tourist industry, it has given objective consideration to such matters as publicity, road signs, events, the development of leisure sites, camping and the conversion of historical buildings to maximise potential for both jobs and the economy. Some years ago, when I was leader of the council, we acquired Queen street mill. I hope that, if the Minister ever visits Burnley, he will go and see the mill: it is the only original cotton mill still working on a steam engine, and it is a major feature of the town. Prince Charles visited it a few years ago, and its future has now been secured through an agreement with English Heritage, the county council and Burnley council.

I believe that the Government should consider our industrial heritage, which, if sensibly marketed, can be a tourist attraction. Although people are unlikely to spend a week or a fortnight holidaying in Burnley—as they might in the constituency of the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason)—it is within easy reach of the Yorkshire dales Blackpool and many other places, and it would be possible to market four or five-day holiday centres. I hope that the Government will co-operate with Burnley council, and other local authorities, to that end.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde mentioned railways and the marketing of tickets. He made some important points. The Minister should consider what happened after bus deregulation and privatisation. Tickets such as the red rose rambler tickets were immediately discontinued. Such tickets enabled people to travel anywhere within Lancashire at a sensible price. They could travel on any bus, whether a municipal bus or a national bus. It was a great tragedy that such tickets were discontinued. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde made the point that through tickets and combined tickets, which attract tourism, could be threatened by railway privatisation.

I do not intend to get involved in a debate on railway privatisation, because you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would rightly rule me out of order. However, I make the point that we need investment in our railways for tourism. We need electrification of the line from Manchester through Preston to Blackpool. It is nonsense that such a major tourist centre as Blackpool has now lost its InterCity railway line. I can understand why it lost that service. One had to go to Preston and change there to a diesel locomotive for the final stretch of the journey. The delay caused made it an unattractive service. The line should be electrified.

Mr Nigel Evans: Does the hon. Genleman agree that if Richard Branson wished to run a service from London straight to Blackpool, he should be given the opportunity to do so through the privatisation of British Rail?

Mr. Pike: I do not think that that will happen. We shall all have to wait to see what happens to the Bill, and whether the House agrees to the Lords amendment. I do not believe that ownership is the problem with the railways. The problem has been the Government's lack of investment in public transport.

We should consider regulations carefully. If regulations are a bar, they should go. However, we must ensure that our industry retains every aspect of safety. We have a good reputation because of the inspections that ensure safety and ensure that certain standards are met. Food hygiene must be considered as a matter of great urgency. We all know of the problems that can be caused if we do not have proper standards in restaurants and hotel kitchens. Regulations that cannot be proved to be needed should be scrapped, but let us not scrap regulations just for the sake of it.

I accept that tourism is an important industry. I want it to grow, especially in my area of Burnley and in Lancashire generally. Tourism can keep people in work and it can create wealth in the local economy.

11.33 am

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) spoke for Burnley, which is a tourist destination that does not immediately spring to mind. His speech marked the sea change that is taking place throughout the country in terms of support for tourism.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) paid lip service to tourism. Nobody really believes that the Labour party is serious about tourism. The Conservative Party has had a total commitment to tourism and our job has always been to expound the fact that jobs in tourism are real jobs which require skill, which are successful and which are long term. We have largely been successful in that.

I warmly welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to the Front Bench. I can think of no better champion of the tourist industry than him. He has already expressed his support for tourism with an energy and zeal that are not in question. We very much look forward to the results of his efforts, which I have no doubt will be wholly successful.

It is gratifying that the Government have demonstrated their commitment to tourism by holding a second debate so soon after the previous one. This debate comes at an important time, because the discussion about deregulation has made us aware that so much regulation is a hindrance to the development of the industry.

We take some satisfaction from the fact that the industry has displayed great resilience during a period of difficulties. There has been a great advance in the quality of catering. There are advances in terms of special offers and value for money which the tourist industry offers those who come here for enjoyment. I pay a warm tribute to the skills and dedication of those in the tourist industry who make it so successful.

In the first four months of this year, the number of overseas visitors has increased to a record 5·2 million—a 6 per cent. increase on the same period last year. Spending by overseas visitors has increased by 13 per cent. to a record £2·2 billion during the first four months of this year. That augurs well for a successful year.

I congratulate the Home Office on its review of the licensing laws. That review is fundamental to the tourist industry, especially for those in catering and for foreign visitors, who are still confused by the difference between our licensing laws and those on the continent and who find

[Mr. Robert Banks]

it frustrating that they cannot buy drinks in some places, such as cafes and restaurants, as easily as they can on the continent.

If Manchester's bid for the Olympic games is successful, there will be enormous benefits for the whole of the north of England, including Yorkshire and Lancashire. We wish our negotiators every success. My constituency would benefit from the spin-off and a considerable number of jobs would be involved, not only in building, but in running the operation.

This debate is about removing excessive and unnecessary regulations. Over the years, we have tended to legislate too much. More often than not, we give wide powers to Ministers to lay regulations as they see fit. In the best interests of improving the quality of our services and ensuring that we have proper regulations to govern the industry, we have allowed matters to get out of hand. We have lost sight of common sense in dealing with everyday problems.

The point is highlighted by my constituent Mrs. Everett, chairman of the Harrogate District Hotels, Guest Houses and Restaurants Association. An inspector came to her hotel and said that she must have all her electrical appliances regularly tested by an electrician to fulfil the requirements of the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989, which have already been mentioned in the debate. She later discovered that the regulations merely recommend the regular inspection of appliances as best practice rather than as a full legal requirement. In the meantime, Mrs. Everett had forked out £400 for an inspection which she could well have done herself.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will my hon. Friend consider the regulations on hoists and lifts, under which the insurance industry is largely the regulator because it has a vested financial interest in the matter? Self-regulation, rather than over-zealous bureaucracy, is a much better way to enforce regulations.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend is right. The insurance industry plays a real role in assisting people and in ensuring that they comply with common-sense standards to meet the requirements of insurance policies.

These regulations have often been found to be confusing, misleading and inconsistent. Environmental health officers who work for different authorities work to different guidelines and different standards. Therefore, hotels and restaurants around the country are unwittingly involved in a regulatory lucky dip as to which environmental health standards are applied.

With more than 400 local authorities in the country, all with their own particular environmental health standards, it is unfair that what might be accepted by an environmental health officer in one part of the country might be rejected in another part. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will carefully consider that point. As a result of removing some of the regulations, the army of inspectors might be reduced.

I want to refer briefly to the Immigration (Hotel Records) Order 1972 which the Minister quite rightly mentioned. The order requires hotels to keep a detailed record of each guest for inspection by the police and to maintain such lists for 12 months. It is unlikely that many illegal immigrants will come to Harrogate and stay in our hotels, some of which are quite expensive and some of which are very modest and reasonable in respect of cost. However, the whole concept is out of hand. That bureaucratic problem is completely unnecessary.

My hon. Friend the Minister gave a good example of the regulation governing sandwiches. Under a similar extraordinary regulation, one cannot cut up celery on a board on which one has cut up cheese. If one is making cheese and celery sandwiches or a salad with cheese and celery, one must not, according to the regulation about which I have been informed, use the same board. Frankly, that is ridiculous.

Can one use the same knife? The answer to that must be no. What happens if one wants to mix something else into the salad or the sandwiches? No doubt one must use another board for that. Clearly, matters have got out of hand. I have no doubt that we could dispense with many of those stupid regulations.

A moment ago, I referred to the number of environmental health inspectors. In 1990, the Health and Safety Executive employed 3,698 people. That figure rose to 4,321 last year. We must tackle the problem that that rise in the number of staff represents. I believe that that will occur naturally.

The hon. Member for Burnley and others referred to signs. Perhaps I can add weight to the point by referring to a lady in my constituency in Knaresborough who set up a very small dolls house museum. That is a tourist attraction. She has been battling with Harrogate borough council to have a sign erected. Very reluctantly, the council agreed that she could have a sign for just one month. To my mind, that is utterly ridiculous. Why could she not have a sign for three months because that is the period during which she wants to keep the museum open and it represents the tourism season? I hope that the council will change its mind.

That point illustrates the reluctance of local authorities to back tourism projects. We must get everyone working to support tourism. Local authorities can do so much in that respect and they must take full account of the communications to tell people where there are places to visit.

I must apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister and to the House as I cannot stay for the whole of the debate. I must fulfil commitments in my constituency. However, I very much welcome the enormous amount of work that is being done to get rid of the unnecessary regulations. It is even more important that the people in the industry have had an opportunity to make direct contact with the Minister through the various task force groups. That is enormously important because it gives people a strong feeling that they can get through to Government and say, "For goodness sake, get this load of bureaucracy off our backs."

11.44 am

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): May I also take this opportunity to welcome the Minister to his new appointment and thank him for his helpful replies to representations that I have made on behalf of constituents? I wish him well in his campaign with regard to deregulation. I very much support the thrust of that campaign and I welcome his initiative.

The south-west is as heavily dependent on tourism as any other part of the country. As tourism and agriculture

are our two traditional industries and job providers, and both are in long-term decline although for different reasons, I thought it necessary to participate in this debate.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) made many valid points in addition to some rather silly points about where right hon. and hon. Members might be this morning. Hon. Members of all parties have long standing commitments on Friday mornings which prevent them attending debates of which we are notified only one week in advance.

Mr. Raynsford: Where is the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) now?

Mr. Harvey: The remarks by the hon. Member for Torbay about my being absent from the Chamber for a minute or two while the Minister was speaking have just been alluded to by the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford). It is notable that the hon. Member for Torbay slunk off within seconds of completing his speech.

It is clear that there is agreement on both sides of the House that the tourism industry is over-taxed, over-regulated, over-charged and over-burdened. If the Government are to set about the task of trying to remove some of the burdens, many of us on the Opposition Benches will be behind them.

I was pleased to hear Conservative Members exploding the myth that Brussels is to blame for all the problems. Few people are more ready than I am to blame Brussels for a variety of sins. However, the claim that Brussels is responsible for many of the regulations that are burdening the tourism industry is not true. The blame very largely lies with the United Kingdom and with this Chamber.

I welcome the strong remarks that have been made by the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). It is never too late for a sinner to repent, but one wonders how many of the regulations that the hon. Member for South Hams has castigated he actually voted for during their consideration in this House.

There are many examples, some of which have been referred to today, of regulations to do with fire, health, food and hygiene which cause problems for the very small businesses which typify the tourism industry. It is not always simply a question of how the regulations are framed. The problems are caused by their application.

In a recent survey that I conducted of hoteliers in my constituency, more than 40 per cent. said that the inspectors of those regulations were rude or arrogant. *The Daily Telegraph*, which publishes many useful things in addition to opinion polls, has said:

"Amid this regulatory chaos Environmental Health Officers have been running riot, behaving with a petty-minded arrogance which would not be out of place in a totalitarian state."

It is easy to understand why that is so when we consider some of the things that have happened.

During the debate on 4 May, the hon. Member for South Hams said:

"Directives from Brussels are often quite sensible and come to Britain suggesting one way of dealing with a problem, but once the directive arrives here Whitehall officials occupy themselves by rewriting it, more often than not with the opposite effect, causing unnecessary and often immeasureable damage . . . Then there is legislation from our own Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 4 May 1993; Vol. 224, c. 20.]

That is only too true. While our competitors in the rest of Europe find ways of getting round the various directives, it often seems that Whitehall is not satisfied if documents have not trebled in length and complexity. Indeed, one often feels that one needs to be a member of MENSA to understand those directives. One wonders whether there is not some ingenious job creation scheme afoot in Whitehall whereby officials spend several years putting those burdens and directives together and then manage to promote a deregulating initiative so that they can spend more years taking them all apart.

Several hon. Members have referred to chopping boards. It seems that if one wants to put together a club sandwich, one needs three knives and three chopping boards. There have also been problems with refrigerators, and I entirely support the Minister's views on cheese. I think that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) must have been bringing his normal humour to bear on the matter.

However, there are small stores in small communities in my constituency on which not only tourists but the whole community are heavily dependent. People operate very much at the margins, make very small returns and just about manage to eke out an existence. When they are confronted with the shock of the uniform business rate and then the requirement to buy expensive new refrigeration units, some of which can cost several thousand pounds, which can be a large proportion of their income, that is an understandable burden for them.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I, too, had exactly the same lobbying from my village shops until they got their first electricity bills. Their bills dropped very significantly because they were not trying to cool down the area around the cabinets. The attitude has completely changed.

Mr. Harvey: I am pleased to hear what the hon. Lady says. Unfortunately, the three shopkeepers who approached me in this regard have subsequently gone out of business and therefore have not received any further electricity bills to compare with earlier ones.

I have also been approached by constituents who have been running holiday flats in the town of Ilfracombe. They have been running them for about 12 years or so and have brought them up to a high standard which has been given the three-key mark by the tourist board. Suddenly they find themselves required to bring about all sorts of alterations in order to meet the fire control requirements. The property next door—the buildings are semi-detached—is subject to no such regulations, because the owners run bed-and-breakfast accommodation rather than holiday flats. The buildings are architecturally identical, save that they are mirror images of each other. The owners are confronted with a bill for about £60,000. In recent years they have survived on profits of about £5,000. Clearly, it is impossible for them to try to meet those sudden requirements.

The matter was made more galling for the owners when the inspectors who visited them initially confused their property with another and did not mean to visit theirs at all. They agreed that the owners might reasonably raise the level of a patio so that a regulation about the number of rooms being more than 20 ft above ground level could be circumvented, and then heartily agreed that that would make matters entirely legal without improving the fire conditions of the building.

The matter was made even more galling for the owners when they learnt from the regional tourist board that local

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authorities in other parts of the county have no plans to implement the legislation because the task would apparently be too great to contemplate, leaving other parts of south Devon at a great advantage over them. I agree that the insurance industry could contribute greatly to tightening up in that regard, and it should be given more of a rein to do so.

I have another example of people who own holiday flats and who put televisions in them. They rent out the flats for fewer than 140 days in a year in order to get around some of the local rating charges, but they have to pay the television licence fee for the full 365 days. Of course, they remove the television sets for fear of their being stolen when the flats are unoccupied. Something could be done in that regard to help tourism. Also, the business rate needs to be looked at more closely. In many cases, valuations assume 365 days of trade, and all too often that is not the case.

I hope that the Minister will comment on the high water charges in the south-west if he is trying to improve tourism in Devon and Cornwall. Beaches are fundamental to tourism in our part of the world. We have great difficulty in that a mere 3 per cent. of the population are trying to pay the costs of cleaning up 30 per cent. of the nation's beaches. Although we welcome the Prime Minister's recent interest in the subject, we regard his suggestion that the programme to clean up the beaches might be delayed as more of a threat than an assistance.

Surely, after water customers have had to go through the agonies of paying vastly increased water bills in recent years, the last thing that they want to hear is that the beaches will not be cleaned up. Tourists are becoming increasingly discerning in deciding where to go on holiday. They are becoming more aware of which beaches pass tests and win blue flags and which do not. That is vital to tourism-related industries that live off the back of beaches.

The hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) referred to the Home Office review of the licensing laws. I agree with his comments. Another threat to tourism is the general tone of some of the options being floated by those who are seeking to alter the law on Sunday trading in general. I hope that we have successfully buried the idea that Sunday trading should apply differently in coastal resorts compared with inland resorts. It clearly would be extremely damaging for coastal holiday resorts if businesses suddenly had to close their doors. What about Canterbury, Salisbury and South Molton in the middle of north Devon? They would be brutally affected if, suddenly, they had to close their tea rooms, antique rooms and so on. I hope that when the House considers Sunday trading next Session, no such distinction is built in.

Reference has been made to British Rail and the forthcoming privatisation. The year before last, 100,000 international passes were sold, enabling people to use the United Kingdom rail network. I hope that, under the new arrangements that the Government are introducing, it will be clearly demarcated that someone, somewhere—some organisation—has responsibility for marketing those passes.

VAT is another problem which afflicts small tourism businesses. They rightly feel aggrieved that, with the growing single market in Europe, VAT in France operates at 5·5 per cent. on hotel accommodation and meals.

The Minister has been helpful in his responses to representations from my constituency on road signing. Four years ago, a new road was opened, giving access into north Devon. It has done much to improve communications in the area, but it was hoped that it would greatly assist local businesses. Unfortunately, in the four years that it has been open, precisely the reverse has proved to be the case, and for the very reason that hon. Members have already referred to—the over-prescriptive regulations which appear to govern the erection of directional signs.

Mr. Waterson: As the hon. Gentleman is talking about planning matters, will he state his party's policy on the operation of the use classes regulation, which has already been canvassed, particularly in the light of the attack on my campaign by a Liberal Democrat county councillor in Eastbourne?

Mr. Harvey: I certainly cannot comment on remarks by a county councillor in Eastbourne, as I do not know what they are and I cannot stand by every remark made by every county councillor in every county. I can, however, tell the hon. Gentleman my own view, which, from the sound of it, concurs with his own. I have been lobbying Ministers in the Department of the Environment for some time to bring in precisely the change of use requirement, and I back that very strongly.

My party's housing spokesman would have to say more generally whether the party agreed with it, but I took the Minister's point that, by bringing in such a requirement one puts it back in the hands of the local council and local democracy to determine such matters. There would not appear to be any obligation on local authorities to act in one way or another. It would be hard to find that exceptionable.

The problem with the new road in north Devon is that it has been carved through countryside where there are no businesses, leaving the old road, which it largely superseded, as a barren wasteland.

The hotels, pubs, campsites, garages, shops and everything else that used to pick up a healthy passing trade are completely isolated and abandoned. When some of them started to put up signs on the new road pointing to what the area had to offer the passing tourists in the neighbouring villages, the local authority moved in. It interpreted the Department's regulations rigidly and demanded that the signs be taken down.

The result is that people are completely unaware of what north Devon has to offer them and they pass it by, carrying on at the great speed that they are able to achieve on the north Devon link road. In no time at all, they are in north Cornwall where there is a proliferation of signs on both sides of all the roads telling them precisely what is available.

Mrs. Lait: While I accept that many local authorities are reluctant to put up signs—clearly, the hon. Gentleman's local authority is one of them—I simply wonder which political party runs his local authority and has taken this specific view.

Mr. Harvey: It is nothing to do with which political party has taken the view. The attitude started when the local authority was independent and it has continued under the authority with a Liberal Democrat grouping. My colleagues, who are Liberal Democrat councillors, regularly tell me that they want me to challenge the

Minister in the House on the fact that the regulations are over-prescriptive and the local authority has no choice but to implement them.

The problem has arisen in north Devon because the road is new. The regional office of the Department of Transport is more vigilant in north Devon because the road is new than it is in those of surrounding aurtthorities which are, in some cases, run by Liberal Democrats as well. It is not a party political problem—it is a problem of the regulations being over-prescriptive.

The solution that we think that we have found is one with which we hope the Department will agree—putting up some sort of uniform signs, perhaps with the use of symbols, along the road point out that there are local communities on either side where pubs, hotels, campsites and so on are available. The Department of Transport —I am sure that the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) will agree that it is run by the Conservatives —has thus far refused even to agree to that.

The suggestion that has come back is that small information boards could be put up in lay-bys. While that would certainly do no harm, I am sure that the hon. Lady will agree that it would do little to inform passing motorists of what the area has to offer. With the full support of my Liberal Democrat-controlled local authority, I appeal to Ministers to make the regulations more flexible so that local authorities have more latitude in applying them.

In Devon, there has been a 5 per cent. drop in the number of tourists in each of the past three years—each drop coming on the one before. In the town of Ilfracombe, there are many hotels for sale. In many cases, elegant Victorian properties with 16, 18, 20 or more bedrooms are for sale for as little as £60,000 or £70,000. They are all much of an age and a great deal needs to be done to improve them. According to the inspector whom I quoted earlier, they are all getting into trouble in terms of the fire regulations.

Surely, the single greatest thing that would give a boost to a town such as Ilfracombe would be to reintroduce section 4 grants to England. Those grants are still available in Scotland and Wales. Good use was made of those grants in the past in Ilfracombe and elsewhere and it would be one of the single biggest things that could be done to boost those areas.

Another concern is the cuts in the grants to tourist boards. When the Prime Minister visited Cornwall recently, he said;

> "The West Country in a sense is its own best advertisement for tourism; we do not need to tell people about the West Country as a tourist centre, it is instinctively there. When people think about holidays, they will instinctively think of the West Country among places as somewhere to go."

I simply cannot begin to understand why that should be more true of the west country than of Scotland or Wales.

Expenditure on tourism per head of population is £6·26 in Northern Ireland, £5·06 in Wales and £3·20 in Scotland. However, the sum for England is a mere 42p. If that is not bad enough, it will get worse because, in 1995-96, the figures will have increased to £8·60 in Northern Ireland, £5.39 in Wales, a modest cut of 6p to £3·14 in Scotland and it will have halved to 21p per head in England. That is the real problem which the west country faces. We are operating at a gross disadvantage compared with the rest of the United Kingdom. I have already explained the great importance of tourism in Devon and Cornwall.

Shortly, the Government will announce their review of assisted areas. I know that there is a feeling in many coastal resorts represented by hon. Members on both sides of the House that the Government's pledge at the start of their review—that they would examine the future trends as well as the past patterns of unemployment—will need to be recognised in the coastal areas if any alternative employment is to grow up. It is a sad fact that 11 of the 20 top unemployment black spots rely on the holiday industry.

The blame for the unsatisfactory state of affairs cannot fairly be laid in Brussels. Many regulations about which hon. Members have spoken eloquently have been passed by the House. In many cases, Conservative Members must have voted for them. The Government have set us at a disadvantage compared with the rest of the EC. I welcome the Minister's remarks and the initiatives that he has taken. They cannot come soon enough. The tourism industry is absolutely desperate. I wish the Minister well. I hope that he will make rapid headway in this regard.

12.6 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I support the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) about getting more traffic into our regional airports, especially Manchester airport. I also throw my support behind the campaign to get the Olympic games into Manchester. If we were successful in getting the games, they would not simply be the north-west games; it would be a great success for the whole of the United Kingdom and British industry. The knock-on effect, with the number of tourists that would come into the region —tourists would not simply come to Manchester; they would come to all parts of the north-west—would be extremely beneficial.

Mr. Pendry: I concur with what the hon. Gentleman says. Does he think that it is a little ironic that the Government have given something like £50 million plus to the bid for the Olymic games at the same time as they have effectively cut the amount of money to the north-west tourist board? Surely, if we are to attract International Olympic Committee delegates and their wives to the north-west, we must ensure that it is presented in an attractive package. The Government should not be cutting back in that tourist area; they should be giving money on top of the capital expenditure that they are giving to the Olympic games bid.

Mr. Evans: I am extremely grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments. However, he must agree that the money that the Government are spending on ensuring that the games come to Manchester, irrespective of whether we are successful, will be spent in Manchester.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the expenditure of about £55 million for the new stadium in Manchester. That must be welcomed. As the British Tourist Authority is concerned, the amount of money is being maintained. We must ensure that the money that is being given to the regional tourist boards is more effectively targeted. I have no problem whatever with the sums of money that will be spent to support the tourist industry in the United Kingdom.

I welcome the Minister's five principles. I would prefer to call them the five steps to heaven. As far as the tourist industry is concerned, we need a cost-benefit analysis to

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ensure that the benefits of any rules and regulations that are made are not outweighed by the massive costs incurred in implementing them.

Hon. Members have already referred to the need for sensible rules and regulations. Common sense must be applied to them. They must be consistent and clear so that their interpretation does not differ from area to area, or even within areas, according to which local authority officer enforces them. Few things can be easier than dreaming up new directives and rules to be imposed on our businesses, but somewhere along the line someone must work out the cost of their implementation. We must discover who benefits from that.

Reference has also been made to the new fire regulations that have been introduced. It has been estimated that it may cost £8 billion to implement them. That fantastic sum of money will have to be borne by businesses. We must be careful that we do not go overboard when enforcing the rules. For example, even small artists' workshops will be required to erect all sorts of fire doors and fire exit signs, even though they may be visited by few people. Similar regulations will be imposed on stately homes.

One officer may say that the owner of a property must do this, that and the other, but planning regulations may prevent the owner from complying. We must ensure that enterprise is not snuffed out. We must also ensure that guest houses and bed and breakfasts, which are national institutions, are protected and not forced out of business by the enforcement of certain rules that were never intended for such accommodation. The owners of such properties must be properly consulted before rules are introduced.

The likely benefit derived from some rules may be zero, and the cost of their implementation may be disproportionately high. One should not assume that many small businesses do not want to comply: they may not have the cash. Once the owner of a company had explained that, despite spending X thousands of pounds complying with certain regulations, no benefit would be gained by his customers, it would be difficult for him to borrow money from the bank.

Mr. Pike: The hon. Gentleman's constituency includes the Trough of Bowland, which is one of the most beautiful parts of the north-west. What does he think about the pressure being exerted on farmers as a result of the common agricultural policy and other regulations? Does he believe that the beauty of the Trough of Bowland may be endangered if some of those farmers go out of business?

Mr. Evans: That refers to a separate issue relating to the impact of rules and regulations on rural areas. I accept, however, that if some of my farmers were put out of business by some unwieldy European Community rules and regulations, that would have an impact on the beauty of my constituency. I believe that the Government and the European Community are looking towards more environmentally sensitive assistance for farmers. However, the money should be targeted more effectively at farmers instead of the middle men, because the great danger is that money is not getting to the right people. I know that the Government are considering that problem.

Food safety has been mentioned time and again. The stringent interpretation of the Food Safety Act 1990 has meant that those in the catering industry have incurred a bill of £1 billion. Such is the cost of buying new fridges and bringing premises up to the standard required. Restaurants, hotels and catering establishments live in fear of the knock on the door. It may not happen at midnight and it may not be the KGB: it is the EHO, the state Securitate. They will not be deflected from their task of enforcing the new rules.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Many hon. Members have made repeated reference today to the food safety regulations. I am the first to accept that there are stupid regulations in all walks of life, but who has introduced them? Are they the result of Government legislation, EC legislation or local authority legislation? I do not want to hear about the British Securitate. Let us spell out who is introducing the regulations and forcing many businesses in the tourist industry to comply with them.

Mr. Evans: It has already been said that the regulations may come from Brussels, Westminster or local authorities. It is their interpretation, however, that causes the problem. A rule may be introduced for one reason, but when it is enforced it is screwed just a little too tight so that it is enforced in such a way as was never intended. We must be extremely careful about that.

Some EHOs are caring and helpful when it comes to helping businesses to comply with rules and regulations. Others display a clipboard mentality. They are extremely hard and tell the owners of businesses that they have to do this and that. We must be careful of that mentality. We must ensure that such maverick inspectors have their clipboards taken from them.

Nowadays, the temperature of fridges must be checked regularly and forms must be completed to prove that they have been checked. If an inspector turns up and an owner has not filled in those forms, woe betide him. The representatives of one hotel chain told me that, given the volume of paperwork as a result of the new regulations, they believe that they would be far better served if they got rid of one of their chefs and employed a secretary to cope with the forms. That must be wrong. Another hotel chain has estimated that its overall electricity bill has increased by 2 per cent. since it had to introduce new fridges; the regulations insist that hotels must have some fridges at one temperature and others at another for different food. We must consider those regulations again.

The Forte hotel chain has informed me that since the new food safety regulations were introduced, it has had to deal with more than 1,000 different forms. One of the top agricultural shows, the Bath and West, reported a £91,000 loss due to the £250,000 cost of meeting the new hygiene safety requirements.

Another part of the problem is that many EHOs seem to try it on when ordering compliance with regulations. One survey recently revealed that of 2,000 pubs, 40 per cent. of compliance requests were not legally binding, but had cost each business, on average, £2,000. There are 500,000 food handlers in this country and if one multiplied that cost, the final bill would, all of a sudden, be £1 billion.

When I was last in Spain, I began to wonder whether food handlers were operating the same rules as our own. One may order some ham from a wonderful ham hanging on the wall and the flies are beaten off it before the meat

is cut. It then goes back on the stained wall. I am not too sure whether that practice has ever killed anyone, but standards in Spain do seem to be somewhat different from our own.

Many a time I have had a beer in France where the head has constituted a far larger part of the drink than the beer. In this country, we are about to introduce beer orders that may require larger glasses to be used so that one can still have a head on a pint of beer that does not constitute the pint.

It is quite crazy that we are going down one route while the rest of the European Community seems to be going down another. I am not saying that we should introduce Community-wide regulations that are so stringent that certain practices on the continent are ruled out. In many instances, our fellow Europeans may have a healthier outlook than we have.

I am sure that we are all aware that many village halls are now not allowed to prepare food on the premises because of the cost of sticking to the letter of the law of the health and food regulations. We need to save our village halls so that they can continue to provide their traditional service. Village halls are an integral part of the British way of life and many overseas visitors find them extremely attractive. They add to the charm of our villages, as does the Women's Institutes' jam and marmalade. Whenever I go to fetes I make a habit of buying jam and marmalade. Although I am not a great eater of them, the principle is at stake.

The Institute of Directors carried out a survey of its members. The Minister will be delighted to learn that 81 per cent. of those who responded felt that the initiative on deregulation was extremely important, but only 30 per cent. felt that we shall be successful in tackling the problem. That is alarming, so the Minister has the support of Conservative Members in his battle to deregulate.

We must show equal zeal against the army of clipboard bureaucrats, who in many cases are being weighed down by new rules and regulations. It may be difficult for environmental health officers to keep up with the pace of change. Few things are worse for a business than when, having just established good relations with an environmental health officer who is assisting the business, he is then changed and the whole process must be started again.

Several hon. Members have mentioned licensing laws. I should like them to be liberalised, because on the continent one can drink until midnight or 1 am, particularly in tourist areas, and it is a shame that in this country we cannot drink after 1 o'clock. Weekend licensing laws and licensing in tourist areas should be changed, as many tourists would like to be able to drink a little later into the night.

Music licensing laws are another problem. If more than two people play in an establishment, a licence must be acquired, but a loud discotheque does not require a licence.

Mrs. Lait: Another horror of the licensing laws is that if an hotelier or innkeeper wishes to change the shape of his bar, he must get permission from the licensing justices.

Mr. Evans: That is another rule which places an unnecessary burden on businesses, in terms of both cost and time. Those running businesses must leave the business to sort out the matter at the local town hall, and we all know how long that can take. The business person's time could be better spent.

I contacted the owner of a restaurant in my constituency, the Inn and Whitewell, which the hon. Member for Burnley probably knows well. The restaurant owner believes that the law on refrigeration of cheeses is a disaster because it ruins good cheeses. He said that processed cheeses carry listeria but traditional natural cheeses, such as Stilton and brie, lose much of their taste when taken straight from the fridge. He also said that the European Community is in the process of considering a law requiring all foodstuffs to be transported in refrigerated vehicles. An hon. Member has already mentioned smoked salmon being sent by post. That, too, may be covered by that regulation.

Another law will require restaurants to give a customer a clean glass whenever a drink is poured, even if the customer wants to keep his old glass. Again, should we consider such a regulation and employ officers to enforce it? It would be better to take a common-sense approach to the introduction of new rules and regulations.

Sometimes existing regulations are unused. For example, the long measure is illegal in this country. Under that silly rule, someone who pours more than a pint of beer could be prosecuted. It should be discarded.

The European Community has decided that beaches awarded its blue flag of excellence must deny access to all four-legged animals. I understand what is behind that rule, but it will mean the end of donkey rides, which have brought great happiness to many generations, and future generations should not be denied access to that wonderful entertainment on our beaches.

Mr. Hendry: Guide dogs would also be denied access.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is right. Should people be denied access to donkey rides simply because of that regulation? We must have a common-sense interpretation of such rules and regulations.

I am delighted that this debate is taking place. When scrapping May day, we should consider creating deregulation day on 9 July to celebrate the fact that this debate has taken place. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister, and wish him well in his efforts to bring about deregulation.

12.25 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): This has been an interesting debate. I have great respect for the Minister and I hope that he will remain in his position for a while so that we can hear about the progress that he makes on the regulations in the tourist industry, which many of his hon. Friends feel are farcical.

However, we would pay close attention in our own homes to many of the rules and regulations that have been mentioned this morning, especially those involving appliances. When people go to hotels we must consider the fact that they will not know the layout and we must ensure that equipment that they may need to use is safe. It is so easy to knock authorities, at whatever level, for introducing regulations but we must look at the matter closely before making changes.

In the previous debate on tourism last March, I spoke about London local authorities' concern about their representation on the board of the London Forum. A little

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progress has been made since March. I understand that two representatives from London authorities will sit on the board of the London Forum. However, many local authorities, irrespective of which party controls them, feel that they will not be adequately represented in a role which they have sought to expand for many years—the development of tourism in London.

The Minister may be in a position today to comment on the fact that, as I understand it, the London boroughs grants committee is still not represented on the board of the London Forum. If he cannot do so today, perhaps the Minister will write to me about that. As we have heard many times this morning, there must be proper representation on, and co-ordination between the London Forum, the London tourist board and London local authorities. I think that I am the first London Member to be called in the debate and I do not think that even the Minister made much reference to London.

I realise that in a debate such as today's it is always open to hon. Members to say that this district or that district was not mentioned, but we must not lose sight of the fact that London is one of the great tourist attractions in the United Kingdom. I agree that there are many other attractions, but London must be high on the list of places that people want to visit when they come to the United Kingdom. Evidence proves that London boroughs have played an extremely supportive role in seeking to develop tourism in London. I hope that we shall hear the Minister's views on how London is represented. I am sure that Conservative Members who represent London would also like to receive some answers on that issue.

This morning, the Minister stated that tourism is big business in terms of money spent and numbers of visitors. I sometimes feel that the tourism industry has become a rip-off. The expensive prices charged for hotels and meals in London has been mentioned. High prices may also apply in other parts of the country. Until last November, I had been for three years the treasurer of the British group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It was my job as treasurer to sign the cheques for the bills for hotel accommodation, meals and other expenses incurred by the British group when overseas delegations came to London. I was able to see how the hotel charges were calculated.

Despite repeated attempts by the staff of the IPU—to whom I give great credit—to ask the management of well-known London hotels whether they would give them, as good customers, a favourable rate, they received no help. They told the hotel management that there was not a one-off business transaction and that, in the course of the year, they would bring many people to London to stay at the hotels. However, they never received a favourable response and the hotel management never said, "As you are good customers, we shall give you a favourable rate which will benefit both you and us as it will ensure your continuing custom."

Employees of the hotel and tourist industry in London and, I am sure, in other parts of the country, work long hours. Their work is often seasonal. I have asked people who work in both the hotel and tourist industry about their conditions and salaries. They are certainly not overpaid; I do not believe that they are even reasonably paid. My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) mentioned the abolition of the wages councils. We know that a gulf divides opinion in the House on that subject.

Those of us who are members of the Council of Europe, travel to Europe fairly often and stay in European hotels know that the fears screamed about by the British Government and Conservative Members are not realised in Europe, where such a policy does not put people out of work or drive businesses out of business. Funnily enough, our competitors in Europe are able to apply a minimum wage. Why can they have such a policy while we cannot? We do not even allow people who want to adopt that policy to do so, in the hope that, as other organisations see the benefits to be gained from paying proper wages and operating proper working conditions, they will follow the lead.

While the tourist industry obviously brings benefits, it also brings problems. One only has to look around the Houses of Parliament to see those problems. One does not have to be a London Member to know what the problems are. In the debate on this subject in March, I mentioned the enormous numbers of coaches that come to this part of London. There is still no adequate parking for them, and, despite our representations to the Department of Transport and local authorities, there has never been any clear recognition that this is a problem which must and will be tackled. Large, modern coaches continue to park in bus lanes and side streets, often for hours on end. Something must be done about that. In the many years of this Government's term of office there has been little evidence to show that they are willing to tackle this sort of problem.

Tourists and residents of London all want an efficient public transport system that is safe to use and reasonably priced. Despite all the problems—imposed by the Government—that London Transport has had to put up with, and despite the savage cuts in investment programmes experienced by the London bus and underground network, London Transport has managed to build up a good system. This debate, however, is about deregulation, and London Members know that high on the priority list for privatisation come the London bus service and London's transport system generally, which is to be deregulated. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It is interesting to hear those roars of approval from Conservative Members.

Mr. Raynsford: None of them comes from London.

Mr. Cox: Even so, one assumes that many of them make use of London's public transport while they are here. I have a question for them: what surveys have been carried out to determine public opinion? How many people in the 32 Greater London boroughs have been asked for their views on the deregulation of transport services in London? We hear a great deal of talk from the Government about the citizens charter, about making the voice of the people heard and about ensuring that the Government respond to that voice. Earlier this morning, we heard Conservative Members saying that, despite the problems in their constituencies, the powers that be do not listen. I do not dispute the fact that there are problems in Conservative constituencies, but those who roar their approval of deregulation should ask themselves how much consultation has taken place with the people of London. There has been none——

Mr. Nigel Evans: What about the general election?

Mr. Cox: The hon. Gentleman has not been in this place long. We are not so naive as to think that the manifesto, which contains hundreds of little comments, covers the point. During the general election campaign, Conservative candidates in London certainly made no attempt to bring up the issue, which the hon. Gentleman claims was in the manifesto. His senior colleagues, spokesmen and spokeswomen for the party in London, did not want to raise the issue or commit themselves to it. They did not try to find out what the people of London thought about it.

What will happen to London's transport system? There are now some outer-London Members in the Chamber. I am sure that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) has received scores of letters and cards of the type that my hon. Friends the Members for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) and I have received saying, "Protect the travelcard. We do not want to lose it."

The travelcard is extremely popular with London tourists because London Transport has given it great publicity. Research shows that about 75 per cent. of all overseas visitors to London make use of that card. That is because it offers great benefits. It not only takes people to places in central London to see the shops and visit the theatre, but allows them to travel to attractive outer London areas. People like to visit parks such as Richmond and Wimbledon or Kew gardens. When we visit countries overseas, we like to visit similar places.

The research showed that visitors did not like to have to fiddle with coins when paying the fare on the bus, the underground or the train. I am sure that all of us who have visited countries in which we cannot speak the language and do not understand the currency do not want to have to fiddle to find the correct sum to pay for a journey. That is the great benefit of travelcards.

We have not been given any assurance about how the travelcard will be protected. Many visitors to London make use of that card, as London tourist board research has clearly shown. The Minister spoke about developing tourism in London, so I hope that we shall hear more about that.

The London tourist board made representations to the Department of Transport after the publication of a paper called "A Bus Strategy for London" in March. The board said:

> "Visitors and residents alike need an efficient transport network which provides for access into and out of London and for ease of travel in London, whether by rail, bus, taxi or coach. It should be efficient, reliable, and provided at reasonable cost. A network approach which allows for transfer between bus, underground and British Rail using a single ticket, is essential in a complex city like London."

That view by the London tourist board sums it up. I do not think that any hon. Member would say, "Do not take too much notice of them because they are not really representative." We hope that we shall hear a little more about that today, or perhaps in correspondence.

There are other aspects. London Transport has set up an excellent information service. One can go not only to London tourist board offices but to London Transport offices and quickly get understandable information packs about the services provided. I am sure that when we go abroad, we want something similar. The packs give useful information such as where to board buses and what is required for every destination, and similar information about underground trains and British Rail. What will happen to that service under the deregulation proposals for public transport in London?

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) naively said that the pledge was in the manifesto. Tory Members claim that everything can be left to the private operators, who will work together to ensure that operator A knows what operators B, C and D are doing, whatever they may be called and whatever routes they may be operating, so there will be no problem. I do not believe that for one minute, and neither do the people who have been running London Transport for many years or the people involved in the tourist industry in London.

We all know that if the new operators do not come together there will be congestion and chaos. Already, London has enormous traffic problems. Unless the current system developed by London Transport and British Rail is protected, I and many other hon. Members, the people who live in London and the people who come to London often and know it well, believe that there will be utter chaos. I hope that we shall hear a little more about that.

There are famous images in many parts of the country. People come here and say, "I have always seen or heard about this or that." Nothing highlights that point more than the London red bus. People who have never been here before, who have come from distant parts of the world, say the moment that they arrive, "Ah! There's a London bus." We all know that London's red buses are famous as tourist attractions in other parts of the world. All of that will be done away with.

Often—this goes back to an earlier point—one Department does not know what another is hoping to do. Those of us who take part in transport debates put those points to the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), the Minister for Transport in London. He said, "We are not sure about that. We hope that, once deregulation comes about, the new operators will be willing to preserve the London red bus."

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend is on to a crucial and interesting point. He knows that companies spend vast amounts of money creating a corporate image, and that changing one is a big decision. The red bus is one of those things that people recognise as being part of London. There will not be red buses if deregulation comes in. Already, different coloured buses are appearing on the streets. My hon. Friend might like to mention the black cab. New York is characterised by its yellow cabs. More and more of London's black cabs are disappearing as they are covered in advertisements. Again, London is losing an international mark of recognition that has long been so important to it.

Mr. Cox: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments about London's red buses and black cabs. Hon. Members in all parts of the House acknowledge the significance of the London red bus. It will be interesting to hear the comments of Conservative Members who represent London constituencies *[Interruption.]* I did not hear the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), but if he wants me to give way, I shall willingly do so.

Mr. Hendry: The hon. Gentleman says that he wants to hear the comments of Conservative Members—but the way he is going on, we shall not have a chance to speak.

Mr. Cox: I made only one intervention, but the hon. Gentleman made several early in the debate. Those of us who have been Members of Parliament for any length of time know that if one jumps up and down like a yo-yo, one cannot complain if one is not called to speak. The hon. Gentleman has been a Member of Parliament long enough to know our procedures. If he chooses to intervene on his Minister to score local press points, he should not expect an automatic right to be called later. The hon. Gentleman should give some thought to his general performance in such debates.

In such a debate, hon. Members raise various points of particular interest to them, and rightly so. That is what the House is about. Although the constituency that I represent does not have a large tourism industry, as do the constituencies of certain other hon. Members, other aspects of it are of crucial importance to my own. I have tried to highlight some of them. What is to happen to the travelcard and to the availability of concise information about the traffic systems that will operate after deregulation?

As to the future of the London red bus, hon. Members in all parts of the House know that, with hindsight, the Government would have introduced strict and tough regulations for those who took over industries that were privatised in the past. Any Government have the right, especially in the privatisation of state assets, to tell those who are to take over, "We are prepared to consider your bids, but we will impose conditions that you will be required to observe." The President of the Board of Trade might argue, "That would kill off the incentive. Potential bidders would not be interested in taking on the operation on those terms." We know that that is not the case. Operators have made so much money from past privatisations that they would willingly have taken them on even if certain conditions had been attached.

I hope that the Minister will have a chat with the Secretary of State for Transport and with the hon. Member for Epping Forest and tell them that the red bus has a fundamental role to play in the image of London and for the people who visit it. The Government must ensure that those who seek to run a deregulated bus service in London undertake that the red bus will continue to be part of London's traffic scene. If that opportunity is lost, it will have gone for ever, and enormous annoyance will be caused to Londoners and others. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West is even better qualified than I to talk of Londoners' reaction to the denial of their right to express their views about the development of county hall.

I hope that the Minister will impress on his colleagues the need to ensure that the London red bus will continue to run on London's streets, whichever organisations or individuals manage London's transport after deregulation.

12.55 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I am pleased that we are debating tourism for the second time in five months. I especially welcome the emphasis on deregulation, which allows me to express some concern on behalf of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill). My hon. Friend has asked to be associated with my comments; a heavy programme of constituency engagements prevents him from being present.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his return to his old job, which has not been mentioned so far. [HON MEMBERS: "Yes, it has."] I shall mention it now in any case. My hon. Friend carried out the same duties with considerable flair and dynamism more than 10 years ago, and today's robust speech demonstrated that he has not changed a bit. However, he may not welcome my reminding him of a parliamentary answer that he gave me on July 1982 in response to anxieties that I had expressed, along with other hon. Members representing coastal resorts. He said then that grants under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 should no longer be tied to assisted areas, but should henceforth be distributed throughout the whole of England according to tourism need.

That far-sighted policy undoubtedly helped many seaside resorts, including my own, to resist the decline of the traditional British seaside holiday. As other hon. Members have pointed out, it enabled hotels and guest houses to upgrade their facilities, and helped resorts to improve their attractions and extend their seasons to withstand the competition from better, cheaper and hotter continental rivals. In Bournemouth, for example, more than 50 investment generating projects worth over £8 million were launched with section 4 grants worth one tenth of that figure.

I know that my hon. Friend is well aware of the widespread and continuing disappointment felt by the tourist industry about the abandoning of the section 4 scheme four year ago. The plug was pulled at exactly the wrong time—at the beginning of a recession that has hit the south coast, in particular, harder than any of its predecessors.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): Unfortunately, I cannot stay until the end of the debate. Following my hon. Friend's reference to the south coast, I take this opportunity to inform my hon. Friend the Minister of an exciting new project in my constituency. A heritage centre is being constructed to celebrate the area's railway and aviation history. I know that those two subjects are dear to my hon. Friend's heart; perhaps he will find time to visit my constituency during the next six months, and to consider how his Department could help further the project.

Mr. Atkinson: That interesting intervention reminds me of the problems that we are experiencing in trying to restore Bournemouth's central station to reflect its Victorian heritage. We are seeking grants from the Department of the Environment and elsewhere. I wish my hon. Friend well with his constituency's railway project. The forthcoming National Lottery Etc. Bill will enable such projects to apply for funds. Without modest Government encouragement and pump-priming help of that kind, a growing number of hotels and guest houses have turned to other methods outside tourism to survive. Many have become rest or retirement homes for the elderly. That shift represents a permanent loss of beds for visitors which must mean, in due course, a permanent loss of visitors.

Now there is a new concern, which my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) referred to earlier and

which was articulated so well by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) in his Adjournment debate on 26 February and on which my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West and myself have been making representations to the Minister.

I was delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister referred to the fact this morning that smaller hotels and guest houses are now becoming bed-and-breakfast hotels for social security claimants. It is becoming big business, to the extent that companies are advertising in inner cities for claimants to come and live and claim on the south coast. Instead of attracting holidaymakers, with money to spend that sustains local economies on which many thousands of jobs are based, we are attracting only those with little money to spend. The effect of that trend, if unchecked, will be to turn decline into decay. I was encouraged to hear, as was Bournemouth borough council, that my hon. Friend the Minister is making representations to the Department of the Environment for the Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order 1987 to be amended to allow local authorities to exercise a degree of control over the decline.

As the now reconfirmed champion of the English tourist industry, will the Minister reconsider including England in the scope of section 4 grants for all the good reasons that justified his initiative in July 1982? The increase in competition arising from the single European market this year and the opening of the channel tunnel next year add to the case for including England in that scope.

Despite all the difficulties that have faced our seaside resorts, I share my hon. Friend the Minister's optimism for the future. Holidaymakers from this country and abroad will still get great value for money from our small, owner-run hotels, certainly in Bournemouth. Our local authorities should ensure that visitors obtain value for money from local visitor attractions and facilities. A tourist can be ripped off only once; they will never come back again. A can of Coke that costs 60p on Bournemouth beach can only be described as a rip off.

I welcome the Government's new determination to eliminate all unnecessary regulations and frustrations by enterprise initiatives in tourism, as the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) reminded us. We have been in this situation before with the 1985 White Paper, "Lifting the Burden" which did much to help hotels and other businesses. We have relaxed the liquor licensing laws, abolished the wages councils and introduced the seaside resorts campaigns all in response to the demands of industry.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take this opportunity to review the gaming laws to bring them into line with those on the continent. While it is small in comparison with many other countries, the British casino industry generates some £2 billion worth of business a year, much of which, of course, goes to the Exchequer in taxes. Yet section 12 of the Gaming Act 1968 imposes a 48-hour rule that prevents members of other clubs from enjoying the facilities of clubs in areas that they may be visiting for a limited period. No such restrictions apply to members of social, drinking, Conservative or Labour clubs who visit clubs in other areas, providing that they show their affiliation card and abide by the local club rules. I ask the Minister to look into the restriction of opportunities in the gaming industry.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will review the working of the six-bed qualification for business rates for bed-and-breakfast establishments that replaced the 100-day rule and I ask him to suggest a simpler calculation based on the number of weeks in the year that businesses open for trade. That was the old system under the old commercial rates; it worked well and better than the present system.

Now that the principle of subsidiarity has been firmly established by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I hope that, as other hon. Members have said, we shall see an end to the many unnecessary Community-imposed regulations on tourism. For example, it is nonsense to require trading standards officers to investigate those who advertise Dorset cream teas to ensure that they do not serve them with pump-action UHT cream.

Unfortunately, one of the proposals in the "Lifting the Burden" White Paper, which could have been of enormous assistance to small buisnesses and not simply to the tourism industry, has not been achieved yet. That proposal was to negotiate increased flexibility in the European Community to raise the VAT threshold above the rate of inflation.

Lifting the requirement for businesses to register for VAT to an annual turnover of £100,000 a year would relieve tens of thousands of small businesses in the tourism industry and elsewhere of the considerable burden of administering VAT without any loss of revenue to the Exchequer because of the departmental savings that would be made in administration costs.

I hope that the White Paper proposals published recently by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, on the future of funding of the police, will see an end to the burden on conference towns and their police authorities in respect of bearing the entire costs of policing and providing security for party conferences.

The Lancashire police authority will face a bill of more than £2 million this year as a result of the Conservative party conference in Blackpool in October. Dorset will face a similar bill next year. There will be considerable extra expense for the Blackpool local authority this year and for Bournemouth local authority next year as a result of that policing. It is totally unreasonable for local council taxpayers to bear the cost of protecting our national leaders in that way. I hope that the forthcoming changes in funding the police will reflect that situation.

1.6 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): This debate is timely and appropriate and it is right that every hon. Member who has spoken stressed the importance of tourism to Britain and to the national economy. It is certainly not a Mickey Mouse industry. I was slightly perturbed by the suggestion of the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) that Disneyland was a model for tourism. That was not a very well-advised comment to make from an economic point of view bearing in mind the current situation of Euro Disney. I for one do not relish the idea of this country being festooned with more synthetic plastic theme parks when we have quite enough genuine and decent tourist attractions to bring people to this country and for them to enjoy.

As a country, we have a considerable range of tourist attractions. We have wonderful landscape, beautiful cities and towns and many historic sites. We also have great art collections. We have a huge variety of elements which will

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bring people to this country and will cause people in Britain to visit other parts of the country. We should focus on those assets and make the most of them.

Some emphasis has been placed on the number of tourists coming to Britain. I believe that there is a danger of complacency. Some Conservative Members, including the hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks), referred to the record number of overseas visitors. If we take into account internal visits, the total number of visitors has still not returned to the levels achieved in the late 1980s.

We have begun to come out of the worst dip that occurred in the early 1990s as a result of the recession and there is an encouraging upward trend in overseas visitors. However, far fewer people from within the United Kingdom are taking holidays here. Many of them can no longer afford to do so because they have lost their jobs or their incomes have dropped during the recession. We still have a long way to go to pull our industry back to the levels that were achieved some years ago.

Figures show that there were 16·3 million visitors to London last year and that figure is expected to rise this year to perhaps 17·3 million. That will take us back to the level that we saw in 1990, but it still leaves London with approximately 1·5 million fewer visitors than there were in 1989, when there were 18·9 million visitors. That puts the issue in perspective. We have a long way to go to increase tourism and to put Britain once again in a leading role in the international tourist industry.

Tourism is an increasingly competitive industry. We should be very worried about the relative decline of Britain in relation to other European countries and certainly in relation to America throughout the 1980s. The figures that were quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) highlighted the fact that the growth of tourism in the 1980s lagged behind that of America, France and Spain. We cannot afford to allow our position to be further eroded by losses to other European countries which will increasingly be attractive magnets to tourists from all over the world. Even the Minister conceded that we have been falling down the international league and that that trend has to be reversed. Action is needed to reverse that trend, not just to encourage more international visitors to Britain but to encourage more British people to take their holidays in the United Kingdom.

It is an illusion that deregulation is the key to changing our competitive position, improving the strength of our tourism and encouraging more tourist visits to Britain. However much Conservative Members talk about deregulation and tell funny stories about anomalies—there are many anomalies; I am the first to agree that—deregulation will not solve the problem of Britain's position in the international tourist league. The removal of a few regulations and the easing of the financial position for some elements of our tourist business might be welcome, but it will not attract the huge increase in the number of overseas tourists and United Kingdom tourists that we need if we are to be able to strengthen our tourist industry.

Opposition Members rightly argue for a sensible balance. Of course, we do not want foolish and inappropriate regulations. We certainly do not want regulations that inhibit the promotion of tourism. We have heard of many examples, including a ban on motorway signs pointing out important tourist attractions and the restrictions on advertising for hotels at the entrance to towns. There are obvious restrictions, the effect of which is to inhibit the benefit of information for the tourist industry. We need to consider those matters very seriously.

We also need to distinguish unnecessary and harmful regulations from those that are vital to the health and safety of the community and which help to promote good standards, which in turn will encourage more tourists to visit this country. I am glad to hear the recognition that fire regulations are vital and that we must be careful before abandoning regulations that protect individuals who stay or work in hotels from the risk of death or serious injury as a result of an unnecessary fire or a fire that is not properly contained for lack of controls and protections. We do not have—no pun is intended—to put people's lives at risk by calling for a bonfire of regulations. We still suffer too many deaths and injuries from fires in small hotels, boarding houses and houses in multiple occupation. Often the borderline is uncertain, as hon. Members have said.

We need to be absolutely sure that tourists and other people, including the staff who work in hotels and boarding houses, are properly protected by suitable fire regulations. However, it is not just a matter of fire; we need also to think about other safety angles. The Minister paid attention to an incident that caused considerable inconvenience to a hotel because of controls over its air conditioning unit.

There can be nothing more disastrous to the reputation of this country than any further outbreaks of legionnaire's disease attributable to malfunctioning or insanitary air conditioning units causing death or serious injury. That would have disastrous consequences for our ability to attract other people to Britain. Therefore, we must be careful before we abandon public health and fire controls. They are important to ensure the safety of the public and give assurances to tourists, as well as people in Britain, that we will maintain the highest safety and hygiene standards.

The maintenance of standards is an important issue. There is a problem for Britain in international tourism in that there is a growing perception that we are, in some respects, a country which is overpriced—we do not always offer good value for money. Hotel pricing, certainly in London, is an issue which has been highlighted by many of my hon. Friends in this debate—and rightly so. A comparison that one must inevitably make with hotel prices in comparable European countries, such as France and Germany, shows that the price levels in Britain are in a different league. That is a serious risk if people are talking about whether to come to Britain and spend a slightly longer time here or to visit another European country. They look at the prices and see that it is simply not feasible for them to afford such a price for hotel accommodation.

Another issue that endangers our reputation as a country is the incidence of touting for tickets for sporting events, theatres and other events. This is a serious issue. We joke about the ticket tout at Wimbledon every summer and measures are suggested to deal with the problem. However, we all know that the problem of touting in tourism is extensive. It leads to extensive rip-offs. People who are ripped off will not come back. It may be that the overpriced can of Coke on Bournemouth beach is enough to deter people from going back to Bournemouth. Certainly, a ticket at an absurd price for Wimbledon, a

sporting event or a theatre in London could be the deciding factor in discouraging an overseas visitor from coming back to this country. We need to examine seriously the whole issue of touting.

Mr. Pendry: Before my hon. Friend leaves that point, perhaps he will reflect on one of the worst potential problems—the opening of Buckingham palace. Because the tickets were sold in advance, they are now selling on the black market at something like 10 times the face value of the ticket. That matter should be addressed by the Government. I hope that they will take note of my hon. Friend's comments.

Mr. Raynsford: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that appropriate intervention. It highlights a specific problem which will certainly cause immense damage if it is seen that the British monarchy is the subject of a rip-off by touts who are using the opportunity of a visit to Buckingham palace to make unjustified extortionate gains at the expense of tourists.

The London tourist board has drawn attention to touting as a serious problem in a briefing document issued by the London tourist board before today's debate. I quote:

"The growth of touting for theatre tickets and those for other events, hotel rooms and most recently taxis"—

incidentally, it does not mention Buckingham palace, but I am glad that my hon. Friend highlighted that—

"is not simply undesirable, it also damages London's reputation for fairness, honesty and value for money.

In the case of theatre and event tickets the practice is open to abuse for, frequently, the face value of tickets is not disclosed to the purchaser. The sale of such tickets does not benefit the venue or the arts activity as the difference in value is pocketed by the tout."

The London tourist board then makes some proposals for dealing with the problem, including the licensing of ticket agencies and the need to make it a legal requirement to inform the customer at the moment of purchase of the face value of the ticket. In that way, a customer will be able to make an informed choice and will be aware whether he is being ripped off. It also suggests that the touting of tickets outside major events should be unlawful; Wimbledon is an obvious example.

Touting is damaging our reputation as a tourist centre and may therefore make it difficult for us to attract tourists. The London tourist board believes that more regulation is necessary to tackle that problem. I have not had a chance to consider the implications of the proposals with those in the tourist industry and I am not advocating that such regulation is, necessarily, the right solution. It is clear, however, that if we do not take steps to enforce proper standards and to stop the gross exploitation of tourists and others by touts, our reputation will be damaged. That cannot be in the best interests of our tourist industry. A balance must be struck. We need regulations to prevent abuse and to protect public safety, but they must be sensible and they must encourage initiative. They should not damage the tourist industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) was right to stress that transport is critical to tourism in London. While people cannot travel around London comfortably, with reasonable confidence that they will get to their destination on time and that they will benefit from a service that is reliable and frequent, the London tourist industry, will inevitably be harmed.

I represent Greenwich, which is one of London's main tourist attractions, and I am only too well aware of the damage caused to it by inadequate transport links with the rest of London. Network SouthEast is a joke. The recent reduction in services on a Sunday, from two trains an hour, which was already inadequate, to one, will have a deplorable impact on an area which needs to attract more tourists to its considerable number of exhibitions and historic buildings and sites.

It is of fundamental importance that the quality of the existing rail services must be improved to assist Greenwich. We also need new rail services. We are still waiting for the promised Jubilee line extension. I wish that I could have received a pound for every time that Ministers have relaunched that project. Those of us who attended the debates on it would now be extremely rich, because that extension has been promised many times. When it is built, it will be the first tube link to Greenwich and it is long overdue.

The riverbus service has been clinging on by its fingernails for the past couple of years and the prospect of bankruptcy has hovered over it too many times. A reliable and regular river transport service will be an important feature in making London a more attractive environment for tourists in the 21st century.

What is needed for all transport is not deregulation but investment. The supposed competition that will flow from the privatisation of the railway services will not improve the rail service to Greenwich. That can be done only by investment in long-overdue new rolling stock and more reliable, regular services.

The riverbus service must also receive more investment to prevent its closure which would be a disaster for those who rely on it and would also damage London's overall transport network.

We need not deregulation, but investment in improved transport services. We must also ensure that our transport policies improve the environment for Londoners and tourists. One of the biggest problems that we face in Greenwich is the excessive volume of traffic that passes through an area that was never designed to cope with it. Greenwich and its residents are now under serious threat because of that traffic and the pollution that it causes.

We are urgently seeking a ban on heavy goods vehicles through our historic town centre and I hope that it will be in place before too long. If the Minister is keen to promote transport policies that will enable tourism to flourish in London, I hope that he will say a few words to his colleagues in the Department of Transport about the importance of measures that will make major tourist attractions like Greenwich a more pleasant environment for people to visit. Such policies will also avoid the risk of tourists suffering the risk of injury or death at the hands of 40-tonne lorries coming through the centre of an historic town which was never designed for that volume of heavy traffic. That measure could begin the process. We need more positive transport policies to improve the quality and appearance of tourist sites in London such as Greenwich.

One hon. Member suggested that local authorities were not always helpful in promoting tourism. The local authority in my constituency has been exceptionally keen to encourage and promote tourism and is doing its best to ensure that Greenwich becomes an even more important tourist attraction than it already is. However, it is hampered in one respect. It is a technical point, but I hope that the Minister will speak to his colleagues in the

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Department of the Environment about it. It concerns the standard spending assessment provision for local government finance relating to tourism. Local authorities incur expenditure to promote tourism and cope with the consequences. This includes additional street cleansing, parks maintenance, traffic management and tourist information, which all cost money and should be provided for. However, the current formula is based entirely on the number of people who stay overnight in hotels, rather than on the number of day visitors. That is desperately unfair to the many tourist areas that attract large numbers of day visitors but do not have a large network of hotels and thus have a small number of overnight stays.

In Greenwich, we estimate that in 1991—the last year for which figures are available, because they were based on a survey rather than on regular monitoring, which reduces paperwork—the number of overnight stays represented just 7 per cent. of total tourist visits to the area. Those who know Greenwich will know that, because it is frequently visited by tourists who take a boat down the river or come by other means of transport to see the fine sights and tourist attractions, it is severely penalised by the SSA formula. Ironically, areas of London with a larger hotel network get the advantage of much more substantial expenditure in the form of hotel bills and the cost of meals, which are the most expensive items in tourists' total outgoings. Based on the 1991 survey of tourists coming to Greenwich, we estimate that tourists spend on average £9·59 a day, which is a small sum compared to the huge amounts spent by tourists staying in central London.

Authorities for which the SSA does not adequately reflect the need to cope with a considerable number of tourists, and which have the added disadvantage of not getting the financial benefit of tourists staying in the area, rightly feel aggrieved. I hope that the Department of the Environment, which is currently conducting a review of standard spending assessments, will reconsider the formula so that it reflects more accurately the pattern and cost of tourism, not just the number of overnight stays. I hope that the Minister will put in a good word with the Department of the Environment, as that issue concerns not only Greenwich but many other tourist areas with the phenomenon of a disproportionate number of day visitors to overnight stays.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde highlighted another issue relating to regulation in his opening speech from the Front Bench. It is an issue in which I have a constituency interest and it involved the collapse of the SFV Holidays travel company, and the problems encountered by people who booked holidays with it in the absence of bonding arrangements.

From the evidence that I have received, it appears that the DTI played a crucial role in giving guidance to SFV that, in the circumstances, the company did not have to comply with the bonding regulation. If that is true, the DTI has done no service to the many people who booked holidays with that company and lost substantial sums of money. One of my constituents lost more than £2,000 and his holiday as a result of booking with SFV. He rightly feels extremely aggrieved that the company, apparently on advice of the DTI, had no bonding arrangements in place to cover the eventuality.

That example emphasises the fact that we cannot be too relaxed about regulation. If we do not have appropriate regulations, which can be made to stick, some companies will always try to evade the provisions and, as a result, operate without proper safeguards. It is often just such companies which fail and, when they do so, innocent people suffer serious financial losses and have every right to feel aggrieved, not just about the treatment that they have received from the company, but about the British Government's failure to provide proper protection.

Tourism is crucial to Britain's economy, and there is considerable scope for growth in that industry, in terms of both internal tourism and the attraction of tourism from overseas. We need to encourage and support the tourist industry and to take measures to make it possible for all those involved to operate more effectively. The Government must give a lead and take more positive action. They should ensure that there is necessary infrastructure and investment, where necessary, to help tourism. They should be stamping out damaging practices such as touting and ensuring that regulation exists, where needed, to ensure high standards and public safety. They should look to change regulation where it is foolish and unnecessary.

Above all, our concern should be not with ideology and slogans, but with the promotion of tourism in Britain as a fundamental element in our economy. We should do everything that we can to put Britain back at the top of the league of international tourism.

1.32 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am delighted to have the opportunity to participate in today's important debate on tourism and deregulation. We have heard precious little from the Labour Members present on the subject of deregulation. In some cases, they seemed to be proposing more regulations. It is not so much that they do not want to participate in the bonfire of regulations, but that they want to produce a regulation to supervise the bonfire. That is hardly surprising, as one does not have to scratch the surface very deeply to find the old Labour party which wants to control the lives of ordinary people and regulate for the sake of it.

I have a personal dream that one day in the not-too-distant future there will be a heritage theme park in London that is easily accessible to visitors and which is based on the history of the British Labour party. It will be populated with life-size working models of old Labour politicians—a sort of Jurassic park of the Labour party. It would be a tremendous tourism attraction—*[Interruption.]* I can hear some trumpeting from the dinosaurs opposite.

To be serious, I am not opposed to Government regulations, where appropriate. I would go so far as to say that I am opposed to deregulation when it leads to anomalies and problems for businesses. As my hon. Friend the Minister stressed, it is always a matter of judgment, although the burden of proof should always be on those who want more, rather than less, regulation.

Hon. Members have been good enough to refer to my Adjournment debate earlier this year on the use classes order. Relaxation of the regulations in that area of planning law may cause damage to the environment in various seaside resorts and other parts of the country, even though the Department of the Environment seems to

regard this as its contribution to deregulation—in which view it is sorely mistaken. In essence, the change came about because the 1987 regulations lump together hotels and hostels in the same use class, so planning permission is no longer required to change the use from a hotel to a hostel.

No one is trying to deny the rights of those who want or have to live in hostels for various reasons, but there must be proper planning zones in these towns. The heart of a town's economy, if it is tourism, must be preserved; and the whole process should brought within planning regulations, or there will always be the danger that has been realised in some towns—not, I am pleased to say, in Eastbourne so far—of a downward spiral of noise, nuisance, petty crime and even violence.

I am particularly grateful for the efforts of the Eastbourne Hotels Association, which has done a great deal to preserve the character of the town as a seaside tourist resort and has tried to resist some of the worst effects of this ill-conceived stroke of the legal draftsman's pen. I am indebted to Mr. Edward Lewis, chairman of the association, for giving me some of the examples to which I will refer later.

The Minister will know that later this month I shall be accompanying a delegation from the Eastbourne Hotels Association to see him to discuss some of these subjects.

Let us move on from poor deregulation to poor regulations. I have said that I recognise the importance of Government regulations where appropriate. In some circumstances, the Government have a positive duty to regulate, but only if the regulations comply with certain criteria. First, their drafting must identify a specific problem or risk. Secondly, they must be accurately and clearly drafted. Thirdly, they must be a proportionate response to the risk with which they are supposed to deal. Finally, there must be no alternative course of action that the Government can take in the circumstances.

When these criteria are applied to certain regulations affecting the tourist industry, they provide examples of the nanny state's ability to scold and cajole in every aspect of our lives. To quote a letter from Mr. Lewis:

"The amount of bureaucracy has increased, mainly, it appears, as a result of initiatives emanating from the European Community, but often compounded . . . by more rigorous application by our own Government and, similarly, it appears that British authorities are applying the EC regulations in a stricter fashion than the authorities in other EC countries."

I join other hon. Members in commending my hon. Friend's initiative, announced on 14 June, to reduce bureaucracy and over-regulation. It has not surprised me in the least to learn that he has been almost overwhelmed with representations. We have heard something about the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1990. I have to admit that I am not averse to a bit of cheese. Finely presented on an attractive cheeseboard, it can be the highlight of a delicious meal, but I draw the line at hard Brie and Camembert with the consistency of an ice hockey puck. Soft cheese is supposed to be soft cheese, but one would not think so looking at the 1990 regulations, which require that all relevant food, including such cheeses, can be displayed at catering premises for up to only four hours "where such display is for the purpose of service to a purchaser for consumption on those premises".

In short, the cheeseboard has a life of four hours. What nonsense! Although I acknowledge the concerns about listeria, judging by what I have read, the regulation is disproportionate to the risk. In my grandfather's day the Stilton was kept for days, if not weeks, as more port was added to mature the cheese. He, like the cheese, lived to a ripe old age.

Then there are requirements upon hotels to keep record cards and registers. We have heard about that. The Immigration (Hotel Records) Order 1972 requires everyone over the age of 16 to register his name and nationality at the hotel. Those records must be kept for 12 months and be available for inspection by any police constable or any other person authorised by the Secretary of State. I have yet to find an hotelier in my constituency who can recall anyone authorised, or for that matter unauthorised, who has ever asked to see those records. It is absurd to restrict that duty to hotels or guest houses if it serves a purpose of keeping track of the movements of foreign visitors. It is yet another unnecessary bureaucratic burden on hotel owners and operators.

Not only visitors have to be logged in and logged out of hotels; items of food must be recorded and a history produced. That record of movements must be kept so that one can trace the journey of a lamb chop not only into the premises but into the freezer, out of it, into the refrigerator and on to the plate. It is another nightmare of records and log books for the small hotel keeper to contend with. The Food Safety Act 1990 requires individual itemised records of each item of food that is placed in the freezer, the checking of temperatures of fridges and freezers three times a day and the maintaining yet again of copious records. Even that is not the end of the story because when the food is ultimately thrown out—presumably after four hours if it happens to be cheese—precise records have to be kept of the rubbish collection.

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 requires the filling of forms and the monitoring of waste collected from a hotel and it must be individually itemised, dustbin by dustbin, bag by bag, together with an assessment of the credentials of those collecting the waste from the hotel. That imposes enormous additional paperwork on the poor hotel keeper and, of course, it is all rigorously, if not ruthlessly, supervised by the food gestapo.

Then there is the hotel that tries to help parents by providing some entertainment for children so that the parents can take a break and go off to do something on their own. We could include in that category people such as the Butlin redcoats and that frequent resident of the kiddies' corner in McDonald restaurants, Ronald McDonald. Those people appear to be caught by the provisions of the Children Act 1989 which states that persons who provide any form of activity supervised by a responsible person, whether or not on a regular basis on non-domestic premises, for children under the age of eight years, must be registered as child minders. Give him a group of seven-year-olds and poor old Ronald loses his sense of fun. The additional requirement is that to be a child minder the person must perform the act for reward and must do so for more than two hours each day. I assume that Ronald McDonald does not provide his services free. Even he gets paid, as do the redcoats.

Perhaps even Father Christmas gets caught. Imagine the scene in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Children are left by their parents with Father Christmas, perhaps while the parents go to buy the very Christmas presents that the children are whispering, or seeking to whisper, into Father Christmas's ear. To the child seated on his knee Father Christmas asks, "How old are you, young

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

man?" The child answers, "Seven, Mister." Christmas spirit rapidly evaporates as Father Christmas says, "Well, I am afraid that pursuant to section 71 of the Children Act 1989 you will have to get off my knee." Those are all absurd examples, but they all add to the cost of running British tourist and leisure industries.

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 also impose great burdens on my constituents. We have also heard about the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989, which seem to impose the most bizarre, complex and expensive requirements on hotel owners in my constituency and those of other hon. Members. There is also the issue of notices. When one enters a hotel reception lobby, one wants to see a welcoming notice or two, possibly something about the fire regulations or where to park one's car.

The difficulty is that one is now met with a panoply of different notices. There is the Tourism (Sleeping Accommodation Price Display) Order 1977, the Price Marking (Food and Drink on Premises) Order 1979, the Price Indications (Method of Payment) Regulations 1991, the Price Indications (Bureau de Change) Regulations—I could go on and on. All that means a proliferation of notices, which almost blots out the welcome of the receptionist. On top of that, there are the bizarre requirements of the Food Labelling (Amendment) Regulations 1989, notifying the alcoholic strength of drinks sold. I do not know what others in the Chamber today think, but that is not the sort of notice that I immediately seek out when I am ordering a drink in my favourite pub.

I ask the Minister to review, as soon as possible, the requirement—placed on all hotels and guest houses offering services to tourists—to establish bonding arrangements. I am glad that that point has already been raised. As we have heard from more than one hon. Member, the new EC directive imposes a sharp increase in overheads if a hotel includes within its prices golf or tennis lessons or tournaments. Such additional services can mean that the hotel is said to be providing a package. At a time when the British tourist industry is developing leisure and entertainment packages as an answer to the sunseeker-type holiday abroad, the regulations distort the market. The situation with package holidays abroad is quite different. Going abroad means that the tourist is subject to the vagaries of airlines, ferries, foreign hotels and so on. In those cases, I accept the argument for bonding.

My hoteliers in Eastbourne, and others elsewhere, do not need to be told how to look after their guests, to make them comfortable, safe and happy. They will provide them with hygienic food properly prepared in pleasant surroundings. Eastbourne provides a warm and hospitable welcome all year round and we are looking forward to welcoming my hon. Friend the Minister there at some time.

The wind of deregulation is blowing strongly. It is encouraged by the Prime Minister, and my hon. Friend the Minister is already performing tremendous tasks. The post-Maastricht mood here and throughout the Community is in favour of deregulation and abolishing unnecessary bureaucracy. Regulations are fine as long as they benefit the consumer. The unnecessary regulation, whether in Britain or in mainland Europe, is nothing less than a curse to the consumer. This has been a timely debate and I have every confidence that my hon. Friend the Minister is the right man to be carrying the cause of deregulation forward.

1.47 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I do not think that I am a pervert because I happen to prefer my Camembert and Brie cold out of the fridge. It is still a soft cheese in comparison with Cheddar and one can still get the taste of it—[HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] Well, it is obviously a matter of taste. Clearly we shall not agree, but I refuse to back off because I prefer my cheese cold rather than oozing towards me like a glutinous threatening blob. However, enough about Tory Members.

The significance of tourism to the economy of London is undisputed. It is estimated to have earned the capital city about £4·4 billion in 1991—£3·6 billion having been spent by overseas visitors and £720 million by British citizens. London receives enormous benefits from visitors, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) said, even with the slightly declining number of 16 million, a lot of people come into the capital city annually.

Although that volume of tourists is welcome, it exerts enormous pressure on the centre of London in particular. That may be fun if one is a young and fit student backpacker from Germany or France, milling about on Victoria or Westminster station, but not if one is frail or a commuter trying to get to work—if one is lucky enough to have a job in the capital after 14 years of Conservative government. There are continuing incidents of friction between large parties of tourists and commuters on inadequate concourses and in ticketing areas on the London Underground and at British Rail's main stations.

It is great that large numbers of people still want to visit London, but we must do more to make them welcome and to help them get as much from their visit as they can so that they will want to return again and again.

The Minister made great play of the question of regulations and offered a whole series of anecdotes. He said that they were not amusing, but he played them for all that he could and raised laughs from Conservative Members. As I pointed out before, many of those regulations, if not all, were passed or left on the statute book by previous Conservative Governments—but also, I accept, by other Governments.

New regulations from Brussels have been agreed by British Ministers, so it is no use their blaming the Commission. British Ministers connived in those regulations, so, although the Minister may not take personal responsibility for them, he cannot detach himself entirely from the Government's actions. When the Government have constructed or helped to construct regulations, they cannot seek to win cheap cheers from their own supporters by attacking those measures.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich said, the right balance must be struck. Total deregulation would be even worse than total regulation. Neither is desirable, but we want to stop tourists being ripped off in London and elsewhere. There must be sensible regulations on quality and standards.

It has been said that London hotels are among the most expensive in the world. The Minister spoke of the high cost of staying in a London hotel, as if that could all be blamed

on regulation. That is nonsense. At worst, regulations impose inconvenience and a marginal cost element. If one asks hoteliers about the real reason for prices being forced up, they will cite value added tax, the business rate and all the other charges that licensing authorities, at the behest or connivance of Government, require hoteliers to make. It is nonsense for the Minister and Conservative Members to argue that high costs are all down to regulation and that abolishing all regulations will produce cheaper hotel stays in London and elsewhere. In London, a balance must be struck between the needs of tourists and those of residents and the desirability of protecting both categories.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) referred to the high cost of London's public transport. We have the highest urban fares in the world, but we do not have the best transport system. The service is poor, and bus deregulation is a nonsensical concept which ought to be scrapped. It has all to do with ideology, not with the needs of London's residents or visitors. A lousy transport system for London affects us all.

I do not approve of museum and art gallery charges; I view them as a charge on knowledge, especially in the case of museums. Other European capitals operate such charges, and I do not object to tourists being charged, but I do object to charges for residents. The science museum charges £4 for entry—unlike the Victoria and Albert, whose charge is optional—although it is perhaps the most important museum to which we can take our kids. I used to love going there; everything was free, and there was plenty to do and to learn about. There is much talk nowadays of single parents and social security. If you are a single parent on social security, just try to get the money to take your child to the science museum! We must try to find a way of getting around this nonsense.

A visit to the tower of London is a good trip, but it costs £6.70, including admission to the Crown jewels. I used to love going there, too. Londoners, however, do not visit such attractions as much as tourists. They tend to say to themselves, "It will always be there. I will go and see it tomorrow, or next week." Eventually, of course, they will die without visiting any of those places.

Admission to the tower of London used to be free, although there was a small charge for viewing the Crown jewels. I understand that Buckingham palace is about to impose a standard charge of £8—although some people may be stupid enough to pay 10 times that to a tout. Why should our citizens have to pay twice over? We already pay for the upkeep of the science museum, the tower of London and Buckingham palace through our taxes. During the consultation process, the Minister should consider introducing the differential charging system that operates in many other parts of the world. Those who can produce evidence of United Kingdom residency should be admitted free, or at a reduced rate: I consider it grotesquely unfair to charge tourists the same as residents.

Countries such as Greece have many western European visitors who can afford to pay reasonably high prices. Restaurants and food shops in such countries make a price distinction between tourists and residents, and I see no reason to object to such a system here. I want tourists to enjoy their time in the capital, but it is not just a question of saying that all regulations are nonsense and should be dispensed with; we should examine the products and the standards of service that tourists are offered. They should feel that they have got something out of their visit.

Souvenirs are a classic example. I did a bit of market research on the other side of Westminster bridge, by the station. I had a look at the trash that is on offer to tourists. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting cited red buses as one of the great features of London, along with red telephone boxes. It is regrettable that we are getting rid of such things. This may sound silly, but another London symbol is the copper's helmet. I pushed off quite a few of those in my day, during demonstrations, but it is possible to go out and buy one: they are all made in China. The same applies to dolls representing the royal family. I was told that there was a fairly well-upholstered Fergie doll —it was not on sale at the time—with a packet of pins that could be pushed into it, and a dazzling array of holiday clothes.

Looking around, I saw "Made in Taiwan", "Made in Bangladesh" and "Made in Hong Kong". I do not object to those economies selling us their products, but I feel that a souvenir from a capital city should be of local manufacture as well as local representation.

Looking on the brighter side, London Underground offers an excellent range of souvenirs, all of which are made in England. The London tourist centre in Victoria also has an excellent array of high-quality souvenirs which are made in this country. The work of the London tourist centre in Victoria has not been mentioned so far. It is helpful, friendly and informed, which is so important. It makes visitors feel welcome, and I hope that the Minister will consider the resources that it needs to extend the services and the personnel there who can greet visitors. We could assist visitors greatly by requiring quality standards for all souvenirs.

We could also help tourists far more by providing information booths around central London in which different languages are spoken. We are arrogant in this country. In other capital cities, one can speak English and always find someone who can give the required information. Try speaking a language other than English around London. People who speak another language in my area of London would probably get their faces kicked in. It is not noted for being a charming part. We need more bilingual notices on trains and buses and at stations to assist visitors. There are many signs in English in other European capitals. French and German should be far more in evidence at our stations and other places where people seek information. There should be more announcements in French and German at stations, rather than the language that many of us who were born here do not understand as it comes out of public address systems in London stations and elsewhere in Britain.

I move on to register my protest at the appalling public transport links between Heathrow and central London. To get on a train that is not a dedicated link is an atrocious introduction to visitors. I am glad to see that the British Airports Authority and British Rail have come to an agreement with regard to a dedicated link on that route, which will mean that communication from central London and Heathrow is more like the good connection between central London and Gatwick.

There are many wonderful places and many good tours in London for visitors to take, but a number of them are substandard. For example, try going on some of the river cruises and hearing the semi-literate, ill-informed and prejudiced commentaries given. Some of the comments, I might add, are about this place and may be justified. However, visitors hear those commentaries. The Circle

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line trip in New York provides a professional commentary of the sort that visitors should hear on a river tour here. Such services are obvious targets for quality regulation.

There are some excellent organised sight-seeing tours in London, put on by private and public sector organisers, but there are a number of distasteful tours that commemorate past incidents of violence and brutality. London is one of the safest cities for tourists in the world. Obviously, plenty more needs to be done because London residents are as concerned about their safety as we are about the safety of tourists, but the idea of having "the bus trip to murder", for example, does not seem desirable. Jack the Ripper walks and the Jack the Ripper exhibition at the London Dungeon are, at the very least, in poor taste, but could be seen by many—and certainly by myself—as insulting to women, especially as the women concerned in a number of those murders were prostitutes. Such women, to this day, are still regarded by some as people who do not deserve protection from violent or murderous assailants. London should not be seen, and Londoners do not want it to be seen, as a place where we are proud of the horrific events in our past.

In conclusion—those are words that Conservative Members love hearing; I shall roll them round my tongue once again—in conclusion, London needs to welcome tourists and honoured guests to our capital city, but sensible measures are required to ensure that our visitors are not cheated or ripped off and that Londoners are not inconvenienced or penalised by tourists so that we regard them as a curse rather than as welcome paying guests.

2.4 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): It is a pleasure to say a few words in this long debate about the deregulation of tourism. As I live in London and in my constituency of Hastings, I have a great deal of sympathy with many of the points raised by Opposition Members. However, I fear that their underlying answer to the problem is to regulate rather than to deregulate. Deregulation is the key to this debate so that we can offer an infinitely better reception to people from abroad and to people from this country who wish to spend a holiday in some of our most attractive tourist areas.

I agree with practically everything that was said by my colleagues, so I shall not repeat what they have said. My hon. Friend the Minister began to list some of the activities of the men with briefcases which affect the tourism industry. Mr. Michael Ann of the Department of Trade and Industry retail and tourism group listed them recently in a local business newspaper. The list included

"environmental health, national insurance, VAT, weights and measures, building control, liquor licensing, swimming pool inspection, electrical safety, planning, trading standards, wages inspection, the English Tourist Board, the RAC and AA, insurance, performing rights and phonographic rights."

The list also included

"the Lotteries and Amusements Act, the Theatres Act and the Data Protection Act."

After dealing with all that, I cannot imagine that there is much time to run an hotel.

A hotelier in my constituency told me a tale, not of the ham and tomato sandwich, but of the beef and tomato sandwich. We have dealt with ham and tomato sandwiches at great length. However, to produce a beef and tomato sandwich, one would need four colour-coded chopping boards with their matching colour-coded knives. The ingredients would have to be taken from a fridge so cold that the tomato, beef and butter would be solid. If one took that freezing cold concoction, wrapped in shrink-wrap paper, as it would have to be, to a client sitting in the bar who then wanted it warmed up, one could not toast it behind the bar because the bar is not a catering kitchen. That sums up fairly succinctly some of the problems that our hoteliers face.

There has been agreement in the debate about what needs to be done, but we have not heard many answers. In the few minutes that remain, I want to consider some of the ways in which we can deal with the problems posed by regulation and over-regulation. No Conservative Member would say that we should abandon all regulation instantly. There is clearly a need for a degree of sensible regulation. However, as my hon. Friend the Minister suggested, we must consider the cost of compliance and the risk analysis involved.

It is easy to say that, but it is considerably more difficult to put it into practice. There are instances when we ask Departments to consider compliance costs. The problem is that the science of compliance costs is not as well understood as it could be and our systems are exceedingly weak. I should like to see the National Audit Office or the Audit Commission, or both working together, produce considerably better systems of cost compliance related to, and involving, those who will have to comply rather than how much it would cost Government Departments.

I was also encouraged by the fact that the Minister wants better relations with the industries involved, although I was slightly disheartened when he said that he wanted to talk to trade associations. So many businesses in tourism are small. If they are dealing with the men with briefcases, they will certainly not have time to join trade associations, let alone be vocal members of them. It would benefit the industry enormously if we could devise consultation that helped people and did not take yet more time out of the business.

We have castigated environmental health officers at great length. I have a certain sympathy—not a great deal—with them because the poor souls do not understand what they are doing. There is a need for training in business methods, in the science of hygiene and in various other disciplines, which would include science and technology as it applies to many companies. If we could institute better training for our environmental health officers, we might obtain a better understanding of what we are trying to achieve.

I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Minister instigated the debate. It has given hon. Members an opportunity to air some of the concerns of businesses in our constituencies. We wish the Minister all power to the elbow to try to get the industry deregulated so that it can continue profitably.

2.9 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the way in which he opened the debate. It was one of the most encouraging speeches that I have ever heard in the House. His robust presentation and understanding of the issues will comfort many of our constituents. They will know that the battle is being joined.

Tourism is vital to my constituency. The Peak district national park attracts 22 million visitors a year, which means that it attracts more visitors than Blackpool and Scarborough combined and more than any other national park in the world except Mount Fuji. In the Peak district national park, man has actually harnessed nature to create something even better. Natural facilities are used for sport and recreation, hang-gliding, caving and walking—as long as one is careful to avoid hang-gliders swooping down and catching one behind the neck. Man has improved the environment further by the introduction of reservoirs. People can sail, and there are trails such as the Longdendale trail, the Sett valley walk and the Pennine way, which starts in my constituency.

On top of that, community activities that have been introduced add another dimension which attracts tourists to our area. The Buxton festival, which starts next week, will attract many people, and this year's festival is expected to be better than ever. The Glossop Victorian weekend is due to be held in a couple of weeks. A host of small villages hold well-dressing festivals, country fairs, sheepdog shows, garland days and May queen festivals. That is what makes us one of the most attractive parts of the country and one of the reasons why so many people visit us.

I thank the Foundation for Sports and the Arts which has helped many organisations in my constituency to flourish by giving grants now in excess of £250,000.

I also thank the Department of National Heritage for the way in which it has already positively intervened in the case of the Buxton crescent. The Buxton crescent is one of the most spectacular and important buildings in the north of England. We have seen it decaying and falling apart, but, thanks to the actions of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the former Minister and the current Minister, we are seeing it put right. We have reason to be optimistic that, this year, the builders will move in and start to restore the building. That owes more to the Department of National Heritage, backed by English Heritage and the national heritage memorial fund, than to anybody else. I welcome the fact that they are working so helpfully in conjunction with High Peak borough council.

But all is not well. There is a general problem facing businesses—too much red tape. Whereas we were once a nation of shopkeepers, many small businesses are being closed because we have become a nation of health inspectors. Partly, as we have heard, that is European Community-inspired, but all too often a three-page directive from the European Community is turned into a 30-page regulatory document by our own officials.

Over the past week, my office contacted many businesses to find out about the problems that they are facing. Many of those problems have been referred to. There has been massive investment in hygiene. As for the refrigeration of cheese, we have a delicatessen in Buxton, which *The Times* described as one of the best delicatessens in the north of England. But Pugsons of Buxton is facing a significant problem because of the need to keep quiches and cheeses at temperatures which destroy living enzymes. Cheese is a living food.

We have heard about sandwiches and the need for washing down. A new fear is creeping in about a European ruling that will require every hotel bedroom to have a bidet. Bidets are not part of the British culture and heritage, and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to resist that ruling as well.

Bureaucrats have gone into the Buxton opera house and said that a window must be changed because Judith Christian, who runs the opera house and who was appointed because she is so sensible, can reach that window and open it by standing on a chair. They said that the window was dangerous because she might throw herself out. However, she is not that sort of person. We need people who will not make such regulations for our buildings. There are too many petty rules.

The signposting issue must be tackled. We must get rid of the wretched elephants that appear on signposts up and down the country. I have an otter sanctuary and an owl haven in my constituency which should not be signposted by elephants. I like elephants: my tie is covered in elephants. I am an adviser to an elephant charity. When a five-year-old says, "Mummy and Daddy, let us go and see the elephants", how does one explain that it is not an elephant but an otter or an owl?

The only thing like an elephant that we have in High Peak is the remains of a mammoth in Buxton museum. But if one puts up an elephant to say that the Buxton museum has remains of a mammoth, one will be told to take it down because a different symbol is used to indicate a museum. We have bureaucracy gone mad.

I welcome what the Government are doing. I welcome the approach taken by the Minister, and I congratulate him on his initiative.

2.15 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I shall wind up a fruitful and useful morning by quoting a letter from the owner of the Manor hotel at Mundesley, Norfolk, which will be familiar to the Minister. At the end of a four-page fax, she says from the bottom of her heart:

"Help. We seem to be in the middle of the road with traffic coming at us from all angles with no way out. What do we do?"

She has been buried by regulation.

The law is an ass. This morning we heard such a catalogue of examples that it was almost impossible to cap each one with a better one. Unless we get this regulation under control, we shall never be able to manage the costs that have been raised by Labour Members—the price to the customer. It is not surprising that this country has become expensive for tourism.

There is no better place to see regulation at its worst than in Sutton. Sutton may not be the heart of everyone's touristic world, but in a sense we are a good example because we are perfect for business men wanting to go to Heathrow or Gatwick. We are in a light industrial area and we have good conference facilities.

The hotels that provide their facilities are drowning under paper work. Their greatest burden is overzealous town hall Hitlers driving them crazy. Those town hall Hitlers take European Community directives—which go via Whitehall and are meant to be guidelines—and then interpret them as fact and law and the poor miserable hotelier must comply with them. As a result, my leading hotel spent thousands of pounds complying with yet more fire regulations although it had been okayed only the year before. Every time another inspection officer comes to interview them, they duck—it costs money.

There are other examples of pettifogging. For example, my council insists that everyone in the catering trade—the chefs, stewards, stewardesses and even the chambermaids, because they must prepare a Teasmade—must attend an

[Lady Olga Maitland]

expensive two-day course of basic food hygiene. They get a certificate at the end. What do they learn? They are told not to chew gum while preparing food.

The law is an ass. I could go on for a long time about the examples of what we must tackle. The tourism industry in this country has been regarded as a second show. It is time that we put tourism ahead of football. We should make it our first priority, bearing in mind that it is one of our largest and most important income earners. I congratulate the Minister on tackling this jungle of bureaucracy. He is my Tarzan and the Tarzan for all people in the tourist industry. I wish him well in his endeavours.

2.18 pm

Mr. Pendry: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate. The Minister and I agreed to take just a few moments to conclude, because we wanted those who turned up for the debate and who have a real interest in the subject to speak.

It has been a good debate. I know that the Minister will not have time to reply to all the good points made today, but I hope that he will reflect on them. My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) made a particularly important point, which was picked up by other hon. Members, about the importance of promoting areas outside the capital, Oxford and Stratford. I agree with him that Burnley should be promoted, but other areas in the north, such as that represented by my neighbour and almost namesake, the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) and my area of Tameside should also be promoted. I hope that the Minister will consider that request.

There is no doubt that London is the focus for overseas visitors and my hon. Friends who represent London made typically thoughtful speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) made a good point when he pleaded that red London buses should remain, whatever deregulation may be introduced. Those hon. Members who cheered deregulation when my hon. Friend referred to it would think again if they saw some of the clapped-out buses that those of us whose bus services have been deregulated must now endure.

I hope that the Minister will also respond to the point that my hon. Friend made about the parking problems encountered by buses and tour buses in London.

My hon. Friends the Members for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) put to rest the bogus claim that the Labour party is not interested in the tourist industry. They made a balanced case for good regulation over bad regulation. They also referred to other problems such as that caused by ticket touting. The Government resisted an attempt to make that an offence under the Criminal Justice Bill, which is now in Committee. I was surprised by that because I have two letters on the subject from the Prime Minister, who said that, as soon as parliamentary time allows, he will introduce legislation to prevent ticket touting at football matches. That also follows the recommendation contained in Lord Justice Taylor's report. Today's debate, however, has highlighted that that problem transcends football.

In conclusion—my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West has stressed that they are the magical words in such debates—the tourist industry does not want us to indulge in petty party-political arguments when discussing its problems. The debate has, however, revealed genuine cross-party concerns. I hope that the debate will give the Minister the type of opportunity that he wants, new as he is to his post, to ensure that where regulation is necessary within the industry, it will be clarified and made relevant to those at the sharp end.

As has been pointed out today, much of the legislation that Conservative Members have complained about was voted for by them. Too many sloppy Acts have been passed since the White Paper "Lifting the Burden" was published in 1985.

I hope that we can have more debates on tourism. We have got to get the message through to that vital industry that the House cares about tourism. If there are some healthy punch ups between hon. Members on both sides of the House, I hope that the synthesis of such clashes will be good for the industry.

Although we have had two debates in four months on tourism, I hope that we will have many more.

2.22 pm

Mr. Sproat: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate and attempt to follow the wise advice given to me by the Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown).

I thank the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) for his welcome of the fact that this is the second debate on tourism in four months and for his call for many more.

Tourism is an extremely important industry and, although hon. Members on both sides of the House may place a different emphasis on what is the right balance to be struck between regulating and non-regulating, there is widespread agreement among hon. Members that the industry is subject to too much regulation overall. It is commonly held that too much of it is wrong and that where it is stupid, it should be repealed.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said that a lot of the regulation that we have discussed and castigated as stupid or absurd had been passed by Tory Governments. That is exactly so. I do not care tuppence who passed them—if they are stupid, they should be changed and if they are not, they should be kept. That goes not only for the House but for local authorities, whether they are run by Conservatives, Liberal Democrats or Labour.

We are trying to lift a burden from the tourist industry. As Minister responsible for tourism I want, first, to subtract the measures that damage the industry—we have been discussing those today—and, secondly, to find measures that increase the industry's competitiveness. The latter is not a subject for this debate. Those matters constitute a double punch.

I am acutely aware of all the questions about funding the British Tourist Authority—by the way, it is the English tourist board which has had it money cut—and the relationship between the regional tourist boards and the English tourist board. We must see whether we can involve the Scottish and Welsh tourist boards in a more co-ordinated way in dealing with visitors within this country. We all understand that the Scots and Welsh want to keep their own tourist boards. Scotland is a very sellable tourist commodity and it is right that Scotland should wish

to sell it. However, while maintaining total control over its national tourist product, there may be room for more co-ordination between the English, Welsh and Northern Ireland tourist boards.

A sad aspect of this debate is that although the Department of National Heritage is responsible for tourism as a whole, it is not responsible for many of the problems that have been mentioned in this debate. I must work out how we can convince the Department of the Environment that use class orders should be changed. I have been convinced of that by hon. Members and representations that I have received from outside. I will send a powerful letter to the Department of the Environment setting out the arguments about why local councils should have a right to say whether buildings that were once hotels should be converted into hostels.

Similarly, I will write to the Department of Health on the Children Act 1989. One of my hon. Friends mentioned the anomaly that McDonald's wants to run children's parties but when more than eight children are in the party room, another so-called "qualified carer" must be present to ensure that the children do not misbehave themselves. That makes it uneconomical for McDonald's to run that helpful facility for parents.

Mrs. Lait: When my hon. Friend talks to the Department of Employment about the May day bank holiday, although I welcome a deregulation day bank holiday, will he bear in mind the fact that, in Hastings, May day is a valuable tourist day? It is one of our most successful weekends because we hold a Morris dancing festival.

Mr. Sproat: I am glad that my hon. Friend did not ask me to attend the Morris dancing festival, but I note what she said.

Hon. Members asked about hotel registers and the immigrations forms that must be filled in. Nobody has yet found an hotel that has been asked by the police or anybody else to return such a form. I shall probably now be flooded with letters from the Home Office saying that that is the most important measure that it has passed for a long time, but I look forward to hearing from it.

The Department of Transport is responsible for signs and I hope that we can get some movement on that. The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) rightly asked about aviation and I hope that we can follow that up. Motorway service areas are part of the tourist product. We deregulated those last August; until a few months ago, one could land at Dover and try to reach Birmingham without seeing a single motorway station.

One hon. Member talked about pints of beer and whether it should be illegal to sell a pint of beer in a pint glass because the head constituted a tiny proportion of the beer at the top of the glass. The Department of Trade and Industry is considering whether to regulate that and place costs of £30 million on the pubs and clubs of the land, which would have to get rid of their old glasses and buy new glasses that can hold a pint plus the froth on top.

Those are all small issues in themselves, but they have clearly exercised the House today. I give a pledge that I will take up those matters with the appropriate Departments. I have been asked whether a statement will be made in the House, as I promised, about an interim report on the inquiry. I will certainly seek to provide one, probably by way of a written answer, which I will make as full as possible. The lengthy debate that we have had today shows the great interest that the House, as well as the industry, has in the subject.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Hong Kong (Ethnic Minorities)

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Michael Brown.]*

2.30 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise with the House and the Minister one relatively small issue relating to the transfer of Hong Kong to Chinese control. While it is a small problem in terms of the numbers of people involved, it is of great humanitarian and constitutional importance.

Like many people in the United Kingdom, I have felt somewhat guilty about the transfer of Hong Kong to Chinese control. Every other colony that has moved out of our control has been able to secure freedom, independence and national consciousness, but Hong Kong is the exception because we are transferring it to Chinese control on the basis of an outdated and irrelevant agreement made with the Manchu emperors.

The comparison with little Macau is unusual. Macau is only 20 miles from Hong Kong—less than half the distance from the House to Southend on Sea. The Portuguese, who control Macau, have agreed to transfer control to China by the end of the century, but everyone there is entitled to seek Portuguese citizenship. Some 100,000 passports have already been issued to the 400,000 people there—men, women and children—and another 100,000 passports are on the way.

Due to the iniquities of the Foreign Office and the EC, which appear to haunt us all the time now, a considerable number of those 400,000 delightful people will be entitled to come to settle in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Most of the Macau people have lived there for generations, or at least have proof of having done so. Most of them speak English as that makes commercial sense and most of them speak Portuguese of a sort because they are aware of the rules of admission once the colony is transferred. I am sure that if the Minister telephones the Foreign Office he will receive a Euro-assurance that the numbers involved are small. However, on the basis of the time that those people have spent living there and their ability to speak Portuguese—actively spoken in Macau—the numbers will become considerable.

I cannot hold our delightful Under-Secretary of State responsible for the sins of the Foreign Office or Brussels, but I can ask him to bear in mind that loophole when he considers my request on behalf of a tiny group of people, who have the ethnic background of Asians, White Russians and Eurasians, have lived in Hong Kong and had British nationality for generations, and who have paid their taxes and given their obligations to the British Administration. They now seem likely to become stateless people. Their numbers are tiny—they amount to 7,000. But the real number will probably be about 5,000 because the balance will have qualified for citizenship as part of the 50,000 passport scheme.

We must consider the facts. First, will those people actually become stateless? The Government have insisted that they are currently British dependent territorial citizens and will be able to seek classification as British nationals overseas. We are told that that will ensure that they have the protection of the British consuls. However, the status of BN(O) will be handed down for only two generations. The great-grandchild of any one of those BNOs will have no nationality, no homeland and no security unless we do something.

Am I right in my belief about statelessness? Everyone else seems to think so. The International Commission of Jurists has determined that the ethnic minorities

"will become effectively stateless in 1997".

That is clear and precise.

Article 10 of the 1961 convention, to which I understand we are a party, obliges any state involved in the transfer of territory

"to secure that no person shall become stateless as a result".

Will the Chinese sort things out for this small group of people when they take over? Sad to say, there is no sign of that. Chinese laws on nationality are essentially race based and the 5,000 have no right to Chinese citizenship even if they wanted to take it up. The Chinese Government have made their position clear. They have stated that the 5,000 will have to stay in Hong Kong as stateless persons or else seek some sort of special Chinese passports whose status has not been defined. The Chinese policy, stated openly and publicly, has been to advise the 5,000 to appeal to London to grant them United Kingdom passports.

What does the Legislative Council of Hong Kong think? Does it believe that the problem is insignificant? Far from it. It has passed a unanimous resolution appealing to the United Kingdom Government to make a concession. It took the trouble to send a delegation here a fortnight ago to seek help from the Foreign Office and from the friends of justice and humanity to get the problem solved.

Disregarding the democratic representations, what does the Governor think? Unprecedentedly—this says a great deal for him—he took the trouble to make a clear public statement as recently as Thursday 10 June. He stated unambiguously:

"I think that the case has been put not only by the delegation of legislative councillors, but also by me and others—and we will go on putting the case and I hope that we can get some movement on that."

Clearly the Governor, as well as LegCo, believes that this is a just cause requiring action.

It seems that everyone at every level accepts that this is a real problem, a grave injustice and a genuine personal crisis for the 5,000 forgotten United Kingdom citizens of Hong Kong. I understand that the Government have made the concession of stating that, should things get rough in Hong Kong after the changeover—which they might—they will look sympathetically at the plight of the 5,000. If that is to be regarded as a guarantee, what on earth would we lose by making the nationality concession? The 5,000 appear to wish to stay in Hong Kong—there is not the slightest evidence that they do not want to. So what difference would it make if we gave them nationality?

As the House of Commons has unfortunately tended to become an area of interest promotion, I should like to emphasise that I have no connection, direct or indirect, by the back door or the front door, with Hong Kong or with any business operating there, or with the 5,000 or any of their industrial or commercial ventures. Indeed, I have been to Hong Kong only once, for a short holiday with my wife. My principal memory is of paying more for a cup of coffee—£2·80—than I have paid anywhere else in the world. I did not enjoy that, the more so since we were joined at breakfast by five of my fellow Members of Parliament who were staying in the same lavish and costly hotel as participants in one of those mass of useless delegations paid for by some taxpayer somewhere.

I therefore have no interest in Hong Kong. My only possible interest lies in the fact that it owes me £2 for the coffee.

My real interest stems from my belief that Britain is in danger of flouting its inescapable duty to a group of citizens whose rights are being ignored and whose future will be unstable and constitutionally deprived unless we do something. It would be terrible if we told these 5,000 people that they belong nowhere—that they are nationals of nowhere—especially as they have served Britain so well in the past.

I believe that nothing would be lost by saying yes to these people. If the Government really mean what they say—that if the 5,000 get into trouble, they will help them—what is lost by giving them passports? Home Office Ministers, including the Minister answering this debate, are people of sincerity and judgment. I appreciate that the last thing that I can hope for is that the Minister will suddenly announce in an Adjournment debate that that policy is to be overturned. However, I hope that he can at least give an assurance that, on the basis of what appear to be facts and the real problems of real people, he will think about what I and others, including the Hong Kong Legislative Council, the Governor and the representatives of the Chinese Government, have said. I hope that the Minister will at least say, "I shall look at this again and think about what has been said."

2.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Charles Wardle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) on selecting this subject for debate and I welcome the opportunity that it provides for me to set out the Government's position on the Hong Kong ethnic minorities. There has been some misunderstanding on the subject over the years and I hope that I can put matters right.

My hon. Friend spoke about Macau. Portugal is not granting Portuguese citizenship to all residents of Macau; nor can people travel there from Hong Kong and acquire Portuguese citizenship. I do not think that my hon. Friend suggested that, but he may be as aware as I am that in a debate on Monday in another place it was suggested that the Portuguese Government had said that they would give Portuguese nationality to all those from Hong Kong who apply in Macau.

It is not true to say that residence in Macau leads to the acquisition of Portuguese citizenship. The Portuguese Nationality Act 1981 provides that only children born in Macau to existing Portuguese citizens will get Portuguese citizenship. Portugal is not operating any kind of assurance package after the fashion of our selection scheme under the terms of the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I accept everything that the Minister has said. Does he accept that 100,000 Portuguese passports have already been issued to adults? Therefore, we are not debating an insignificant problem. While I agree that what was said in the Lords was rubbish, there is a problem.

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend's estimate that 100,000 citizens of Macau have Portuguese citizenship is right as far as I know. That number may increase. As Portuguese citizens, those people who are not in Macau may travel to the EC and may visit this country. If they want to reside here they will have to make it clear that they are not dependent on social security. That applies to any EC national.

The issue raised by my hon. Friend is not new. Over the past six or seven years, it has been debated regularly in the House and, within the past six months, there have been two debates in the Hong Kong Legislative Council in which the Government's position has been explained. There is clearly a need for our position to be repeated because of questions asked in Hong Kong and in this country by my hon. Friend and by many others.

I should like to make plain which members of the Hong Kong community we are debating. We estimate that currently in Hong Kong about 28,000 people belong to the non-Chinese ethnic minorities. The great majority of them have another nationality besides British. For example, most of them hold citizenship of either India or Pakistan. Perhaps 7,000 of them have only British nationality in the form of British dependent territories citizenship—BDTC—or British nationality overseas.

The question at the heart of the debate is whether special measures should be taken for that section of the Hong Kong community, or whether they should compete, like everybody else, for the 50,000 British citizenship places that we have already made available under the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act.

Representations have been made on behalf of that group for a number of years and Parliament carefully considered their position when formulating its citizenship scheme for Hong Kong in 1990. It concluded that there was no case for making special citizenship provision for them and that remains our position.

Let us look at the arguments that have been advanced in favour of special treatment. First, it is said that after 1997, the ethnic minorities will not have a proper nationality and passport. That refers to the status of British national (overseas)—BN(O)—or British overseas citizen—BOC—and their related passports. The British Government do not accept that those nationality statuses are in any way inferior to BDTC status. There are more than 1 million people in the world with BOC status and the BOC passport is well established. There are more than 500,000 people in Hong Kong now with BN(O) status and the BN(O) passport is accepted throughout the world. Holders do not need entry clearance for visits to the United Kingdom, although, like everyone else, they require entry clearance if they wish to come here on a more permanent basis.

BN(O) and BOC passports give the holders an entitlement to registration as British citizens provided that they have completed five years' residence in the United Kingdom and have achieved settled status. Those passports also confer British consular protection worldwide and will do so in the Hong Kong special administrative region, as it will be known after 1997, if the holders are not Chinese nationals as well. The ethnic minorities will, therefore, be in no different position in those respects after 1997.

Secondly, the ethnic minorities have expressed fears that, unlike the ethnic Chinese, they will not have the right of abode in Hong Kong after 1997. In our view, those fears are quite groundless. The Joint Declaration and article 24(6) of the Basic Law guarantee the ethnic minorities the right of abode in Hong Kong if they do not have a right

[Mr. Wardle]

of abode elsewhere. The Peking authorities have said that people in Hong Kong who are not ethnically Chinese are welcome to remain and that it is open to them to apply for Chinese citizenship.

Thirdly, it is claimed that under existing arrangements, the ethnic minorities, their children or grandchildren will be left stateless. There is no question of that. Specific provision has been made in article 6 of the Hong Kong (British Nationality) Order 1986 to deal with that question. People with solely British nationality—that is, BDTC, BN(O) or BOC—before 1997 will retain British nationality after 1997, either as BN(O)s or BOCs. The children of those who become BOCs or BN(O)s under the 1986 order will automatically become BOCs if they would otherwise be stateless. Their grandchildren will have an entitlement to acquire BOC status by registration—again, if they would otherwise be stateless.

Fouthly, concern has been expressed on the limitations on the transmissibility of the ethnic minorities' British nationality status to future generations. They are, however, in no way unique in this. No form of British nationality will be transmissible indefinitely in Hong Kong. The British Government cannot give indefinite rights to transmit nationality from one generation to the next, expecially where the territory in question is not British. Those limitations in respect of future generations would apply even if they were to be given British citizenship, assuming that they remained in Hong Kong, as they have said they wish to do.

The Government therefore remain firmly of the view that it is neither necessary nor appropriate to introduce legislation to give the ethnic minorities British citizenship. They are, of course, free, along with all other BDTCs, to apply for British citizenship under the selection scheme that was set up under the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990.

Records for the selection scheme are not kept on the basis of ethnic origin, but a check made on the basis of surnames indicated that the ethnic minorities who have applied have been successful in about the same proportion as other applicants. About 60 per cent. of those who applied have been successful. The scheme could not, however, be arranged to give preference to the ethnic minorities. It is designed on an impartial and objective basis under which points are awarded according to set objective criteria.

The Government do not see any case for taking further action on the matter of citizenship. We have been prepared to give an assurance relating to the admissibility of the ethnic minorities to the United Kingdom in the event of their coming under pressure to leave Hong Kong. My hon. Friend alluded to that in his speech.

We do not expect that any members of the non-Chinese ethnic minority will be forced to leave Hong Kong after 1997. Their right of abode in the special administrative region of Hong Kong is explicitly protected in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law, and we have no reason to think that the Chinese will not honour their commitments in that respect.

Over the years, however, we have regularly assured the non-Chinese ethnic minority in Hong Kong that if, against all expectations, members of that group came under pressure to leave Hong Kong and had nowhere else to go, the Government of the day would be expected to consider with considerable and particular sympathy their case for admission to the United Kingdom. I am glad, in view of my hon. Friend's remarks, to repeat that assurance today.

I hope that my comments today show that the Government are perfectly happy to see members of the ethnic minorities being offered British citizenship if they qualify for it. There has been some misunderstanding on that point. We see the ethnic minorities in the same way as all other British nationals in Hong Kong. If they meet the selection criteria under the selection scheme and secure the requisite number of points, they are entitled to British citizenship.

The scheme awards points according to age, education, experience, ability with the English language, British connections and so on. It is, however, competitive and there are bound to be those who are unable to gain the appropriate number of points. Nevertheless, we recognise that the ethnic minorities have made a substantial contribution to Hong Kong's economic prosperity and we have no wish to deny any of them British citizenship if they qualify under the scheme.

It would be wrong to pretend that the scheme could accommodate all 2,000 to 2,500 families in the ethnic minorities with only BDTC citizenship in the second tranche, which is planned to start in January 1994. Only about 12,000 places will be available for all groups in the second tranche. Many thousands of people will be competing for those places and it is unrealistic to expect that the ethnic minorities will be able to obtain more than a proportion of them.

Nor is it possible to grant British citizenship to ethnic minorities in Hong Kong under the British Nationality Act 1981, under which eligibility for British citizenship is, in general, tied closely to past and future residence in the United Kingdom. If special treatment were to be accorded to that group, new primary legislation would be necessary —and we were not persuaded that there is any case for fresh legislation.

We took the action that we considered necessary for Hong Kong in 1990, when we passed the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act. It was our view at the time that the immigration assurance that I have just repeated and the provision that we were making by means of the 1990 Act struck the right balance between maintaining confidence in Hong Kong and limiting potential immigration to the United Kingdom.

We believe that we got that balance right and that there are no new circumstances that would justify making different arrangements now. The ethnic minorities' ties are with Hong Kong rather than with the United Kingdom and our primary objective has been to ensure their security in Hong Kong. We believe that we have done that.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 12 July 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Arts Funding

1. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National heritage when he next plans to meet the Secretary General of the Arts Council to discuss Government funding for the arts.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): My right hon. Friend meets the Secretary General of the Arts Council from time to time to discuss a range of issues.

Mr. Clapham: The Minister must be aware that there is a mounting crisis in arts funding. For example, the proposed budget for next year is to be 2 per cent., or £5 million, less. That proposal will have a devastating effect. The former Secretary of State for National Heritage said only a few days ago in *The Guardian* that the reduction in funding will not be spread evenly across the board, but will fall heavily on the smaller companies, which means that some of them are likely to be put out of business. How does the Minister intend to ensure that those smaller companies are protected and are able to continue to make their cultural contribution to the community?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Member mentions an important point. This year there will be an increase in the Arts Council grant in aid of £5 million, or 2 per cent. Next year it will be cut by 2 per cent. At a time of economic difficulties, the Arts Council cannot remain immune to those difficulties but must shoulder its burden like everyone else. Much of the unease being expressed results from the Arts Council's deciding on new artistic priorities, not from the amount of funding that it has been given.

Mr. Renton: May I draw a comment from my hon. Friend on the reported decision of the Arts Council to ask three of the great orchestras to submit themselves, their musical standards and future programming to a judge for examination and for a decision on whether they should continue to receive public funding? If the musical experts at the Arts Council cannot reach a decision on that matter, what is the precise purpose of the Arts Council?

Mr. Sproat: It is a matter for the Arts Council to decide how to deal with its funding. We want London to have world-class orchestras and I am afraid—or perhaps I am not afraid—that it is a matter entirely for the Arts Council.

Mr. Sheldon: Surely the Minister cannot be immune from commenting on such important matters. He actually set up the Arts Council, which was established to advise on where the funding should go. If it makes a botch of it and relies on a judge to take over such responsibilities, surely he has something to say on the matter.

Mr. Sproat: I do indeed have something to say about it. There is a firm tradition of an arm's-length relationship between the Department and the Arts Council in these matters. If the Arts Council chooses to make its decision by taking outside advice, that is a matter for the Arts Council.

Mr. Jessell: What is the latest position on Arts Council support for the London City Ballet?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend mentions an important subject. As I understand it, the Arts Council was perfectly prepared for the London City Ballet to go into liquidation. Now that a new company appears, possibly, to be rising from the ashes of the old, the Arts Council has said that it will not even pay the touring grant, which previously it was going to pay. I cannot openly give my views on the subject to the Arts Council because of the arm's-length principle, but I see no reason why my hon. Friend should not.

Mrs. Clwyd: The Minister obviously has a convenient memory. At the last general election, the Conservatives promised to maintain support for the arts, but they have ratted on that promise, just like everything else. Does the Minister feel any concern about the probability that one, and possibly two, of London's orchestras will be forced to close, and that several of our famous regional theatres are now under threat of closure because of Government cuts, or is the Minister totally apathetic about the wreckage being inflicted on the arts by the Government's policies?

Mr. Sproat: Perhaps I could remind the hon. Lady that funding for the arts has gone up by 45 per cent. under the Government. That certainly is doing our bit by the arts. It is true, as I said in answer to an earlier question, that next year there will be a cut of 2 per cent. only. The reason that so many provincial theatres are at risk is not the 2 per cent. cut but the fact that the Arts Council, in its wisdom, has decided that it does not want to concentrate as much on drama in the future. I hope that the Arts Council will read *Hansard* and see the strength of hon. Members' feelings about its decision.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, over the past five years, the Arts Council grant from the Government has actually risen by 20 per cent. in real terms? Will he state, particularly in relation to London City Ballet, that the Arts Council should be far more flexible about the way in which it allocates funding? It is disgraceful that, out of a classical ballet budget of £15 million, the council cannot find even £250,000 a year to give a touring grant to an established ballet company.

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point, and I hope that he will make it forcefully to the Arts Council. He is correct in pointing out that the Government spend a great deal on the arts. At a time of economic pressure, the Arts Council grant this year is £225·6 million, which is a great deal of money.

Independent Television

2. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he proposes to take to protect the independence of the smaller independent television companies; and if he will make a statement.

7. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has had with the Independent Television Commission about the rules concerning the ownership of C3 franchises.

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Peter Brooke): I am reflecting on the discussions I have had with both the Independent Television Commission and the ITV companies about the ownership rules and other issues.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge the value of a genuinely produced and transmitted independent commercial television service to local areas such as my own in south-east Scotland? Will he say more about the discussions? Is he aware that the small independent companies are expressing great concern at the lack of protection that may exist for them after 1 January? Will he give an assurance that they will have a degree of protection similar to that afforded to the larger companies under the existing rules? Will he confirm that an article in today's *Financial Times* indicating that he will make an announcement in September is something like the truth?

Mr. Brooke: I am happy to join the hon. Gentleman in his commitment to, and endorsement of, the importance of regional quality. The Broadcasting Act 1990 was written in such a way as to ensure that the ITC made certain of that. As to protecting the small companies, the hon. Gentleman will know how the legislation is written. The meeting that I held on 14 June, on which I am still deliberating, obviously related to events after 1 January in a number of directions.

Mr. Etherington: No, 7, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Questions Nos. 2 and 7 are linked.

Mr. Etherington: Things are not always too good on a Monday, Madam Speaker.

When the Secretary of State speaks to the heads of ITV companies, will he make them aware that many people in the industry are deeply concerned about the prospect of an internal carve-up and a free-for-all? It is also widely felt by many in the industry that this is merely a self-propagating effort by those with a vested interest in the matter. Will the Secretary of State ensure that those who are stating that in the region of £100 million can be saved by doing away with duplication between various companies are made to explain fully to the Secretary of State's satisfaction that that is the case, and that it is not just another example of the companies advancing their own views to their own advantage?

Mr. Brooke: The rules relating to ownership are written into the 1990 Act. I acknowledge—as I did to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood)—that my meeting with ITV companies on 14 June related to that and to other matters. As to the £100 million savings, that issue was raised at the 14 June meeting and I have had subsequent correspondence with a number of those present pressing just the point that the hon. Gentleman made.

Mr. Simon Coombs: My right hon. Friend will be well aware that there is, to put it mildly, some dispute between the chairmen of the various ITV companies over whether the moratorium at the end of the year is likely to lead to a greater risk of a foreign takeover of some of the smaller ITV companies. Does he have a view on that dispute and if he has concluded that there is some likelihood of a foreign takeover, does he propose taking any action to prevent it?

Mr. Brooke: The issues that relate to what happens after 1 January came up at the meeting that I held on 14 June, so I was made fully aware of the views of individual Channel 3 companies about that proposition. We are of the view that our rules should be on all fours with those of the rest of the Community and we are taking an interest in those countries where we feel that the rules are not drawn up on the same basis as our own.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend accept that immunity from takeover and protectionism for existing management do nothing for the quality of programmes or for the efficiency of companies?

Mr. Brooke: I could not possibly disagree with my hon. Friend. On the other hand, if we were to proceed with the Broadcasting Act 1990 as currently written, companies in this country would be in a slightly different position from those in other Community countries after 1 January.

Mrs. Clwyd: As there is some dispute, will the Secretary of State tell us the net amount he expects the ITV companies to pay to the Government this year compared with the amount paid under the old levy system? Is he aware that Yorkshire Tyne Tees Television is to axe a further 188 jobs in yet another cost-cutting exercise? Does that not confirm what the Labour party has repeatedly said about the discredited Broadcasting Act 1990 and the damage being inflicted on ITV? When will the Secretary of State understand that staff loyalty, staff continuity and, above all, adequate staffing levels are critical to maintaining programme quality?

Mr. Brooke: I am, of course, aware of the commentary in one of today's newspapers about the specific amounts that ITV companies are paying in levy this year, although I have not yet done my own detailed cross-analysis of those figures. The hon. Lady knows that I share her views on the need to maintain the production base of television in Britain and that there are many aspects to that question beyond those that she has mentioned.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that strict enforcement of programme obligations, the current ownership structure and the regionality of ITV make it all the more important that the House should have regard to the funding of ITV? Does he accept that commercial pressure is being brought to bear on ITV at the present time? As a constructive way to resolve that problem, would he consider bringing forward the review of the ITV franchise arrangements to coincide with the review of the BBC charter?

Mr. Brooke: I understand my hon. Friend's proposition, but it would be premature to take a decision of that nature. On the other hand, I mentioned to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) a moment ago my

concern that we maintain the production base in this country. That larger issue will certainly inform our thinking.

Broadcasting Act 1990

3. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to seek to amend the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Mr. Brooke: I have no present plans to amend the Act.

Mr. Sedgemore: As the stability of commercial television is now threatened by takeover mania, and as Granada has expressed an interest in taking over London Weekend Television, as has Carlton, and in taking over Central, Yorkshire and Tyne Tees, will the Secretary of State guarantee that there will be no change in the legislation to enable major regional companies to be taken over by national monopolistic conglomerates? Should not people like Jerry Robinson, the tea boy at Granada, concentrate on programme making rather than on pushing up Granada's share price for his personal benefit?

Mr. Brooke: In answer to an earlier question, I paid tribute to the issue of regional quality and to the fact that the legislation is written in such a way that the Independent Television Commission can ensure that that quality is maintained. On the rest of the question, I have made it clear that the issues that we discussed at the meeting with the heads of the Channel 3 companies on 14 June covered a wide agenda. It was a lively but good-natured debate. All aspects of the issue were discussed constructively by all parties.

Mr. Streeter: In any future amendments to the Broadcasting Act 1990, will my right hon. Friend consider introducing provisions to ensure that the Arts Council continues to fund excellent municipal theatres such as the Theatre Royal in Plymouth, which has attracted more people per £1 of grant——

Madam Speaker: Order. What has this to do with broadcasting? The hon. Gentleman is referring to an earlier question.

Mr. Streeter: In any amendment to the Broadcasting Act, is it possible to include a provision whereby the Arts Council can be made to ensure that it supports mainstream municipal theatres——

Madam Speaker: Order. I understand the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm, but I think that we should now move on.

Mr. Bryan Davies: Does the Secretary of State accept that the fact that the heads of a number of major independent television companies seek to change the fundamental terms of their franchises and the fact that Richard Branson is seeking to alter the waveband on which he has received his franchise throw into question the whole operation of the Broadcasting Act? Is that not a comment on the fact that the legislation is so misguided that it is creating an absolute shambles in the broadcasting industry?

Mr. Brooke: Taking the second premise relating to Virgin Radio and the waveband first, in any negotiation for an exchange of the waveband, it would not be within the gift either of Mr. Branson or of anybody with whom he sought to effect such an exchange to make that exchange. Control over the wavebands remains with the Radio Authority, with which he should therefore treat. The purpose of the meeting on 14 June—at which, I hasten to say, the smaller companies were as interested in being present as the larger companies were—was to discuss a way forward, looking at the larger objective of maintaining the quality and the production base of British television.

London Hospitals

4. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proportion of London hospital facilities are listed buildings.

Mr. Sproat: There are some 90 hospitals in the 12 central London health districts, of which 25 are subject to 80 statutory listings.

Mr. Cohen: Did not the 1987 report show that there were 770 listed hospitals in Britain, of which 11 were grade I—the equivalent to this place and Westminster abbey—a further 58 starred grade II and all the rest of historic significance? Has not Save Britain's Heritage been fiercely critical of the neglect of many hospitals, including the neglect emanating from the Government? Is not the position set to get a lot worse with the closure of hospitals in London? Will the Minister step in as part of his departmental responsibilities to save London's heritage hospitals such as St. Bartholomew's, or is the neglect part of a conspiracy with health Ministers, business-oriented health managers and developers, who see listed hospitals only as the source of a quick buck?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman asks a very important question. The answer is that the Secretary of State for Health is responsible for ensuring that the heritage aspects of hospitals are maintained. Only last week, we issued general guidance to those who find that they are in charge of listed buildings, but who find that there is no longer a commercial use for those buildings. We are trying to reach an agreement whereby people understand that for the buildings to be preserved for commercial use one or two of the statutory listings may have to be changed. My Department has also set up a task force between the Department of Health and ourselves to ensure that the considerations that the hon. Gentleman mentioned are taken into account.

Mr. Ward: Is my hon. Friend aware that many of us appreciate the work being done by his Department in listing London hospitals and many other buildings? Will he proceed with extreme caution, however, before committing public money to buildings that clearly have no use or no useful life to come?

Mr. Sproat: We will certainly be careful. That is why I mentioned that where it is possible to maintain a building with a commercial use, we quite understand that there may have to be one or two changes in the statutory listings in order that the building as a whole may continue. As to my hon. Friend's question about hospitals, that is primarily a question for the Secretary of State for Health.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Under-Secretary of State seriously saying that those hospitals that have been maintained over centuries, such as St. Bartholomew's, will

not be given any special concessions, and if it is in the commercial interests of the Secretary of State for Health to let that building go, presumably because it is a city centre site for which she can obtain a large amount of money, he will do nothing to ensure protection for existing buildings? If that is his implication, we shall begin to understand rather more clearly why the Secretary of State for Health is so anxious to get rid of that major centre of importance.

Mr. Sproat: I am absolutely not saying that. I am saying that the Secretary of State for Health has a duty to look after the heritage buildings within her remit. Her Department spends £500 million a year on the maintenance of a current estate. Within that, the listed aspects of the building will be protected. If the buildings are sold off, that is a matter for her. The heritage aspects will absolutely not be neglected either way.

Performing Arts

5. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations his Department has received about the impact on British performing arts of local authority discretionary grant policy.

Mr. Sproat: Since the establishment of the Department of National Heritage last year, we have received more than 300 letters about local authority discretionary grant policy and its impact on students of dance and drama.

Mr. Luff: Does my hon. Friend agree that the British performing arts make an enormous contribution not only to cultural life but to the economy? Is he aware that the local education authority discretionary grant policy in many counties, including my county of Hereford and Worcester, means that many talented young people are unable to play their full part in that success story? Does he share my concern at the damage that that is doing to the future success of the British performing arts?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend has been a persistent and assiduous campaigner for this important subject. It is certainly true that most of the letters and representations that we have had have shown that an awful lot of students are not able to take up places because local authorities have declined, for whatever reasons, to fund them——

Mr. Tony Banks: Your lot did it.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman should wait. I accept that there is a serious problem. It may well be that there is a genuine shortage of money, although local authorities were given sums that the Department of the Environment thought sufficient. To settle the matter, the National Foundation for Educational Research will examine precisely what the facts are. Depending on what those facts are, the Secretary of State and I will speak to the Department for Education, which has a lead in the matter, to see what needs to be done to sort it out.

Ms Glenda Jackson: I welcome the Minister's response to the previous question—that there could indeed be a financial shortfall, which is having a deleterious effect on those young people who manage to gain the very few and highly contested places in drama schools—but does he agree that there is little or no point in any young person taking a place in a drama school if the Arts Council is allowed to pursue its stated policy of closing 10 regional theatres? Is there any aspect of the cultural life of this country for which the Government take responsibility?

Mr. Sproat: We certainly take responsibility and the £225·6 million that we shall give to the Arts Council this financial year is proof of that. That sum will be spent at the decision of the Arts Council. It has taken decisions that are nothing to do with me. Indeed, I am prevented by the arm's-length principle from lavishing so much as a breath of praise or dispraise upon it. It is up to the Arts Council. If the hon. Lady disagrees with the Arts Council's policy of moving away from drama and music towards contemporary dance, she should lose no opportunity of telling it so.

Mr. Dickens: Is the Minister aware that in the borough of Oldham, we have a theatre workshop, the Oldham Coliseum theatre and one of the best repertory companies in the United Kingdom? Does he agree that it is important not only that funding reaches those worthy causes but that all hon. Members who purport to support the arts should help the National Lottery, etc. Bill complete its passage through Parliament before the summer recess?

Mr. Sproat: I hope that the Bill will get its Royal Assent before the recess. Otherwise, I agree, as so often, with my hon. Friend's words of wisdom.

Mr. Corbett: Does the Minister care that 23 theatre in education companies in England and Wales, including the Collar and Tie in the constituency of the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff), have lost around £1 million in grants this year, mainly because of cuts in what the Government will allow local authorities to spend, and that they face further cuts because of money being taken from the Arts Council grant? Does he understand that this may see the end of the unique blend of theatre and educational drama, mainly for children in areas where no other theatre exists? Will he set up an independent inquiry into how theatre in education companies can be funded from next April or is he content simply to see another slice of our theatre wither away?

Mr. Sproat: The issue arises on a later question and if the hon. Member will contain himself in patience, he will get a powerful answer at that point. However, I fear that I would be trespassing on your patience, Madam Speaker, if I gave a longer answer on that now.

National Lottery

6. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects the first moneys to be paid out by the National Lottery Charities Board.

Mr. Brooke: We hope that money will be available to be paid out by late 1994 or early 1995 for charities and the other good causes.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he know that I am being pressed by the local Liberal Democrats in my constituency to get that money through as quickly as possible? Can he ensure that all parties in the House understand that all my constituents, from whichever party they come, are keen to see that money come through as quickly as possible so that it can go to all the excellent sports and arts projects that they wish it to support?

Mr. Brooke: I am delighted to hear that the Liberal Democrats of South Dorset are pressing to get the Bill through as early as possible, as their party in the House voted against Third Reading of the Bill.

Mr. Enright: Will the Secretary of State kindly tell us whether there is any particular significance in the archaic use of the word "monies" in the question as originally tabled, and more particularly in the archaic use of that form of the plural, or is it merely a dry run for the Government's English test for 14-year-olds?

Mr. Brooke: As the hon. Gentleman may know, in terms of such textual criticism, his question should be addressed to my hon. Friend and not to me.

Tourism, West Yorkshire

12. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the promotion of tourism in West Yorkshire.

Mr. Sproat: That is a matter for the English tourist board through its strategy for support to the regions, and for the Yorkshire and Humberside tourist board through its strategy for meeting local needs and priorities.

Mr. O'Brien: I accept the Minister's reply, but does he accept that there are problems with the Yorkshire and Humberside tourist board and the English tourist board over financing? West Yorkshire, with its loss of jobs both in traditional industries such as mining, textiles and engineering and in other sectors, is looking for Government help towards tourism. Is the Minister prepared to meet the leaders of West Yorkshire council to discuss tourism and allow them to put to him their concerns over lack of resources to promote tourism throughout West Yorkshire?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I will glady meet a delegation if the hon. Gentleman wishes to bring it along. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate his region on the fact that the latest figures show 7·2 million overnight visitors in his area. Other areas in the United Kingdom have been more badly hit during the recession, but the excellence of the tourist facilities in his area ensured that the number of visitors there were kept up.

Mr. Robert Banks: Does my hon. Friend agree that the project to house the royal armouries in a brand new museum in Leeds will be, when completed, one of the largest and most important international tourist attractions in this country? Does he also agree that all political parties should come together to get the project built as soon as possible?

Mr. Sproat: I agree with my hon. Friend. The armouries in Leeds would be a tremendous addition to the city's tourist attractions. I hope that the project will go ahead as my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Pendry: The Minister is to receive a copy of the Coopers and Lybrand report that has been commissioned by the English tourist board steering committee, on which sits one of his representatives. If that report condemns the cuts in funding to the English tourist board that were made by the Minister's predecessor, will he take the best initiative to encourage tourists to Normanton, Bradford, Halifax and elsewhere in West Yorkshire by being bold, brave and sensible enough to restore the funding?

Mr. Sproat: So far as West Yorkshire is concerned, I note that two applications for tourism renewal grants have been received from Wakefield and Dewsbury. No doubt both those applications will be considered properly by the tourist boards.

Although it is true that overall funding to the British Tourist Authority and the English tourist board has been cut, the British Tourist Authority's grant will be maintained. We believe that, within the cuts that have been made necessary by the economic climate, there should be a slight shift away from centralised English tourist boards to those run by the regions.

Lady Olga Maitland: While continuing to promote tourism in West Yorkshire, will my hon. Friend also continue the campaign against deregulation? Does he agree that unnecessary regulation in the hotel and entertainment industries has been crippling, and has resulted in increased costs to the customer?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend makes a good point. In West Yorkshire, and elsewhere in the country, there is no doubt that the competitive edge of our tourist industry —when compared with other countries—has been worsened by the heavy regulatory burden. I am determined to remove as much of that unnecessary burden as possible and to make our industry more competitive when compared with other countries.

Theatre in Education

13. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to meet representatives of theatre in education to discuss funding.

Mr. Sproat: theatre in education companies have traditionally been funded by local education authorities together with the Arts Councils and regional arts boards. Any discussions on funding are most appropriately undertaken with those agencies.

Mr. Hall: The Minister will be aware, from the question put some moments ago by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), that theatre in education companies are under threat. Some theatres have closed and others are facing closure because they have lost revenue, because of council tax capping placed by the Government on local authority spending, because of the lack of money that is available through the local management of schools and because of the threatened cuts in Arts Council grants.

The Minister should recognise that theatre in education provides a unique dimension to education in many thousands of schools throughout the country. Does he agree that the shortfalls—amounting to £1 million—should be met by the Government? Will he instigate a full public inquiry into the funding of theatre in education for the years to come?

Mr. Sproat: No to the hon. Gentleman's last question, no to his second last and yes to his third. I agree that theatre in education can make an important contribution to schools, but those involved now must realise that they must sell themselves to individual schools because of the

local management of schools process. If they do that, and if individual schools want to have theatre in education, the projects will continue.

Independent Television

14. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received concerning the operation of the Independent Television Commission.

Mr. Brooke: This year, I have received five representations from four hon. Members about various aspects of the ITC's activities.

Mr. Barnes: I do not know whether any of those representations backed the ITC's position on "News at Ten". I hope that the Minister will support that position and that adopted by the National Heritage Select Committee, which wants the programme to remain at 10 o'clock, so that political news—including 10 o'clock votes from this House—sports news, news from America and hard-hitting news generally can be properly dealt with. We need news at ten, not nudes at ten.

Mr. Brooke: The obligation of the Channel 3 companies is

"simultaneously to broadcast high quality news programmes dealing with national and international matters at peak viewing times".

The hon. Gentleman has drawn the attention of the House to the action of the chairman of the ITC, who will be awaiting a response from the Channel 3 companies.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Magistrates Courts

27. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Attorney-General what proportion of cases pursued by the Crown Prosecution Service in magistrates courts in the last 12 months have resulted in a conviction.

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): For the year ending 31 March 1993, 97·6 per cent. of cases that proceeded to a hearing in the magistrates court resulted in either a guilty plea or a conviction.

Mr. Booth: Is my right hon. and learned Friend satisfied that those excellent figures have been achieved by the Crown Prosecution Service adopting the test of a reasonable prospect of conviction, not some higher esoteric standard?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I am satisfied of that. It is extremely important to make it clear that when the CPS reviews the evidence to determine whether there is a sufficiency of admissible, substantial and reliable evidence, it applies the test of a realistic prospect of conviction—not, as is sometimes suggested, a higher test.

Mr. John Morris: Is the Attorney-General aware that, despite a 50 per cent. increase in recorded crime since 1987, the number of cases that the police are instructed by the CPS to drop has nearly doubled? What role has the Treasury had in creating a situation in which arrested people are allowed to walk free because of the cost of bringing them to trial? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that 32 per cent. of cases are dropped on public interest grounds? Has he agreed to that? Will he define it in the context of decisions taken by CPS officers? Will he publish the instructions given to them; and what is the lowest grade of officer allowed to take such a decision on public interest grounds?

The Attorney-General: I am not aware of any case that has been dropped on the ground of cost. The shadow Home Secretary has visited the Crown Prosecution Service this morning, I am glad to say, and has been able to hold discussions and form his own views on these very matters. Meanwhile, I am glad to have been able to answer the right hon. and learned Gentleman clearly in this regard.

When cases are discontinued on public interest grounds, cost is not the reason. It will be well understood by the House that it is not in the public interest to prosecute every elderly person or every frail person or everyone suffering from some injury or every case for which there is sufficient evidence.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that our magistrates courts are capable of dealing with a great many more cases, especially those that go to the Crown court? Does he agree that the recommendation by the royal commission to end the right to trial by jury would end the scandal of 83 per cent. of those electing trial by jury pleading guilty? Is not the reason for that the fact that policemen are spending too much time writing up reports and preparing cases for court, which keeps them off the streets?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to the 83 per cent. of defendants who choose to go to the Crown court and then to plead guilty once they get there. That imposes what the royal commission has suggested are unreasonable costs and a waste of resources on the system.

London Borough of Bromley

28. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Attorney-General when the Crown Prosecution Service received reports from the Metropolitan police into two separate allegations of fraud within the social services and environmental health departments of the London borough of Bromley; and whether the Crown Prosecution Service now intends to prosecute.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): An initial report concerning the social services Department was received on 17 October 1991. Following further police investigations, an additional lengthy report was submitted on 20 May 1993. Meanwhile a report concerning the environmental health department was received in February this year. Police inquiries continue and decisions on prosecution will be made as soon as possible.

Mr. Dowd: Is the Solicitor-General aware that it is now almost two years since this matter was first reported to the Metropolitan police, and almost a year since it was first reported to the chief executive and monitoring officer of the London borough of Bromley? Is not it a disgrace that it has taken so long for a decision to be reached on a matter of such importance and significance, and that we are still told today that decisions are awaited? Will the Solicitor-General give an assurance that incompetence and corruption in local government will be pursued as

vigorously as possible, wherever they arise, and not soft-pedalled in areas that the Government and the Conservative party regard as particularly sensitive?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman is quite right that all cases ought to proceed with expedition. Where there are allegations of fraud and corruption, as in this case, it is doubly important that they are investigated rigorously. It is not unusual for such fraud to be carried out in a secretive way by those involved, and, for that reason, the police sometimes find that it takes a considerable time to investigate. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that it is not in the interests of justice for defendants to be tried on half-baked inquiries, which are then found to be without substance when fully tested at trial.

As to political considerations, I remind Opposition Members of the words of Mr. Peter Archer, when he was Solicitor-General, which were contained in a Fabian pamphlet. I do not suppose many Opposition Members read Fabian pamphlets nowadays. Mr. Archer said that no Law Officer takes into account party considerations.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. and learned Friend accept that there is widespread concern about corruption in local government? Does he further accept that many hon. Members would like to see an inquiry into the corruption in local government, in view of the deplorable events in Lambeth?

The Solicitor-General: A number of inquiries are being held up and down the country into local government dishonesty and fraud. There are two cases of alleged fraud in the Bolsover district council, in which one defendant has already been convicted and the other has been tried and a retrial of his case is awaited.

Asil Nadir

29. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received in the last two years over the Nadir case.

The Attorney-General: I have explained to the hon. Member in a written answer this afternoon, of which I have given him notice, that a total of eight Members have written or spoken to me or my predecessor about this case. Of these, four have made representations during the past two years.

Mr. Winnick: It is now eight hon. Members and not seven. Although the Attorney-General is reluctant to reveal their names, can he explain why the majority of hon. Members who made representations are very reluctant for their identities to be known? What were their reasons for making those representations in the first place? Is not there a particular responsibility on those who championed the cause of Mr. Nadir in the House of Commons, strongly to urge him to return so that he can put his case in open court? Does the Attorney-General accept that the money given by Mr. Nadir to the Conservative party should be returned promptly because it comes from a very dubious source?

The Attorney-General: I do not accept the factual premise of the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. Most people, I think, have made it clear whether they wrote—[HON. MEMBERS: "No, they have not. Name them."] However, as to contributions to any particular political party, the hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a matter for me. This case makes it abundantly clear that it does not produce any favour or affection either way, whatever party may be involved.

Mr. Dykes: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, while not condoning melodramatic practices by any of its operatives, hon. Members should not, in general, attack the Serious Fraud Office? Should we not all support it and give it greater resources in the fight against fraud?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend may have seen the remarks in the royal commission's report about the importance of the work of the Serious Fraud Office, both in maintaining high standards of financial probity in the financial services industry and in making it possible for anyone who abuses the privileges that apply to that industry, thereby damaging investors—often small investors—to be brought to justice more effectively.

Lenient Sentences

30. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Attorney-General how many cases have been referred to the Court of Appeal on grounds of leniency of sentences in the past 12 months.

The Solicitor-General: In the 12 months to 30 June 1993, the Attorney-General applied to the Court of Appeal for leave to refer 33 sentences for review, including five in Northern Ireland. Of the 19 references so far determined by the court, 16 have resulted in an increased sentence.

Mr. Garnier: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the Court of Appeal's judgments in those referred cases have already been of considerable assistance to sentencers at first instance? In the spirit of open government, will he publish the letters that he received from Opposition Members who voted against the Criminal Justice Act 1991, which included that power, so that we may know that those who voted against it now seek to make use of it?

The Solicitor-General: That power is now widely accepted as important and necessary and we often see it referred to by judges in their sentencing remarks. I shall resist the temptation that my hon. Friend has extended to me but, on Second Reading in 1988, an Opposition Member described that power as "sheer cruelty". He appears to have a poor memory because, only a short time ago, he wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend asking him to refer the sentence in the Newport case to the Court of Appeal and invite it to pass a severe sentence. However, following our usual custom of confidentiality, I shall spare his blushes and shall not publish his letter.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Elephants

35. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what resources he will make available for elephant conservation projects during the current financial year.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): We estimate that conservation projects supported by the aid

programme, which may include benefits to elephant conservation, will amount to £2·85 million in the current financial year.

Mr. Banks: I noticed that the Minister said only "may". We need to know precisely how much money is being paid out to protect, wherever possible, the welfare of elephants. Is he aware that, because of drought, civil war and the continued activities of illegal ivory poachers in sub-Saharan Africa, enormous pressures are being put on herds of African elephants, a noble and magnificent beast which is close to extinction in some places? Will he please consider earmarking far more money for elephant conservation schemes? The people of this country would support that wholeheartedly.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We all know what the hon. Gentleman has done to save the elephant and he is to be commended. He must agree that the British Government have done very well. We did exceptionally well in 1992, when there was a further £600,000 specifically for helping elephant populations.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend agree that the key to protecting endangered species is effective action on bio-diversity to protect their habitats? In that context, what has his Department done to help elephants?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We do a lot for bio-diversity conservation generally, including the protection of habitats. At present, there are 78 projects wholly or partly concerned with bio-diversity and those cost some £37 million a year.

Kenya

36. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Kenya to discuss bilateral issues.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will visit east and southern Africa later in the year. Her detailed programme is not yet available.

Mr. Cox: When the Minister's right hon. and noble Friend visits eastern and southern Africa, will she note the fundamental changes in monetary and economic policy that the Kenyan Government are now following, adding to their increased problems with refugees from Somalia? Will the Government be sympathetic to requests for aid, should they be made, and for releasing funds earmarked for Kenya?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Kenyan Government have had difficulty with the International Monetary Fund, but reached a new agreement in May of this year called the shadow programme, which we and the IMF will monitor. If the shadow programme is successful over a period, the IMF and the British Government will consider their position on new balance of payments support and other such matters.

Sir David Steel: Will the Minister take this opportunity to reinforce the concern that has already been expressed by Her Majesty's Government about the official sabotage of the printing presses of Fotoform Ltd, whose managing director is a British citizen? Will he make it clear that enforced continued non-publication of various magazines by that press constitutes unwarranted interference with the freedom of the press?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have repeatedly stressed the importance of a free press as one of the cornerstones of a healthy democracy and strongly condemn the police action against Fotoform printers. We are pressing for the court case to be concluded urgently.

European Development Fund

37. **Mr. Wells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the effectiveness and economy of administration of the European development fund; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): The European Commission is responsible for administering the European development fund. We are in constant touch with the Commission and with other member states to improve its effectiveness.

Mr. Wells: Is it not true that Britain, under the leadership of my right hon. Friend, takes the lead in insisting on a more efficient and focused European development fund, and the co-ordination of its policies with member states' aid policies?

Mr. Hurd: I hope so. We should certainly like to see in the European development fund greater concentration on countries in real need with a record of good government. Making multilateral programmes more effective is increasingly important, as they make up a steadily increasing part of the total aid programme.

Mr. Meacher: The Prime Minister decided at Edinburgh last December to double the United Kingdom's contribution to the European development fund and the EC aid programme by the year 2000, while freezing the British aid programme for the next two years. In view of that, has the Foreign Office told him that such policies are throwing Britain's bilateral aid programme into turmoil? Is he aware that his own Department has released a statement declaring that the next two-year freeze will reduce Britain's aid programme by £150 million and that, in terms of value for money, after black Wednesday's devaluation, that figure will be nearer to £250 million? Will he confirm that his own Department is preparing contingency plans for major cuts in aid? When will the Foreign Secretary start standing up for the aid budget and stop being such a soft touch?

Mr. Hurd: We are beginning, not ending, this year's public expenditure round and we all know the problems affecting that round. There will be pressures on the aid programme, as on other public expenditure programmes. As I said in answer to the first question, I believe that multilateral contributions, whether to the EC or the United Nations, are a steadily increasing part of the total aid programme. I believe that our bilateral programme is second to none in its quality and I intend to maintain an effective programme.

Population and Development Conference

38. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on preparations for the international conference on population and development to be held in Cairo in 1994.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I understand that the United Nations preparations are proceeding well. The Overseas Development Administration will continue to work closely with everyone involved to help ensure the success of this important event.

Mr. Ottaway: I thank my hon. Friend for that positive statement. I congratulate him and the Prime Minister on persuading the G7 summit to agree to encourage the success of the United Nations conference, which reflects the growing concern over the population issue. Does my hon. Friend accept that there is growing concern that what is meant to be a conference on population and development is rapidly turning into a conference on development and a bit of population?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I very much agree with my hon. Friend that the conference must be about population, not development generally—it is essential to get that message across. My hon. Friend and the all-party group on population and development are to be congratulated on drawing attention to what is a great problem. There is no purpose in having aid programmes if they do not, in considerable measure, address the problems of population growth for the future of the world in the next century.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that, as we prepare to go to some of these conferences, some countries find it odd that this country and Europe still pay farmers to reduce production through set-aside programmes? Should not we try to use that food to help with the problems of population and development in other parts of the world?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: All those questions can be considered at the conference. The important point is to understand the principles that are at stake.

Russian Federation

40. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet European colleagues to discuss continuing aid to the Russian Federation.

Mr. Hurd: Aid from the European Community and member states makes up 70 per cent. of all western support to Russia and the rest of the former Soviet Union. I meet my European colleagues regularly, and support for Russia is often discussed.

Mr. Fabricant: Following the success of my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister at the G7 summit, we are all aware that £3 billion will be given to assist the Russian Federation. Will my right hon. Friend expand on this and state the sort of aid that we give to Russia, especially for expertise on privatisation?

Mr. Hurd: I think that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister may touch on that in a few minutes. It was certainly an important result of his expedition to Tokyo. Through our British know-how fund and the schemes that were confirmed and extended at Tokyo, it is important to give special assistance to Russian privatisation and to small and medium enterprises in Russia. I think that my right hon. Friend will give details of the extra commitments that were made.

Economic Summit (Tokyo)

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): Madam Speaker, with permission, I should like to make a statement on the economic summit in Tokyo and the Group of Seven meeting with President Yeltsin.

I attended the summit with my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. During the three days I also had bilateral meetings with our host, Prime Minister Miyazawa, and with the Presidents of the United States and Russia and the Prime Minister of Canada. The summit produced significant achievements. These are set out in the economic and political declarations which I have placed in the Library of the House.

Before the Tokyo summit, the GATT talks had been stalled for several months. The summit acted as a catalyst. The United States, Japan and the European Community negotiated a report on access to each others' markets which has led to a resumption of GATT negotiations in Geneva this morning.

The report offers large benefits to British industry. In six of the eight categories where tariffs are to be abolished entirely, Britain is a net exporter. These include pharmaceuticals and construction equipment. Japan's agreement to abolish all the import duty on whisky will give a welcome boost to sales in a market which is already worth over £170 million a year to Scotland. Many other particularly high tariffs faced by British exporters will be cut by 50 per cent. or more. These include punitive United States tariffs on ceramics, glassware and high quality textiles. In other categories of manufactured goods, there was agreement to cut as many tariffs as possible by a third, or to harmonise them at low levels.

The Uruguay round is far wider in scope than previous multilateral trade negotiations. It still has a long way to go, but the Tokyo meetings have injected much-needed momentum and real progress on substantive issues—action as well as words—and the world-wide prospect of more trade and more jobs, especially for a trading nation like the British. With low interest rates and firm control of costs, British industry is exceptionally well placed to benefit from a successful GATT round.

Each summit country, except Japan, is facing a serious fiscal problem. With the exception of the United Kingdom, the European participants are not expecting economic growth this year. Against this background, the summit identified barriers to growth which have developed in much of the industrialised world.

As at the European Community's Copenhagen Council, I found a new willingness among our partners to address some of the hard lessons that we learnt in the United Kingdom during the recent recession. Three points in particular were generally accepted. The first is that there is a long-term upward structural trend in unemployment in addition to the cyclical effect of the recession. Secondly, on present forecasts, the cost of social provisions is likely to exceed the capacity to meet them in all the main industrial economies and, thirdly, that deregulation and labour market flexibility are vital to get unemployment down.

It was agreed that Europe should implement the firm budgetary and other measures needed to facilitate the rapid reductions in interest rates that are now required in many countries on the continent. In north America, strong action was being taken to bring down fiscal deficits over the medium term with the objective of securing higher saving and investment. Japan, meanwhile, will implement fiscal and monetary measures to ensure sustained growth led by strong domestic demand. That will help to reduce Japan's large current account surplus.

Each of those measures is intended to help growth around the world. The summit's accent on jobs was reflected in agreement to send high-level representatives to a special meeting that President Clinton is convening in the autumn. That will study the causes of unemployment and pool experience in seeking solutions.

In April, the Group of Seven put together an unprecedented set of measures to help Russia through its deep transformation. At Tokyo, the Heads of Government confirmed that approach and noted that some large financial flows were already being made available, including $1½ billion in a new IMF facility. We set out a programme worth some $3 billion to help privatisation and restructuring. There are now some encouraging signs of a spreading enterprise culture in Russia. The summit leaders told President Yeltsin that they were determined to sustain the huge support that they had given reform in his country.

Of equal importance, we have reinforced our political partnership with Russia. As an innovation this year, our agenda included a joint review with President Yeltsin of international problems. At my suggestion, the meeting concluded with an invitation to the Russian President to join us again next year in Italy.

The political declaration touches on many of the problems we discussed with President Yeltsin, or beforehand among the Seven. We supported a negotiated settlement for Bosnia. but only on the basis that it would be acceptable to the Muslim people and not imposed on them. We highlighted the importance of the non-proliferation treaty, supported the constitutional talks in South Africa and expressed concern about the behaviour of Iraq, Iran and Libya.

The summit paid close attention to problems of the developing world and of the environment. I secured agreement that improved debt reduction terms should be considered for the poorest and most indebted countries. I hope that that will carry implementation of the Trinidad terms further. On the environment, the summit reaffirmed its commitment to sustainable development and implementation of the Rio decisions.

Finally, a word about the summit process itself. Over 19 meetings, the summits have evolved from an informal discussion between Heads of Government into an enormously expensive and, in my view, over-structured international event. I believe that radical change is necessary if we are to get the best out of the summit process. I proposed innovations last year and I made further proposals in Tokyo. These were widely supported. I hope that, as a result, future summits will be more informal, less pre-prepared and will provide even more opportunities for spontaneous discussion between the summit Heads.

Despite the procedural weaknesses I have mentioned, the Tokyo summit produced results of particular benefit to the United Kingdom as an exporting nation and a leading advocate of free trade. It concentrated on problems that are causing deep concern not just in this country, but around the world. It helped to bring leaders who are

addressing those problems in common closer together. It laid the groundwork, I believe, for productive work at future summits.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I thank the Prime Minister for making this report to the House.

We welcome the recognition by the Group of Seven that there is insufficient growth and too much unemployment in their economies. In particular, we welcome President Clinton's proposal for a special employment summit this autumn.

Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why, when similar issues were raised at the summit last year by the then French Government, he was, as was noted in Saturday's issue of *The Independent*, brusquely dismissive of the idea of unemployment being discussed, apparently saying:

"What for, if we can't do anything about it?"

Does the right hon. Gentleman now accept the need for closely co-ordinated international action to promote growth and employment, and that such action must be taken at the European level? Would not it be a good lead to others for Britain now to cut interest rates? Would not that also be very much in Britain's interests, given last week's warnings by Midland Montagu, among others, that recovery in our economy will flag unless there is a further cut in base rates? I welcome what the Prime Minister said about the progress that has been made on the GATT. Will he explain, however, why two of the critical issues—agriculture and trade and services—were ignored at the summit? Although valuable progress has been made in the quad talks to which he referred, all the agreements depend on a successful outcome on the difficult fronts. Why was agriculture ignored when the main protagonists in the dispute—France, the United States and Japan—were all around the same table?

Does not the Prime Minister recall that the G7 countries have promised to settle the issue in every summit since Houston four years ago, and that two years ago, at the London summit, the right hon. Gentleman himself pledged to remain personally involved in the process,

"ready to intervene if differences can only be resolved at the highest level"?

Why was the subject dodged at Tokyo?

Opposition Members also welcome the continued economic assistance for Russia; but is it not strange that the $4 billion package agreed by the G7 in April has now shrunk to $3 billion? Why has that happened, and what message is meant to be conveyed by such a startling reduction in such a short time?

Was any consideration given to assistance for the Ukraine, especially in the light of its genuine economic difficulties and the vital importance of its accepting the arms reductions agreed under the strategic arms reduction treaties?

Does the Prime Minister appreciate that there will be disappointment—in many parts of the House, I hope—that full agreement on the Trinidad terms of official debt reduction has still to be reached by all the G7 countries, and in particular by Japan? Should not consideration now be given to extending the principle of debt relief from bilateral to multilateral official loans, especially those of the International Monetary Fund and the World bank? Can that be put firmly on the G7 agenda?

We welcome the recognition in the declaration of the danger of nuclear proliferation and the vital importance of the non-proliferation treaty. Would not the process be assisted, however, if a comprehensive test ban treaty could be agreed? Will the Prime Minister join me in strongly welcoming the United States' decision to extend its own ban on tests by a further year?

Does the Prime Minister understand the depth of feeling, in this country and throughout the world, about the disastrous turn of events in the former Yugoslavia—which, I believe, merited only one sentence in his statement? Does he appreciate the incomprehension at the complete failure of the international community to address its responsibilities in Bosnia? As we speak, the Serbian siege threatens to overwhelm Sarajevo. How does the Prime Minister think the inhabitants of that city feel about the evasive platitudes of the G7 declaration? Have they not heard it all before? Meanwhile, Serb and Croat aggression continues unchecked.

Are we not in a parlous state when the whole United Nations effort—both humanitarian relief and peacekeeping—is stalling because of inadequate resources and support from the international community? Instead of vague threats such as

"Stronger measures are not excluded"—

which the Foreign Secretary got into such a mess trying to explain—should we not hear a commitment to action, such as the use of air strikes, to make the aggressors understand that the international community will no longer tolerate the defiance of United Nations authority and the dismembering of Bosnia?

Why are not sanctions against Serbia being toughened, and why are not sanctions being imposed on Croatia? Why are extra troops and greater resources denied to the United Nations in the field? Why is there no resolve to make safe areas the haven that they should be for the innocent sufferers in this bloody conflict?

Has not the summit generally failed to fulfil its exaggerated promises of success, and, in the case of Bosnia, completely avoided its fundamental responsibilities?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman was uncharacteristically negative, but I shall endeavour to deal with the points that he made. I am grateful for the welcome that he gave to parts of the agreement that have been reached. Whatever cross-party support is available is always helpful on these occasions internationally.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the report in *The Independent*. As is so often the case with newspaper reports, I am a little baffled by what the right hon. and learned Gentleman was quoting from, or what he might mean by it. *[Interruption.]* Well, he probably quoted something that was inaccurately reported.

As for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's question regarding co-ordinated action on unemployment at the European level, I refer him to the report that I gave on the Copenhagen summit some time ago, to which I believe he responded.

I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman that there is a long way to go on the Uruguay round. I specifically made that point. It was necessary to get the access agreement settled so that we could return to everybody negotiating, yet again, for both services and agriculture, where there are extremely difficult problems to be solved. What is vital is that, as a result of the agreement reached in Tokyo, the multilateral negotiations have started again this morning.

[The Prime Minister]

Whatever agreements may be reached by the quad, they are only a part of all the countries which finally have to reach agreement in terms of the Uruguay round. I have made the point on many occasions that each G7 summit since Houston has sought an agreement on the Uruguay round. It was for that reason that on a number of occasions in the last six months I approached other Heads of Government to try to push the negotiations along further, including a meeting that I had with the President of the Commission in the autumn of last year.

I have therefore, as I said I would, remained personally involved in this matter, and I propose to do so for one reason above all others. I believe that there is nothing more important internationally at the moment than a satisfactory outcome to the Uruguay discussions, for such an outcome will increase growth and create jobs in this country and around the world. I believe that that is vital. I know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman shares that view.

On the right hon. and learned Gentleman's questions about Russia, the $4 billion to which he referred that had been spoken of in April was an aim suggested by one member. It was not an agreement. We have agreed on $3 billion. No one is forthcoming with resources beyond that. When I met President Yeltsin at breakfast, and subsequently, he seemed to regard that as a very substantial contribution, and one for which he was extremely grateful. He did not have the reservations expressed by the right hon. and learned Gentleman about it.

As for the Ukraine, we are helping the Ukraine bilaterally. The reason for the inability to help the Ukraine multilaterally is that it has not reached an IMF agreement. If it is able to reach an IMF agreement, the prospect of further multilateral assistance is certainly necessary. The point made about arms reduction in the Ukraine is important. It was a point that we discussed, and it was discussed on previous occasions. It is a problem of immense complexity that we shall need to continue to address.

As for the Trinidad terms, Japan has always had a rooted objection to writing off debt. Japan is prepared to extend debt, but for its own internal accounting reasons it is deeply reluctant to write it off. The United States has often had the same difficulty. However, it has now established the principle of debt relief and will be meeting the Trinidad terms. That is a distinct move forward.

We agreed, as a result of discussions, that we would ask the Paris Club to look afresh at further help for the poorest countries. That will involve the Trinidad terms countries in particular. I expressed the view that I hoped that it would look at going well beyond the Trinidad terms and writing off a large proportion of the total stock of debt, not just the stock of debt that becomes due for repayment during the period of an IME agreement. That would be a substantial addition to write-off for the poorest countries in the world. We shall continue to push for that in the Paris Club.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to a comprehensive test ban treaty. That does remain a long-term aim. I hope that in due course we shall be able to achieve it.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman raised a series of points on Bosnia, points that he has raised on previous occasions. I am not sure that there is anything fresh in what he has said today. Although he was quite long on questions, he seemed to me to be a little short on solutions. It may be that he has lost touch with some of the events that are occurring on the ground. In respect of humanitarian aid, he will perhaps have noticed that even this morning my right hon. and noble Friend Lady Chalker announced a further £18·5 million worth of humanitarian aid from the United Kingdom to help people in Bosnia.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Did my right hon. Friend impress on the other European Community Heads of State and, in particular, on the President of the Commission, Mr. Delors, that if they are at all serious about reducing unemployment and improving employment prospects they should immediately abandon the social chapter and all similar policies, which would impose unnecessary costs on industry and commerce?

The Prime Minister: I am extremely sorry to say that Mr. Delors was unwell and was not therefore at the summit. He was represented by Mr. Christophersen, the Vice-President of the Commission, who is aware of the United Kingdom's views on the social chapter. We did not specificallly discuss it, but he is in no doubt whatsoever that we believe that the social chapter would cost jobs, not create them.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I thank the Prime Minister for having met an all-party group to discuss the Trinidad terms before he left for the Tokyo summit. How soon does he expect some results from the initiatives that he took at the summit?

Secondly, am I correct in understanding that none of the announced tariff cuts will take effect until the Uruguay round of the GATT talks has been completed, and should we not keep that in perspective?

Thirdly, on Bosnia, will the Prime Minister accept that neither the strong words of the G7 nor the humanitarian package announced this morning will do anything to help the potentially murderous siege of Sarajevo unless the United Nations troops on the ground are authorised and reinforced with resources by their Governments to enable them to break that siege?

The Prime Minister: On the three points that the right hon. Gentleman made, I hope that the Paris Club will begin soon to discuss the question of further debt relief. How rapidly it will reach a conclusion I am afraid I cannot anticipate. The United Kingdom will push for a comprehensive solution as speedily as possible, but we have run into difficulties. People believe that we have been a little ahead of them in seeking debt reduction in Toronto terms three or four years ago, in Trinidad terms a couple of years ago and now. There are distinct difficulties in other countries. It is possible for some countries to move ahead unilaterally, as we ourselves have done from time to time in the past, but that then diminishes the capacity of those countries to seek what the debtor countries most need, which is a comprehensive write-off of debt by the Paris Club and, where appropriate, by the London Club as well in terms of commercial debt.

One of the points that I hope all our partners will recognise is that there is no incentive whatsoever for many of the poorer countries to continue to try to lift themselves out of their present difficulties if every element of their

increased prosperity is then utilised to pay off an increasing level of debt interest on an increasing capital sum. I hope that it will be possible to have a substantial write-off.

On tariff reductions, the right hon. Gentleman is entirely right: nothing, in the famous terms, is agreed until everything is agreed. The hope and expectation is that the deadline will be in the middle of December——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Again.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman says, "Again", and he is right to be sceptical about it. We have done it, but we now have movement that we have not seen in the past with the fast track renewal in the United States and the breakthrough on access talks. I hope that we will get it concluded in December of this year.

On the question of Sarajevo, the right hon. Gentleman knows the Government's position. I am not in a position to offer fresh troops.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): The Prime Minister has clearly had a most excellent Tokyo summit, but may I congratulate him in particular on the work that he intends to undertake to make such gatherings much less structured and, hopefully, much less frequent? Is he aware that in certain circumstances travel narrows the mind and that there is nothing more absurd in the current circumstances than a gathering of the world's elite, discussing the nobility of its aims, at a time when right across north America and Europe there is an all-time record gap between the perceptions of Government and governed?

The Prime Minister: I strongly share the views expressed by my right hon. Friend. It may be that one of the reasons for that gap between the public and the politicians is an excess of summit fatigue, where people meet together without a realistic expectation of actually achieving what may have been expected from a summit of that sort.

I am delighted that colleagues have accepted many of the ideas for simplifying the summit process. I must confess that I did not achieve all the ideas that I wanted. I say with some trepidation, with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary sitting beside me, that I had hoped to restrict the summit to Heads of Government only and not Foreign Ministers and Finance Ministers. However, those of our colleagues with coalition Governments felt that they should continue to attend.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Is the Prime Minister aware that one of the advantages of these summits is revisiting, again and again, the continuing problems that face the world? Will he accept that what is needed now is the necessary pressure on Japan to reduce its balance of payments surplus and the essential requirement to move the GATT forward? The excessive trumpeting of success does not suggest that we have the GATT problem fully in mind.

The Prime Minister: We are well aware of the importance of the GATT round and no one in this House has been in any doubt about that for the past two years. Well over 100 nations are engaged in the Uruguay round talks. That makes it extremely difficult to reach agreement. As I indicated earlier, the talks are much wider and much more comprehensive than any previous trade talks. They include services and agriculture, and that has not been the case in the past. Those extensions are very welcome.

One point which deserves to be made is that many of the Cairns group of countries—in industrial terms, rather smaller countries—reached their GATT agreements three, four or five years ago and they have held to them. Their frustration at the difficulty of the United States and Europe in sticking to agreements that they reached months ago is entirely justified. I very much hope that we will be able to do that and also reach an agreement.

The point about revisiting problems is entirely right. However, it is not desirable to revisit them on occasions when there seems to be no practical opportunity of doing anything about them unless the revisiting is on the basis that I have proposed for the future—much more informal discussions.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, while the agreements in Tokyo are to be welcomed, there is no question but that a general reduction in tariffs is to be preferred to a series of bilateral agreements reached between different countries such as the United States and Japan? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the main purpose must be to achieve a reduction and success in the Uruguay round in agriculture? Will he confirm that no single country has the right of veto in such negotiations?

The Prime Minister: I would certainly confirm that. In terms of the European Community, an agriculture agreement is available by qualified majority vote. One hopes that that would not be necessary and I hope that, at the end of the negotiations, the advantages there for every western European country in industrial matters will ensure that no one would seek to block it on the grounds of agriculture. We need an agreement on agriculture. It will be a novelty to have one and it would be a very remarkable breakthrough if it were achieved.

With regard to my right hon. Friend's earlier point, a general agreement is infinitely to be preferred to bilateral agreements. Bilateral agreements are of little help to many of the developing countries.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): In his bilateral talks with President Clinton, did the Prime Minister discuss the United States ban on British nuclear tests in Nevada? Did he remind President Clinton that a year and a quarter ago this Government told the country that nuclear tests were indispensable to British security? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether British nuclear tests are still indispensable to British security, and will he give a clear yes or no?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I discussed that with President Clinton a few days before we went to Tokyo and we spent some time discussing it. The ban has been extended for a further year. We will wait and see whether other people outside the United States sphere of influence continue testing, in which case I think that the United States and we would as well. In that year, we are seeing whether we can find alternative ways of managing without the necessity for the tests. Some think that we can do that and we are still examining that. The scientists are as yet uncertain. I hope that it will be possible.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Although I congratulate my right hon. Friend on a very successful

[Mr. Patrick Cormack]

summit, may I press him again on Bosnia? Does he accept that, since the Washington declaration, events have deteriorated markedly, that no extra protection has been given to those in safe havens, and in Sarajevo in particular, and that that great European city stands on the brink of total collapse in the most atrocious conditions seen anywhere in Europe since the end of the second world war? There were some tough words in the declaration on Bosnia. Is my right hon. Friend prepared to say that they will be followed by action to try to save Sarajevo?

The Prime Minister: The Secretary-General, as my hon. Friend will know, is actually mustering troops at the moment in terms of the resolution, the number of which escapes me for the moment, on safe areas which was passed some time ago. We ourselves have provided troops; we have had troops in Bosnia for some time. We look forward to other people doing so as well so that that resolution can be carried out.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Given the importance of the level of world trade to British prosperity, may I welcome the small but important movements in the GATT negotiations that the Prime Minister announced this afternoon? May I remind the Prime Minister of the answer that he gave recently to the House, that one of the Government's objectives was to establish full employment? Is he aware that it is a long time since the House has heard that as an objective of Her Majesty's Government? Does the Prime Minister accept that, although many people have very useful ideas on how we could marginally increase the number in employment, nobody but nobody in the western world has any idea how to achieve his objective?

When Britain faced exactly the same situation in the 1930s, the then Prime Minister sounded a note of urgency by initiating a national debate and having that debate reporting directly to him. Will he consider a similar initiative so that when the British delegates go to Camp David they can go armed with new ideas, bringing hope to our constituents, some of whom have waited 10 years or more in the dole queues, rather than acting as mere intellectual bag carriers of other nations?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he had to say in his opening remarks about GATT. It was, of course, this country that raised at Copenhagen the significant question of employment across Europe and the long-term trend.

What is of increasing concern when one strips away the effect even of the recession is that right the way across Europe—not just in this country but right the way across Europe—from about 1970, under Governments of both parties, and at one stage two parties at once, there has been a general increase in unemployment. Worse than that, there has been a corresponding increase in long-term unemployment that is centred particularly upon low-skilled or unskilled males. That is not a British phenomenon; it is a phenomenon that one can see to a greater or lesser degree across the whole of the industrialised world, with the exception of Japan, where different circumstances apply.

We did raise the issue in Copenhagen. I raised it again in Japan. We will most certainly contribute forcefully both to the White Paper in Europe and President Clinton's discussions later on this year. Some jobs will certainly be created by supply side reform, some by growth, but there is not an automatic equalisation between growth and jobs, as hon. Members will realise. On any rational expectation, a satisfactory GATT agreement will also create a significant number of jobs. There is a series of events in train that can help to put people back to work. That is certainly our objective.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): As the substantial and exciting tariff reductions that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister fought so hard to achieve can be frustrated if the GATT round breaks down, what on earth can we do if the European Community is unwilling to reduce its agricultural expenditure which is currently beating every previous record, with the mountains of food breaking every previous record? Would it not greatly help the GATT discussions that the Prime Minister has worked so splendidly on if some member state within the EC would propose that either the CAP should be scrapped or that individual nations should be entitled to disengage from it? Would not that help my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in the fantastically good job that he did at Tokyo?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his helpful contribution. The Government agree with him on the need for CAP reform, and there has been some reform of the common agricultural policy. No doubt more will be necessary, but we will certainly endeavour to persuade all our European partners not to stand in the way of a comprehensive trade agreement.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In his opening statement, the Prime Minister referred to discussions on the behaviour of Iraq. What hard evidence did either the Americans or President Clinton give about the involvement of the Iraqi state in the so-called attempted assassination of President Bush in Kuwait? Is it likely, if it was Saddam Hussein's handiwork, that the would-be assassins would run out of petrol and not know where the university of Kuwait was? Will he be very careful before endorsing further military action and the launching of missiles on Baghdad?

The Prime Minister: I will send the hon. Gentleman a copy of the remarks concerning the behaviour of Iraq that were made recently by Ms Albright at the Security Council of the United Nations, which I think he will find of some interest. In the past couple of days, we have also seen obstruction of the United Nations weapons inspectors. I think that is a provocation. It stands in stark contrast to Iraq's obligations under Security Council resolutions and, clearly, that matter will now have to go back to the Security Council.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): May I ask my right hon. Friend—who always represents Britain at meetings of Heads of Government with distinction—a similar question to that which I asked him when he returned recently from the European summit in Copenhagen? What is the point of repeated high-flown communiqués drawing attention to the urgent need to reduce unemployment, when its principal creator, the central bank of Germany, is outside democratic control? Has my right hon. Friend, with his usual tact, reminded his German colleagues of the fact that it was not inflation but unemployment that brought down the Weimar Republic and put Adolf Hitler into power?

The Prime Minister: I cannot say that I made that particular point in that fashion at the summit discussions, but we indicated the importance that we attach to unemployment when we were in Copenhagen, bilaterally with other European and other Heads of Government, and again in Japan. I think there is a level of understanding about the concern that people feel about the problem that did not exist even a few months ago. I know that my hon. Friend's remarks will be read carefully in other places.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is not there an air of unreality about the fact that the Prime Minister had to go all the way to Tokyo to tell us that they have discovered unemployment in Britain? If he had asked in any region of the British Isles, he would have found out that everyone knows that there is a lot of unemployment in Britain. Instead of swapping advice with other Heads of State about how to fiddle the figures in different countries, and talking about level economic playing fields when there cannot be such a thing in the world, why does not he do something here at home, and save the pits, stop shutting the shipyards, save the engineering base, reintroduce exchange controls and introduce import controls? That is the way to save jobs in Britain.

The Prime Minister: I am sure that someone would have made a similar speech following the invention of the wheel.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Did my right hon. Friend make it clear at the summit that there will be no deeper involvement of our limited forces in Bosnia, or any mad adventure there, notwithstanding the blandishments of the armchair television warriors on the other side of the House? Will he suggest to them that, if they want a deeper involvement, they had better go out there and serve themselves?

The Prime Minister: I have said on a number of occasions that we have made a contribution in terms of troops to humanitarian aid. There has been a call by the United Nations for more troops. I think that that call should be met by those countries that have not yet contributed.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): While I recognise that every Member of the House will welcome the fact that the GATT round of talks seems to be under way again, will the Prime Minister say whether he believes in his heart of hearts that a conclusion can be reached by mid December?

As to the agreement on Scotch whisky reached by the quadrilateral partners, does the Prime Minister accept that throwaway remarks suggesting that it will be to the benefit of Scotland really mean that it will be to the benefit of the Exchequer? While the agreement may help to retain jobs in the whisky industry in Scotland, it will not create them. The issue underpinning that industry, which is a major exporter, is the need to eradicate the internal excise duty levied by Japan, which disadvantages Scotch whisky and other spirits produced in this country by £4 to £6.

The Prime Minister: As to the hon. Lady's first point, I think that a settlement can be reached. I cannot be certain because many complex matters have yet to be determined. I am in no doubt now that one can be reached, and I am delighted that the talks in Geneva recommenced this morning.

As the hon. Lady said, there are two elements in the difficulties faced by Scotch whisky in the Japanese market. One is the external tariff. When a settlement is reached, it will disappear entirely—100 per cent. of the external tariff will go. The other is the internal taxation level. We have been pursuing with the Japanese—and I did so again with Prime Minister Miyazawa—the high level of taxation on Scotch whisky. We will continue to do that in the hope of having it reduced. There has already been a significant reduction, or there will be, with the removal of the external tariff.

As I said in my statement, £170 million of exports go to Japan. As Scotch whisky will in future be cheaper, it is likely that exports will increase. That will certainly safeguard jobs, and I am not sure why the hon. Lady is so certain that it will not create them as well.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Is my right hon. Friend aware that perhaps the most popular policy being pursued by his Government at the moment is that of deregulation? It would be even more popular if it were more widely known. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that he was able to persuade his G7 partners that that is a popular and necessary part of a world policy, which will make the lives of small businesses in particular rather more fruitful in future?

The Prime Minister: They seemed persuaded. We shall see whether action follows the gentle response when I made that point in discussions. I believe that there is an understanding that there need to be supply side changes to create employment. One important change, as my hon. Friend said, is deregulation.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): On the question of Bosnia, the Prime Minister has sometimes given the impression that all the expert advice that he receives is that the west should not get involved in using military force to deter territorial aggression, first in Croatia and then in Bosnia. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm whether that is the uniform advice that he is receiving, or do senior diplomatic and military figures say that we could and should use military force to stop the slaughter in the former Yugoslavia?

The Prime Minister: I have received no advice either from senior diplomats or from military figures that a solution could be imposed by military force.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will my right hon. Friend accept the congratulations of my constituents, who are heavily involved in the textile and agriculture industries, on the results of the Tokyo summit? We are pleased at the 50 per cent. reduction in textile tariffs as against the United States. However, if that agreement cannot be put in place by December, does he understand that there will be a need for further reductions in the 50 per cent. tariff ratio so that we may achieve far better exports of British textile goods to the United States.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that we will achieve the settlement by December. In any event, that is not the end of the matter. Although a 50 per cent. reduction in tariffs is certainly welcome, we would have preferred a larger reduction—but that was what was negotiable on that particular occasion. I hope that we will return to that matter and seek an even larger reduction in the tariff, up to its complete elimination.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): Perhaps I may pursue the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), in response to which the Prime Minister seemed to be well intentioned and sincere in his desire to reduce unemployment but vague as to what he would do. Will the right hon. Gentleman share with the House a little more what new specific policy and initiatives the Government are currently examining which they may take to any new employment summit in the autumn?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, there was a range of matters to deal with unemployment. One is deregulation, which has just been mentioned. Not to impose extra costs on employers, as the social chapter would, is a second illustration of what needs to be done. Other measures include policies that will enable the economy to grow—as we have been seeking to do—and to protect capital investment, as we did in the previous public expenditure round. There are also the international macro points that I mentioned earlier: the United States is tackling its budget deficit, Japan will continue to support domestic demand as necessary, and in continental Europe there will be a move towards a reduction in interest rates. The necessity and attraction of closing the fiscal deficit in this country, as in other countries, is that it will be easier to make further interest rate reductions.

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the positive and warm support he receives from Conservative Members for the achievements of the summit, especially the progress towards freer world trade and the greater advantage that that will have for our manufacturing industry? Will he now renew his efforts among our European partners to ensure that they all share our enthusiasm for free world trade?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I will certainly do that. A number of our European partners are also firm advocates of free trade. There are one or two who are slightly less firm in their advocacy and we shall endeavour to encourage them. We are not the only advocates of free trade in Europe; a number of other nations wholly share our views.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): How much of the money that has been allocated to Russia will go towards helping to dismantle its nuclear weapons? Would not it impress the other G7 countries if, instead of talking about the nuclear non-proliferation treaty in glowing terms, the Prime Minister did something about it by introducing a programme in the United Kingdom to shift our manufacturing base away from producing weapons of war to manufacturing for peace and getting rid of Trident nuclear weapons? On the basis of his argument, our jobs will depend on either the manufacture or maintenance of weapons of mass extermination for the next 20 years. Is that his policy?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman refers to weapons of mass extermination, when nuclear weapons act as a deterrent to protect the nation. That is their purpose. If the hon. Gentleman is so keen for us not to manufacture them, I hope that he will make that point equally clearly in Barrow and Devonport and that he has previously made it in Rosyth. His point rings with a rather curious air against representations made by many of his hon. Friends during recent months.

Mr. Cryer: What about diversification?

The Prime Minister: On the question of Russia, to which I was just coming, we are already helping the Russians with the transport of nuclear weapons and with technical help on their destruction. That is of importance to Russia, and, as his right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition mentioned earlier, it is important to Ukraine, where further progress needs to be made.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): As my constituency is not far from that of the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) and as it produces pharmaceuticals, chemicals, engineering products and other products that fall into the eight areas on which, it has been agreed, tariffs will not be imposed in the future, may I warmly congratulate the Prime Minister on negotiating away those tariffs? I hope that he will bring as much pressure to bear as he can to end the GATT round as soon as possible.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I certainly undertake to do that, and I am grateful for his earlier remarks.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I noted with interest the Prime Minister's reference to the Rio accord, which is intended to underpin all economic and trade policies henceforth. I wonder whether the Prime Minister is aware that a recent United States district court ruling meant that the north American free trade agreement could not be ratified because it did not include an environmental impact statement. Is not it possible that a similar fate might await the GATT agreement and that that could unravel the whole round? In that case, will the Prime Minister give some detail about the nature of the environmental discussion in Tokyo and the effect on the agreement there?

The Prime Minister: One of the significant points made in the discussion on the environment at Tokyo was that President Clinton pledged himself wholeheartedly to the Rio accords. That was a shift of policy for the United States and one that was very welcome. As the hon. Gentleman may know, much work has been going on following Rio to produce national plans for sustainable development, for dealing with climate change, for biodiversity and for forests by the end of 1993. There have been meetings of the United Nations commission on sustainable development; the most recent was in New York last month. Developed and developing countries are now working together actively to put the Rio commitments into practice. Rio is becoming a reality.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of the issues that figured most prominently at Tokyo, such as cutting deficits, deregulation and improving the flexibility of the labour market, were issues of British concern? Just as at Copenhagen, the agenda reflected Britain's concerns. Does my right hon. Friend further agree that there is growing evidence that Britain's case is prevailing, both in Europe and in the rest of the world?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right about that point. It was very striking in the Copenhagen discussions just a few weeks ago and it was equally evident in our discussions in Tokyo last week. One of the reasons for that is that we went into the recession earlier than many other countries did. There is nothing like a recession to

concentrate people's minds on the reality of what needs to be done. Many countries, now that they are entering recession, are having to look, just as we have done, at some very hard decisions to help people and to recreate jobs.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): The Prime Minister conceded earlier that Japan was not experiencing high levels of unemployment. While he was in Tokyo, did he take the opportunity to look at what is happening in Japan? Did he notice, for example, that the Japanese are spending $70 billion in public works programmes to expand the economy? Did he notice that Japanese employers are trying to hold on to their workers and are not taking every opportunity to cut the work force? Did he notice that they are not as obsessed with the flexible labour market ideology? In fact, the Japanese Government and Japanese employers cannot understand all the fuss about the social market. Did the Prime Minister notice that, in spite of all that, it is the Japanese who have the substantial balance of payments surplus and that it is we who have the balance of payments deficit? When will he abandon the outdated Thatcherite philosophy and look at what really works in this world?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman may care to study Japan a little more closely before he entirely advocates that. He might, for example, not be entirely happy if we reduced our public spending share of gross domestic product to the Japanese level. That would make a significant difference and one that would be pretty unwelcome to the hon. Gentleman. If he looked at the social costs in Japan, he might also be just a little less enthusiastic. If he looked at some of the wage levels in parts of Japan, he might be a good deal less enthusiastic. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman spends his holiday in Japan.

Points of Order

4.22 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This is a genuine point of order on which I have had discussions with my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Attorney-General and a number of colleagues.

You will recollect and have had it brought to your attention, Madam Speaker, that in 1941 one of your predecessors, Mr. Speaker Clifton Brown, took exception to the various efforts made to raise under the emergency procedure the fall of Singapore before it actually happened. Are we to understand that your advice is that if there is a serious threat of military action whose importance is not challenged and whose urgency is not challenged, but which may not meet the third criterion, which is that it is definite, you cannot hear a Standing Order No. 20 application?

Bluntly, it is appalling that the House of Commons should face the situation where, apparently, there is British endorsement of a United Nations plan to launch missiles on a foreign city, Baghdad, which the House cannot discuss before it has actually happened. Will you, Madam Speaker, reflect over the next 24 hours and come up with a ruling on the conditions in which you will hear an application under Standing Order No. 20 in the case of possible military action?

Madam Speaker: I cannot anticipate what may or may not happen in an emergency. I must look at every application on its merits and I do precisely that. But as the hon. Gentleman knows, there have to be new developments. This is a continuing situation and there must be a new immediate development before I can grant an application. I look at each application to me entirely on its merits and will continue to do so.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I ask that you give a ruling debarring hon. Members who are Lloyd's names from voting on Report this evening or tomorrow on Third Reading. If hon. Members who are Lloyd's names vote themselves tax privileges which are worth perhaps thousands—or even tens of thousands—of pounds, that is tantamount to them putting their hands on taxpayers' money and putting it straight into their wallets.

Lloyd's names have a direct pecuniary interest and "Erskine May" cites a whole series of precedents in which hon. Members are debarred from voting. I realise that they mostly concern private Bills and that the Finance (No. 2) Bill is a public Bill. Nevertheless, the 14 clauses and two schedules in the Bill that apply exclusively to Lloyd's affect uniquely and personally those 44 Members who are shown on the Register of Members' Interests as having an interest in Lloyd's. Therefore, I feel that they should be debarred from voting, and I ask you to give that ruling.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) raised an important distinction between a private Bill and a public Bill. The Finance (No. 2) Bill is a public Bill.

I draw specific attention to amendment No. 21, which you have selected for debate this afternoon. It renders the special reserve funds liable to tax. My submission is that that represents an immediate and personal interest on the part of those hon. Members who are Lloyd's names.

No doubt, Madam Speaker, you will refer me to the ruling that your predecessor made on 14 January 1986 at column 1013 when the issue before the House was whether hon. Members who were Lloyd's names could vote for an amendment that widened the scope of the Finance Bill. Your predecessor quite rightly held that, on a matter extending the scope of the Bill, the House was dealing with a public matter.

In my submission, there is a difference. We are not talking about the scope of a public Bill. We are talking about an amendment, which, if pressed to a vote, would result in tax privileges being available to a number of hon. Members, all of whom are Conservative. It would be useful if you would give a ruling at to what exactly is meant by an "immediate and personal" interest, which is referred to on page 354 of the current edition of "Erskine May".

Finally, Madam Speaker, you will be aware that the matter was raised on 24 March 1981 by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in relation to the Lloyd's Bill. Mr. Speaker advised Members that if there was any doubt on the matter, they should not vote.

It would be helpful if you would let us have a ruling as the matter is of interest not just to Members of the House. Members of the public would like to be assured that the House would not let a situation arise where Members who

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

had a vested interest in their own benefit were allowed to vote in a way that other members of the public were precluded from doing.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that I can now deal with those points of order if I may be allowed to do so.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Shame.

Madam Speaker: Yes, it is a shame but we ought to make some progress and I am quite prepared to deal with those points of order.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) for giving me notice that he would raise this matter. The rule against voting on a matter in which a Member has a personal pecuniary interest does not apply on a public Bill so long as other similarly situated persons will benefit in the same way.

The provisions of the Finance (No. 2) Bill are not confined to those members of Lloyd's who are also Members of the House. There is no prohibition on such Members voting on this matter of public policy.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I have not finished. Hon. Members should not be so impatient, but should listen to my entire ruling. The House will expect members of Lloyd's affected by the Bill who speak in the debates on the relevant clauses to declare their interest.

Mr. Darling: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I should like to be clear about the matter. Do I understand that the effect of your ruling is that, because there are members of Lloyd's who are not Members of Parliament, Conservative Members of Parliament can vote for the measure, notwithstanding the fact that they gain direct benefit? I understand that a further procedure has to be invoked. However, the House must look at such circumstances because many people regard that as rather unfair.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. Let me take the matter a stage further because I want it to be clear to the House. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) is quite right. The measure affects other individuals outside the House and, for the sake of completeness, I shall leave the House with this thought. If I ruled that no hon. Member could ever vote on a measure that would allow him or her to enjoy benefits available to others, the House would never be able to vote for a reduction in income tax. I hope that that clarifies the point. I have given my ruling and I will accept no further points of order on that matter.

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is it a different one?

Mr. Evans: It is an entirely fresh point of order, Madam Speaker. May I have your guidance on clarification of the position under Standing Order No. 31, which, as you know, deals with the selection of amendments, so as to assist Back Benchers in future over the submission of amendments at this stage of consideration of a Bill? I am referring specifically to the Finance Bill.

The point is covered on page 502 of "Erskine May", which says that the power is exercised by the Speaker as "a check upon excessive repetition of debates which have already taken place in committee."

I have in mind that, on 10 May, the House, in Committee, spent a full day debating issues that appear to be grouped together under amendment No. 7 and other amendments on the provisional selection list.

I do not question your selection in any way, Madam Speaker, but I should like to know whether there has been any change in the guidelines or in Standing Orders, given that "Erskine May" says that that is a power that Speakers tend to exercise "rigorously".

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will find that "Erskine May" also says that the Speaker has total discretion over the selection of amendments. Irrespective of whether a matter has been debated earlier, it is at the discretion of the Speaker to decide whether to select such amendments for debate during our consideration of the Finance Bill.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I did not get involved in the points of order raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) and for Neath (Mr. Hain) because they dealt adequately with those points, which you then answered. However, in your answer——

Mr. Dickens: Ah, the hon. Gentleman will get involved now.

Mr. Skinner: No, this is straight and above board. In your answer, Madam Speaker, you said that if the rule were applied in the way that we wanted, hon. Members could not vote on a reduction in income tax because we would all benefit, as well as those outside. The clear distinction is that, while all Members of Parliament would benefit from a reduction in income tax from 25 to 20 per cent., or even to 15 per cent., in the Lloyd's case, only 44 Tory Members will benefit.

Madam Speaker: Clause 123 relates to Members of Parliament, but not all Members will benefit from it. That is quite distinct from the taxation point. I have given my ruling on the matter, and we should not now return to it.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On an entirely separate point of order, Madam Speaker. One of the developments that has taken place since I was elected in 1974 is that the House has adopted a much more tightly controlled attitude towards Members' financial interests. In the circumstances, would not it be helpful if you asked either the Select Committee on Members' Interests or the Select Committee on Procedure to look at the position of those who have financial interests and their voting abilities? I am not challenging your ruling because, unfortunately, I do not have the power to do that, but it might seem outside that it is inconsistent with the development of tighter scrutiny in the House.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can make such references himself. I am certain that my ruling will be seen to be accurate and logical when it has been printed and reflected on.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have listened carefully to what you have said. You commented that if hon. Members who are also members of Lloyd's speak during the debate, they should declare an interest. Will you reflect and make a ruling before tonight's vote on whether those hon. Members should also declare an interest before they vote?

Madam Speaker: The interests are contained in the Register of Members' Interests. I am advising Members who wish to speak that they must declare an interest when they do so. Hon. Members have never been called upon to declare an interest before they enter the Division Lobby.

Mr. Jimmy Boyce (Rotherham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Are there any matters of public policy that are decided in the House that do not affect people outside the House?

Madam Speaker: I think that I require notice of that question.

Mr. Boyce: I am sure that you will get that for tomorrow.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to raise a point that concerns the general principle of declaration of hon. Members' interests. I am not a Lloyd's name. Does an hon. Member have to declare an interest at the onset of his speech, or can he simply allude to it during that speech? The 44 Lloyd's members on the Conservative Benches should, if they catch your eye, declare an interest at the beginning of any intervention that they make.

Madam Speaker: The procedures of the House on this matter are clear and direct. An hon. Member must declare an interest immediately on standing to speak.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans). I seek your guidance, Madam Speaker, on the group of amendments starting with amendment No. 7. Many of the amendments deal with the same point and could be described as repetitive and overlapping. Have the guidelines for those matters changed?

Madam Speaker: No. We never allow repetition or overlapping to occur in the House. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not challenging my selection of amendments.

Mr. Dickens: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to make a point about fair play. I rose following your response to the first point of order, and you would not allow me to continue because you said that you had given an answer. You have since called four Opposition Members to speak on the same subject. I shall not detain the House by pressing you on this, Madam Speaker, but I like to see fair play.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman often rises to say that I have been particularly fair. If he reflects on *Hansard* tomorrow, he may see that the points to which he refers which were raised by hon. Members were separate from my ruling.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek advice from you for the future.

Madam Speaker: Is it on the group of amendments starting with No. 7?

Mr. Butterfill: My point relates to petroleum revenue tax, and the concerns of hon. Members on that subject. We know that the matter was debated extensively on Second Reading and that some amendments that were tabled by members of the Committee were ruled out of order for various reasons.

The issue is complex and hon. Members have taken counsel's opinion on the amendments that have been tabled today to ensure that they are in order. Although I appreciate that the matter was explored at some length in Committee, the concept of transitional arrangements was not so explored. Is there a way in which, in the future, hon. Members can frame amendments so that we can be sure that they will be in order and available for consideration?

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the Public Bill Office, which is open all hours, will be extremely helpful.

Ways and Means

Scottish Trusts

Resolved,

That provision may be made in relation to trusts having effect under the law of Scotland where the trustees are resident in the United Kingdom.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Orders of the Day

Finance (No. 2) Bill

Not amended (in the Committee) and as amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 17

SCOTTISH TRUSTS

'.—(1) Where—

(a) any of the income of a trust having effect under the law of Scotland is income to which a beneficiary of the trust would have an equitable right in possession if that trust had effect under the law of England and Wales, and

(b) the trustees of that trust are resident in the United Kingdom,

the rights of that beneficiary shall be deemed for the purposes of the Income Tax Acts to include such a right to that income notwithstanding that no such right is conferred according to the law of Scotland.

(2) This section shall have effect in relation to the income of any trust for the year 1993-94 or any subsequent year of assessment.'.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.39 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The purpose of the new clause is to apply the same income tax treatment to beneficiaries with an interest in possession in the income of a trust governed by Scots law as applies to beneficiaries with an interest in possession in the income of a trust governed by English law. At present, beneficiaries of English and Scottish trusts are treated differently because of the differences in the underlying legal position.

We discussed this point in Committee, and the new clause responds to the undertaking that I gave there to bring the two systems into line. Scottish lawyers who are present may recognise that we have done this by aligning Scottish legal practice with the practice in England. That may not be the best solution in the context of Scottish nationalism, but in the time available it seemed the most practical way of responding to the concerns expressed in Committee.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): We welcome the new clause, which we pressed for in Committee. I am glad that, in a comparatively short time, the Government have met our objections. There remain one or two matters that might be dealt with in the Finance Bill to be introduced at the end of this year. I understand that one or two parts of the new clause might be better phrased—according to some of my colleagues who regularly practise in Scotland.

First, it is suggested that the phrase,

"having effect under the law of Scotland"

might be better expressed as

"a trust, the proper law of which is the law of Scotland".

Such matters of definition are important. Without the change, the measure would also affect an English trust that happened to have land in Scotland.

As the House is anxious to make progress on other matters I will write to the Minister with my other suggestions. Meanwhile, we welcome the new clause, without which Scottish beneficiaries of a trust would have been treated less favourably than English ones.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Minister said that there are reasons why this form of new clause might not be so welcome as its purpose. When the issue was first raised in Committee, the effect of the Bill as it then stood being to treat dividends received through trusts in Scotland differently from those in England, the Minister was at first unpersuaded. He said that as the payment received in the Scottish case is not a dividend it would be wrong to treat it as though it were. He then listened to our arguments and was eventually persuaded that something had to be done.

Meanwhile, my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) wrote to the Lord Advocate pointing out that in his view a breach of article 4 of the treaty of union might be involved because that treaty provides that

"all rights, privileges and advantages which do or may belong to a subject of either kingdom should be communicated to the subjects of the other".

The combined considerations of the Lord Advocate and the Minister resulted in a Government willingness to table a new clause to sort out the matter.

The Minister must not be surprised to learn that Members who have a concern for Scots law are unhappy that a form of words should have been chosen which treats the matter as an extension of English law instead of changing the Scottish legal basis. The new clause uses the words:

"notwithstanding that no such right is conferred according to the law of Scotland".

My hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland tabled an amendment—probably in order, but not chosen—which dealt with the matter via the law of Scotland. Although the Minister seemed to hint that considerations of time had driven him to this desperate expedient, I cannot believe that any technical failing in my hon. Friend's amendment could not have been improved by the efforts of the Lord Advocate's Department, assisted by the Treasury. That could have produced an amendment framed within Scots law.

Treasury Ministers may not be aware of the strong feeling in Scotland that a sort of legal imperialism prevails under which the Scots legal framework, the Scots statute book and Scots common law are all gradually eroded by United Kingdom legislation being tacked on to Scottish law. Law Bills relating to England and Wales often have clauses relating to Scotland added to them, with the result that the law of Scotland is not contained in a distinctive statute book or in Scots common law.

The Minister was thus right to anticipate that there would be some criticism on this score, and right to expect some lamentation over the fact that the practice of bolting bits of English law on to Scots law continues. It was not really necessary to go about the matter in this way.

Mr. Dorrell: My original remarks were not intended to cast a slur on the Scottish National party—I can cast slights in its direction on other occasions, but I was not trying to do so this time. I merely recognised that the drafting of the new clause involves an infelicity from the point of view of Scots law. I do not accept that it could have been easily reconciled, as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) suggested. He said that

we should have spoken to the Lord Advocate. I can assure him that the Treasury has access to his advice. We did not, in the time available, find a better way of achieving the objective.

4.45 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Is the Minister perfectly relaxed about the compatibility of this measure with European Community law? The European Court of Justice is a court superior to both English and Scottish legal systems.

Mr. Dorrell: I am satisfied that the measure does not cause a problem with the ECJ.

We have sought to respond to the practical concern expressed in Committee——

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Minister answer the point about a possible breach of the treaty of union being involved? Has he consulted the Lord Advocate on that aspect? Has the latter yet replied to the leader of the Liberal party in Scotland, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), on that point? The Minister seems to be treating the matter very lightly indeed.

Mr. Dorrell: Not at all. I recognise that this is a matter of some concern in the Scottish legal fraternity and among those who follow Scottish legal affairs. In the limited time available between the Committee and Report stages, it seemed to the Government more important to respond to the practical concern expressed in Committee than to perfect the drafting in such a way as to meet all concerns. I commend the new clause to the House. '

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 1

COMMENCEMENT OF SECTION 174

'Section 174 of this Act shall not come into force until such time as the Board have by regulations provided that no payments shall be made from a special reserve fund except as provided for under Schedule 20 to this Act.'.—*[Mr. Darling.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Darling: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: new clause 2—*Payment under section 174*—

'No payment shall be made from a special reserve fund established under section 174 of this Act except for the purposes expressly provided for in Schedule 20 to this Act.'.

Amendment No. 29, in clause 183, page 142, line 26, leave out from the beginning to end of line 28 and insert—

'(3) The provisions of this Chapter shall come into force on such date as a Minister of the Crown may by order made by statutory instrument appoint; and different days may be so appointed for different provisions or for different purposes.

(4) No order shall be made under this section unless a draft thereof has been laid before and approved by the Commons House of Parliament.'.

Amendment No. 6, in schedule 20, page 291 line 42, at end insert—

'(3) The arrangements must be such as to secure that, except as required or permitted (whether expressly or by necessary implication) by this Part or Part II of this Schedule, no payments shall be made into or out of the member's special reserve fund.'.

Amendment No. 21, in schedule 20, page 294, leave out lines 27 to 29.

Mr. Darling: We come now to a debate on Lloyd's and the special reserve fund, the subject of an extensive discussion in Committee. We touched on some of the issues during points of order to Madam Speaker, mentioning the difficulties in which some Conservative Members might find themselves because they are Lloyd's names. Looking around, it is clear to me that many of them have absented themselves from the debate because of the difficulties, but I am sure that when the bell sounds they will come back to vote.

This group of clauses and schedule 20 create a special reserve fund to enable Lloyd's names to put money aside to meet insurance losses. We are not against the principle of making provision by means of such reserves—they are a thoroughly good thing—but our objection throughout has been that we should not allow Lloyd's names to benefit from a device that will enable them to shelter large sums from tax.

One of our principal objections was that under the Bill as drafted it would be possible for a Lloyd's name to put aside sums into the special reserve fund, to shelter them tax free, to see them accumulate and then to withdraw them at will to gain maximum tax advantage. In Committee, we pressed a series of amendments to prevent that happening. To our great surprise, the Government tabled an amendment last week in which they effectively climbed down from the position that they had adopted in Committee, and accepted that the Opposition amendments had a substantial point. The Government's amendment and our new clauses 1 and 2 seek to do the same thing: they would stop the special reserve funds from being used as a tax shelter by Lloyd's names.

I welcome Government amendment No. 6, because it will prevent Lloyd's names from using the special reserve fund for anything other than meeting insurance losses. I am sure that that was the intention of the legislation and that will be its effect. I am grateful to the Financial Secretary for reconsidering the matter. He has certainly departed from the suggestion made in Committee by some of his hon. Friends that the Opposition were raising a matter that had no basis. The Government now admit that it has a substantial basis, and I am sure that they agree that it would be wrong to allow Lloyd's names to use the special reserve fund as a tax shelter. For that reason, we welcome the Government amendment.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the welcome he has given to the amendment. I hope that he will accept that it is hardly a climbdown for the Government to table an amendment that has the effect of ensuring that the result sought by both sides of the Committee is delivered by the legislation. Our policy objective has been unchanged throughout consideration of the Bill.

Mr. Darling: I understand that the Financial Secretary must preserve his position. If tackled by his hon. Friends, ministerial colleagues or the Prime Minister, he can point to this passage in *Hansard* and say that he has put on record the fact that the Government were not climbing

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down. If that is not the case, why did so many of his hon. Friends accuse us of scaremongering and raising falsely-based fears?

I am sure that the Minister will accept that, had we not pressed the matter and drawn attention to the fact that a tax shelter would be created, no amendment would have been tabled and Lloyd's names would have been able to use the special reserve fund as a tax shelter. It is important to recognise that the Government have now accepted our position, and that the possibility of using the special reserve fund as a tax shelter has been virtually shut off.

Mr. Dorrell: I do not accept that in the absence of this amendment it would have been possible to use the special reserve fund as a tax shelter. I made it clear in Committee that the safeguards against that eventuality were contained in the deed establishing the trust fund. I said to the Committee:

"We are debating now into which piece of paper the principle should be written."—*[Official Report,* Standing Committee A, 17 June 1993; c. 495.]

In response to the views expressed in Committee, we have written it into both pieces of paper.

Mr. Darling: The Minister is being tenacious. I remember that he said that it did not matter in which piece of paper it was contained. Our preference is to have that tax loophole shut off by this particular piece of paper because this is the statute and the law. We do not want to leave it to the discretion of those who draft the trust fund documents. Nevertheless, we give the Government amendment a fulsome welcome.

Amendment No. 21 deserves attention. We will seek a Division on it at an appropriate time, although that may be some hours, if not days, away. Amendment No. 21 would have the effect of rendering the special reserve fund liable for tax on an annual basis. At the moment, paragraph 9, schedule 20 provides:

"Profits or losses arising from assets forming part of a special reserve fund shall be excluded for the purposes of income tax . . . and for the purposes of capital gains tax".

This matter was discussed briefly in Committee because the main part of the debate was taken up by our principal objection. We were not entirely convinced by the Minister's argument.

It is important that we should accept that, while Lloyd's names should not be discriminated against under the tax system, neither should they be unduly favoured in a way that most members of the public would find intolerable.

I think it is important to put on record the importance of Lloyd's. That point is usually raised by Conservative Members, although not many are here today. Lloyd's is crucial to the United Kingdom, not only because of its reputation—which remains formidable, despite its recent well-publicised difficulties—but for its contributions to the country's earnings. Although Lloyd's has recorded record losses in recent years, the fact that it has significant potential for earnings in the future is important.

Subject to its unique structure, Lloyd's should, in principle and in general, be treated in the same way as any other taxpayer. It should be encouraged but not favoured, and should stand on its own feet. There should be no question of the Government being allowed or encouraged to bail out names who are in financial difficulties. Reports of certain names—particularly those who are Members of the House—being in severe financial difficulties and in danger of eventual bankruptcy are somewhat exaggerated. I notice that the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) agrees.

No matter the difficulties faced by those hon. Members, even if in extremis, I am sure that the good and the great who bankroll the Tory party will step in and ensure that they are not disbarred from being Members of the House.

As to names who are not Members of the House, when they went into Lloyd's they were, by any standard, sufficiently well off to take advice; they knew, or should have known, the risks that they were taking. They were well placed to take the advice which most people would take before joining and becoming names.

As I have said, I do not believe that Lloyd's names should be given preferential treatment or more favourable treatment and opportunity than those who take risks in other industries. As I understand it, it is not possible for people in similar positions to make a general provision against future losses. Lloyd's names are being treated in a slightly different way from people in other industries. For example, it is not possible for someone running a small business to accumulate money, tax free, against future losses—I am sure that many wish that they could. We should look long and hard before we give a particular privilege to Lloyd's when there is no justification for doing so.

Amendment No. 21 would subject the funds in the special reserve fund to taxation, which is entirely reasonable. No doubt the Minister will argue that the money can only be used, for the most part, to meet insurance losses. We agree with that. However, on cessation of business, when a Lloyd's name ceases to underwrite and winds up his or her special trust fund, there is a pay-out. I am concerned that, although there is a ceiling of 50 per cent. of profits on the fund, the money could accumulate, tax free—over the years the sum could be quite substantial—and the Lloyd's name could then choose when to cease underwriting to achieve the maximum tax advantage. That is why we raised the matter in Committee and, now, on Report.

The Minister will no doubt talk about the importance of Lloyd's names being able to make provisions against future losses. He will also make the point, with some force, that many of the difficulties in which Lloyd's names currently find themselves would not have arisen had they made provisions against future losses. All of that is true up to a point. As I said in Committee, we are not against special reserve funds; indeed, as the Minister reminded me in Committee, it was a Labour Chancellor, Sir Stafford Cripps, as he then was, who made that provision.

Currently, the maximum contribution limit is £7,000. We are proposing a much higher ceiling and it is therefore important to look again at the taxation provisions. That is why we attach so much importance to stopping the special reserve fund from being used as a tax shelter. I believe that to complete the process the assets in the fund should be subject to income tax or capital gains tax, as the case may be, to prevent accumulation.

Lest anybody feels that we are being unfair to Lloyd's, or discriminating against it, the House should note that the management of Lloyd's has taken substantial steps to put the organisation on a proper footing.

It is all but publicly admitted that self-regulation has failed and it can be strongly argued that the Lloyd's Act 1982 needs to be repealed and replaced. We know why that

will not happen. Notwithstanding Madam Speaker's ruling a short time ago, the whole question of the conflict of interest of some hon. Members, as Lloyd's names, would arise were the 1982 Act revisited.

5 pm

It highlights the fact that many Tory Members cannot consider the City, in particular Lloyd's, objectively because the wealth of so many of them is tied up in it. That is intolerable and should not be allowed to happen. Lloyd's must be considered in the same way as other companies. Its future should not be influenced by the fact that so many Tory Members have a vested personal interest in it. The fact that the Government have a small majority in the House means that their judgment is impaired because so many Tory Members—not just Back Benchers but at least four members of the Cabinet—are Lloyd's names. We should all pause to consider the fact that the Government would be prevented from looking at the Lloyd's Act again because so many Tory Members cannot make an impartial judgment on the matter.

Lloyd's management anticipates that profits will return by the 1995 year of account. Together with the measures that it is taking to deal with the pre-1985 losses, that shows that Lloyd's can be put back on a proper footing. Those steps and the taxation measures that we are asked to approve tonight lead us to suppose that, even with the taxation that we propose, Lloyd's names will be treated fairly and need have nothing to complain about.

The importance of Lloyd's and the fact that its management is trying to put the business on a proper footing must be emphasised. We do not want to discriminate against Lloyd's but to ensure that it will be treated in the same way as other taxpayers, whether corporate or individual.

The United Kingdom insurance industry must be able to make provision for losses. That is one of its problems in competing against other EC countries. The fiscal regime, particularly in France and Germany, allows companies to make provision against future claims. In this country, it is impossible to do that on the same scale. Although the Government are now consulting on the matter, they have yet to decide what to do. However, it is important that we accept the provision against future claims.

We must remember that Lloyd's is not a corporation or normal insurance company. The difference is that individual taxation is at stake. I am in favour of allowing provision against future losses but we must be careful when dealing with individual taxation to ensure that, as far as possible, we treat individual names in the same way as other taxpayers engaged in investing their money. It is important not to discriminate against others who try to invest their money in industry, for example.

Mr. Dorrell: I agree with the hon. Gentleman but seek further precise clarification. If we were to introduce reserving for catastrophe insurance for the corporate insurance industry, does he think that that would validate similar reserving arrangements in Lloyd's?

Mr. Darling: As I was about to say, a distinction must be made. In general, we would support the principle of reserving for corporations but in Lloyd's there is a difficulty. By the time the Government introduce those measures there may be more corporate members of Lloyd's, in which case their taxation will be akin to that of other insurance companies. The difficulty with Lloyd's is that in future there will be two classes of names: first, incorporated capital, with which I have dealt, and, secondly, individual names who will be taxed broadly like individual taxpayers. Naturally, special provisions are made for Lloyd's. That is where the difficulty arises.

As I said in Committee, I am prepared to allow individual names to make provisions against further losses provided, first, that they cannot use the device to shelter earnings against tax—that matter has already been dealt with—and, secondly, that they cannot accumulate money tax free within the special reserve fund and therefore secure an advantage that is not available to other individual taxpayers. That is what amendment No. 21 strikes at.

Mr. Beith: In Committee we seemed to agree on the principle that any relief allowed to Lloyd's names should be on a basis comparable to that available in the rest of the insurance industry. The hon. Gentleman has argued that that comparability will not apply under the Bill and that, if it did, he would still not be in favour of names having tax relief on provisioning. I do not understand that.

Mr. Darling: The right hon. Gentleman is unnecessarily confused. There is a distinction between the taxation of corporations, to use a general term, and the taxation of individual taxpayers. Both sides of the Committee broadly welcomed the principle of reserving and we hope that the Government will make proposals for the United Kingdom insurance industry. The difficulty in Lloyd's is that, at present, all its names are individual taxpayers. I suspect that in future an increasing number of its names will be corporate taxpayers. But, so long as they are individual taxpayers, we should accept the principle of reserving, which we do by allowing the creation of a special reserve fund. I am simply concerned that it should not confer an additional benefit over and above what is necessary to encourage reserving. That is why we wanted to close the tax loophole. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) was against that.

We also want to prevent the accumulation of large sums of capital tax free, which is a concession that is not available to others engaged in industrial enterprise. So long as individual taxpayers are Lloyd's names, there will always be a problem. I suspect that, given the sums at risk, incorporated capital will make up most of Lloyd's base in the future. We must wait and see what happens.

We must not allow individual Lloyd's names to be given tax benefits that are not available to others engaged in a similar enterprise, other than insurance. I trust that that makes the matter clear.

Mr. Beith: May I pursue the point a little further? The same difference would apply within the corporate sector. If concessions of the kind that the hon. Gentleman and I support are made to the corporate sector, it will make a difference to corporations that put capital into insurance and those that do not. The same will apply to individuals. What they have in common is the peculiar nature of insurance risk and markets. Surely that is an argument in favour of comparable treatment.

Mr. Darling: The right hon. Gentleman carries his argument a little far. Clearly, depending on the business that a company carries out, certain tax provisions are

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available to one group of companies and not to another. Were we discussing petroleum revenue taxation, which we are not——

Mr. Salmond: Unfortunately.

Mr. Darling: I agree with the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). However, oil companies are taxed differently from companies that make rivets, for example. We must accept that insurance companies are taxed on a different basis from oil and other companies.

A clear distinction can be drawn between the taxation of corporations and the taxation of individuals. I do not wish to labour the point, but I am sure that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed accepts the distinction. I assume that, being a Liberal Democrat, he favours the principle of fairness between individual taxpayers. The House must think long and hard before giving individual taxpayers who are Lloyd's names benefits that are not available to other individual taxpayers, while accepting that insurance differs from certain other enterprises.

I am worried that, if the special trust funds are not taxed, Lloyd's names will be able to accumulate large sums. That will not be necessary to meet insurance losses because the sums would be paid out on cessation.

Some substantial tax benefit may arise, but that device cannot be used by other taxpayers. I do not want to labour the point, but we should think long and hard before giving such concessions. That was precisely the thrust of my argument in Committee. I am sorry that the Liberal party did not accept the Labour party's argument because the Tories have accepted it. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed will reflect that he might have got it wrong. If it is good enough for me, the Financial Secretary and the Labour party, it should be good enough for the Liberal party—perhaps the fact that it is not tells us something about the Liberal party.

There was an exchange on the subject in Committee. I did not entirely follow what the Financial Secretary said on a similar amendment. He seemed to set some store on the fact that only 50 per cent. of the profits could be put into the special reserve fund—I accept that. However, I am concerned that if up to 50 per cent. of substantial profits were placed in the fund, which remained untouched for a period of years, after 20 years underwriting, a substantial sum might have accumulated. I fully accept that that is secondary to the main issue which I raised in Committee and which has now been addressed. But we cannot leave the matter there because it is important.

Mr. Dorrell: The argument that I advanced in response to the debate in Committee was the same argument that I shall make in a few moments. I shall be interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's response. The key factor is not that there is limitation of 50 per cent. on profit earned on insurance in any one year. As I said in Committee, the key limitation is the separate limit of 50 per cent. of premium income—the amount up to which the reserve can be built to protect the interests, not primarily of the Lloyd's names but of the policyholders. That is a key test of the liquidity of an insurance business run by a Lloyd's name.

Mr. Darling: I accept that there are two tests, but that does not seem to detract from the argument that the funds should be subject to tax—I said that the Minister set some store on precisely that. The debate between us is whether those funds should be taxed. I believe that they should. That does not lessen the importance of the argument that we advanced in Committee about plugging the loophole. I hope that the Government will be vigilant and alert to the possibility of a Lloyd's name or another party finding a way to circumvent new clauses 1 and 2, or Government amendment No. 6. I hope that the Government will plug any future loopholes that come to light as a result of the operation of the special reserve funds.

As I said, the Opposition want to see Lloyd's thrive and prosper. We want it to put its problems behind it, but we want to ensure that Lloyd's names are taxed on a fair basis. We do not believe that is happening at present, and it is for that reason that I want to press amendment No. 21 to a vote.

5.15 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): I do not wish to—and could not—reopen the ruling that Madam Speaker made earlier this afternoon, but I appeal to those hon. Members who are Lloyd's names not to vote on the new clause—a vote which will probably be taken tomorrow evening. I urge them to follow the precedent set on 24 March 1981 when we were discussing the Bill relating to Lloyd's when—I think—53 names abstained. Although the Government's majority was much greater then and hon. Members could afford to abstain in those numbers, I do not think that they can be excused for failing to do so tomorrow.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), I accept that there is a strong case for tax reform of the Lloyd's insurance market. The establishment of a new reserve fund would put Lloyd's on a level playing field with some of our strongest competitors in France, Switzerland and, above all, Germany—Munich Re is Lloyd's biggest competitor. It would also encourage the prudent management of outstanding liabilities.

The Bill is a recipe for tax avoidance. Any income arising from assets in the reserve fund is exempt from income tax while it remains there. Amendment No. 21 seeks to address that issue, but any capital gains arising from the disposal of assets held in the fund are exempt from capital gains tax. The amount paid into the fund will be treated as a fully deductible businesss expense although, admittedly, withdrawals will be taxed as profits.

It is said that, as a sort of balance against those provisions, there is a new basis of tax assessment which treats capital appreciation on invested premiums as income rather than capital gains. That is said to be a disadvantage to Lloyd's names which just about balances the advantages that they receive from the tax privileges they gain from the new reserve fund. I asked the tax department at Lloyd's to justify the Chancellor's assurance that those two changes, running parallel with each other, were, as he said, broadly tax neutral. The department officials were able only to assert that that was the case and were unable to provide figures or costings to prove it. That makes me suspicious that the overall package is a nice little earner for Lloyd's names.

It is also important to ask why the changes are being made now. It is partly because of the huge losses in the year of accounts over the past three years—1988, 1989 and 1990. But the crisis is not simply about the problems of hurricane Hugo but about City fraud. The crisis is not just about asbestosis problems, but the yuppyitis which

produced a "money-for-nothing" era in the City—with my apologies to Dire Straits. It seems that the chickens from that era have come home to roost and the Government are seeking to clear up the mess.

We have had a sad, sorry and sordid tale of working names indulging in insider dealing by dumping loss-making activity and underwriting on external names while maintaining a profitable business for themselves. As a result, many ordinary names became victims of malpractice and corruption. Some victims are numbered among the 44 Conservative Members of Parliament who are Lloyd's names. I am not sure whether the number includes the Attorney-General, the three Cabinet Ministers who are Lloyd's names or the Tory party chairman—all of whom are named in my early-day motion 2299. That is why there is pressure on the Government to bail out Lloyd's. It is tantamount to an abuse of Parliament that a certain restricted and privileged group of Members of Parliament are being bailed out in that manner.

Mr. Beith: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify for the record whether he would regard as an abuse of Parliament the passing by the House of the new clause and the amendment about which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) spoke or the inclusion of any part of that new clause, amended or not, in the Bill?

Mr. Hain: The amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central improves the Bill and I hope that it is accepted. But my basic argument about the abuse of Parliament is that hon. Members who are names should not be able to vote themselves tax privileges which they will receive from the changes. I am not denying that there is a case for modernising the tax regime.

It seems that, although it is said that the tax changes are not fully retrospective, they go back to the 1992 year of account for reserving and also to the 1992-93 year of account for tax assessments. There is a sense in which the new regime will enable those hard-pressed names at least to reassure those who are making claims on their resources that they will have better years to come. I wish that the same fairness and equality was applied to the bankrupt individuals and small businesses who are going to the wall in the current recession—indeed, they have been doing so in accelerating numbers during the past few years. Why should they be treated differently and on a less privileged basis than Conservative Members of Parliament who are Lloyd's names?

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Would my hon. Friend like to comment on the double standards in this area? The House lays down rules by which local councillors have to declare their interests. A councillor with an interest of any kind, not merely a financial one, not only has to declare it but is prohibited from speaking or voting when the subject of his interest is being discussed at a council meeting. Should not the House follow its own rules?

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend makes his point well.

My amendment No. 29 would require an annual vote to allow Parliament to keep a check on Lloyd's, which is otherwise a law unto itself as it is not subject to any statutory regulation. It is in a unique position and an annual vote on the application of the tax regime would allow us to monitor the progress of Lloyd's as it modernises its structure.

Lloyd's should be subject to statutory regulation, and if it were, many Opposition Members would be more willing to grant the new tax regime proposed, even in a modified way, by the Government. Although the recent reforms by Peter Middleton and David Rowland to restructure and modernise Lloyd's, to separate the market from regulation and to introduce corporate capital were welcome, Lloyd's remains an anachronism and it needs to be modernised and updated.

In the past two decades Lloyd's has been hit by one scandal after another and each has been followed by an internal inquiry. There was an inquiry by Cromer in 1970 and that was followed by inquiries by Fisher in 1980, by Neill in 1987 and by Sir David Walker last year. Although those inquiries led to reforms that were welcomed at the time, further scandals emerged. The latest reforms are welcome, but why should they provide any more of a guarantee than the others? Those reforms did not provide any guarantee whatever as there were further scandals in their wake.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): In view of recent events, the Government's proposals, and the question mark over how the company has been managed in the past two or three years, does my hon. Friend agree that there should be a public inquiry? After all, the Government are to give to Lloyd's benefits that they will not give to other insurance companies.

Mr. Hain: The case for a public inquiry was strong over a year ago when news of the crisis broke. My hon. Friend makes his point well.

It is fundamentally wrong to give tax privileges to Lloyd's names without the quid pro quo of statutory regulation. If we modernise Lloyd's tax regime and encourage the company to move into the 21st century—I almost said the 20th century—we should require from all the markets a willingness to accept the regulation that only statute can bring. If there were such regulation many people outside and probably many Lloyd's names would have much more confidence in the company's future.

Mr. Beith: When the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) speaks about this matter I often think of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and his assertion in Committee two years ago when we first debated the matter at length, that the attitude that Lloyd's was a place in which the seriously rich dabble was not at all to be found in the Labour party. He may have had cause to modify that opinion.

The case for making any kind of special provision for Lloyd's names is certainly not that some people who were very rich are no longer rich, or at least will not be when their accounts are finally cleared. It is certainly not that the Government should respond with tax concessions to the appalling happenings in some of Lloyd's syndicates. Such arguments provide no basis whatever for tax concessions. They do not weigh in this case and they have not persuaded Opposition Members that there is a case for some measures. I intervened in the speech by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), but it is still not clear whether he is in favour of any measures.

The case for some provision is so that this country may have a continuing involvement in the insurance market to

[Mr. Beith]

the extent to which Lloyd's has been involved, and so that we may continue to have the earnings that that produces. No other argument would weigh with me because Lloyd's names were aware of the risks. Their money was used not only as a guarantee to Lloyd's but to earn money in other ways in the meantime. They ought to have foreseen what has happened to them, although the catastrophes were not really foreseen by anybody. However, when taking on an insurance risk one must assume the worst case.

Those names might have been justified in supposing that their affairs would be handled properly and honestly and without insider dealing. However, the fact that that did not happen is not the Government's fault because things went wrong within Lloyd's. The case for making a provision on which there seems to be some consensus within the parties is to ensure future earnings from insurance of the kind that Lloyd's can provide. The principle that seemed to weigh with a number of us was that any provision should be appropriate in the context of the insurance industry and should be available to other participants in that industry. There cannot be strict comparability between all forms of risk because there is not a quite comparable form of risk. Capital may not be put up for insurance if we cannot set out a sensible basis.

The Government are legislating to deal with the Lloyd's problem but are still consulting and forming their opinion about what should be done for the rest of the insurance industry. That is less than satisfactory. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central expressed the surprising view that a strictly comparable treatment of Lloyd's names and of people who were corporately involved in insurance, whether at Lloyd's or anywhere else, would not meet with his approval. He rested his case on the difference between individual and corporate tax affairs. There are indeed differences, but the hon. Gentleman did not suggest that any of them should be systematically offset to an appropriate figure in some arrangement that combined the two. He seemed to rest a great deal of weight on a structure that would not bear it. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman's real reason is to have something to vote on so that the Lloyd's names can be flushed out.

I had some sympathy with the hon. Member for Neath who said that it was unsatisfactory, certainly in the view of the outside world and certainly by comparison with local government, for people with a direct personal interest to be able to vote on their own affairs in a way that can make a large difference to them. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that those people should abstain and throw themselves upon the mercy of the House, in which case they would depend on Labour votes. Up to a point that might be thought resonable because Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen have said that they are in favour of the broad, main elements of the package in the Bill, especially as all doubt has now been removed by the Government's amendment, which ties up the loose ends from Committee, on the first of the two points about which the Opposition were concerned.

Labour Front-Bench spokesmen are taking a perfectly reasonable attitude in seeking to get matters right. What worries some of the Lloyd's names is the belief that the hon. Member for Neath and a few other hon. Members are not in favour of having any such measures in the Bill. The reason for a vote on the amendment at some time is not because one can logically defend it but because there has to be some sort of vote to show up those Lloyd's names who will vote in their own interests. I shall watch the vote with the same interest as Labour Members, but I am still not satisfied that the position is right.

One reason for voting against the amendment is that the process has not been completed. We are doing something for Lloyd's names that we have not yet done for the rest of the insurance industry. That is a reasonable ground and I should like the Minister to address it. Throughout I have sought to argue the principle that we are recognising the special character of insurance risk and the need to ensure that it will still be possible for risks to be taken so that we can continue to obtain the substantial invisible earnings that an experienced insurance industry stands to earn for us. Over the years, Lloyd's has played a particular part in that risk operation—a part quite different from the rest of the commmercial insurance industry.

5.30 pm

The events of recent years have placed a large question mark over Lloyd's future. We must all hope that the current reforms within Lloyd's will change not only the way that it is run but the way that it is perceived, because a very great deal of damage has been done. My judgment, for what it is worth, is that further damage will be done if there is not some reasonable tax framework, but I want to be sure that that framework is comparable throughout the insurance industry. If the Government cannot say that they are moving towards that, they will cast doubt on their case against Labour's amendment. However, if they can say that they are seeking to achieve comparability, I cannot understand why the Labour Front Bench should not welcome that with open arms.

Mr. Salmond: I want to pick up the point made by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) about public perception and how the debate will be viewed outside the confines of the Chamber. The rush to provide assistance for Lloyd's names and the fact that so many of them are Conservative Members of Parliament will be widely understood outside the House.

I well recall that when we have debates on Members' salaries and secretarial allowances, Conservative Members —almost unanimously, although there are some exceptions—tell us to be very careful when voting on matters that affect our own finances. Today, they are silent about the care that should be taken in this debate and in the vote on the amendment.

People outside the House will be appalled by the proposed assistance for Lloyd's names because the Budget will impose severe hardship on whole categories of people. The hardship that those people experience daily is far greater than the hardship that any of the Lloyd's names have yet experienced. Those who will be greatly disadvantaged by the Budget will not welcome the rush to assist a fairly privileged group of people.

I can think of another comparison—those employed in the North sea drilling industry. Parliament is not providing the time and opportunity to discuss whether their jobs will be lost, but is providing the time and opportunity to discuss the rush to assist Lloyd's names. That brings the House of Commons into disrepute. I am not complaining about that because part of my role in politics is to ensure that the House is brought into

disrepute. The activities and the self-interest that are so clearly displayed in the debate will considerably extend that process. Whether or not the Conservative Members who are Lloyd's names decide to abstain in the vote tomorrow, they may come to rue the day politically when the whole process was embarked upon with such unseemly haste.

Mr. Dorrell: To hear the hon. Members for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and for Neath (Mr. Hain) talk, no one would believe that the proposal is a revenue-neutral package that will deliver neither benefit nor cost to Lloyd's names in the aggregate.

The hon. Member for Neath asked me how the proposed figure was arrived at. Of course, it is an estimate. The change arising from the introduction of a special reserve fund will, when it is up and running, have a revenue cost of about £50 million a year, while the extra tax gathered as a result of treating profits on the premium trust fund assets as income will produce a revenue yield of about £50 million a year. Therefore, to talk about the package as a great tax break for Lloyd's names simply does not accord with the facts.

I want to deal with the points raised by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling). In the first part of his speech at least, he tried to be constructive and to respond to the issues of tax principle that we discussed in Committee. I welcome the fact that he has accepted that amendment No. 6 covers the concern that he expressed then. Grudging though that acceptance was, I hope that we can take it that that represents the Opposition's endorsement of our proposals to deal with that aspect.

In Committee, we agreed that two issues of tax principle underlie the treatment of the Lloyd's insurance market. First—and there is no disagreement on this in any part of the House—we cannot approach a policy for the taxation of Lloyd's names on any basis other than the principles of fiscal neutrality, which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central clearly espoused in Committee and repeated this afternoon. As has been recognised by several hon. Members who have spoken this afternoon, we are not introducing the proposals in response to short-term considerations at Lloyd's and we are certainly not introducing them out of a desire to create a tax shelter. As I have said, it would be strange if we were to do so as there is no revenue cost associated with the proposals. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of fiscal neutrality.

I also agree with the hon. Gentleman that the issue that underlies the Government's proposals for the Lloyd's insurance market is the general acceptability of reserving in the context of all insurance business. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said that he found the argument for reserving persuasive, especially in the context of the comparison between this country's tax system and that which prevails in other countries, notably France and Germany. That is one of the issues that the House will want to take into account when it considers the general issue of reserving for insurance business.

However, I suggest that the House take particular account not of that argument, important though it may be, but of the argument based on tax policy and tax equity as between one taxpayer and another. The Government have undertaken to publish a consultative document during the summer on the general question of reserving for insurance business. In that document we shall make it clear that the issue of tax equity is whether it is sensible to continue to tax insurance business on the basis of an annually declared profit, when some insurance businesses specialise in covering catastrophe risks where it is in the nature of that business that catastrophe claims will not necessarily crystallise in the year in which the premiums are gathered to pay for them. Indeed, it is part of a catastrophe-based insurance business that several years' premiums may be necessary to cover the risk of a catastrophe. Annuality, in the context of such a business, may not be a sensible way of taxing that business. That is the principal argument for introducing reserving for insurance businesses.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed that the argument applies equally whether the insurer is a company or an individual. I cannot understand the point made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central about the distinction between an individual and a corporation as the insurer. If reserving is right to cover catastrophe when the insurer is a corporation, it is self-evident that the same must apply when the insurer is an individual. It is because the Government are receptive to that idea, and are proposing to consult on the detail and principle in the corporate context, that we propose the introduction of a catastrophe reserve in the Lloyd's market, where the limiting factor on the right of a name to commit resources to that reserve will be 50 per cent. of the pre-reserving profit and 50 per cent. of the premium limit of the name, the latter clearly being the restraining influence on the total size of reserve that can be built.

Mr. Salmond: Regardless of whether the Minister is right about the essence of the argument, if he were a Lloyd's name—which he is not—would he consider it appropriate, and in accordance with his conscience, to vote on the issue?

Mr. Dorrell: In such circumstances, I would accept the advice of the Chair on what was and was not in order.

The right to reserve is limited by both the provisions that I mentioned, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central recognised. Furthermore, the right to withdraw from the reserve is limited, as the hon. Gentleman has now recognised. The quid pro quo is the commitment to build up a reserve limited by the size of the insurance business that is being done—that is the effect of the 50 per cent. of premium income limit—along with tax-free build-up of the assets within the reserve.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central asked why the reserve should be allowed that tax-free build-up. There are two answers. The first arises from the reason for the creation of the reserve. It is being created to give extra security to the policy holder, assuring him that the claim he may need to make at some future date will be backed by adequate resources. It ensures that the insurer need not be driven to, and perhaps over, the limit of bankruptcy. That is the key consideration. It arises from the need for a test of liquidity within the insurance business, and the Government's desire not to require insurance businesses to declare profits that later prove nugatory, because when the claims bills come in the profit is found not to have existed.

We are limiting the right of a name to build up a reserve and limiting the size of the total reserve. We are introducing the reserve because we expect it to provide the policy holder with extra security. I therefore consider it sensible to reach the limit determined by premium income as quickly as possible in order to provide the insured party

[Mr. Dorrell]

of the insurance business with better security. That is the first tax-principle reason for allowing the reserve to build up without charging tax on the investment return.

There is a second argument, based on practicality. What would be the practical consequence of taxing the investment return on the build-up of assets in the reserve? Hon. Members on both sides of the House have agreed that payments into the reserve will be made before tax and that there will be a tax deduction for them—they will be tax free. Surely all hon. Members would want payments out of the reserve to be taxable income.

It is difficult to see how, in practice, tax-free payments into the reserve could be subject to tax as the reserve built up and then subject to tax again as payments out of the reserve were made to the names. That would mean taxing twice the investment return secured on the assets in the reserve. Surely it is much more simple and straightforward to recognise that the assets going into the fund should be tax free—that it is in the public interest to allow the fund to build up reasonably quickly to provide better liquidity for the insurance business and better protection for the policy holder, and then to tax withdrawals from the fund in their entirety at the time of withdrawal, recognising that the terms on which assets can be withdrawn are strictly controlled. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central has now recognised that.

I cannot commend the new clause to the House. It strikes me as being wrong in principle, because it counters the purpose of providing the reserve in the first place, and wrong in practice, because it would lead to an administrative nightmare in trying to distinguish between payments out of the reserve that had already borne tax, the investment return, and those that had not, the original capital payments into the fund. There are arguments of both principle and practice against the new clause, and I suggest that the House reject it.

5.45 pm

Mr. Darling: I am sure the House will accept that there is a substantial difference between the taxation of individuals and company taxation. If we had the choice, we would all love to be taxed as companies: if we all had the option of setting expenditure against pre-tax income, no doubt we should take the opportunity to do so. Anyone who has ever been a schedule D taxpayer—as I have in my time—will know that it is far more advantageous than being a schedule E taxpayer, because of the various allowances. I am sure that both the Minister and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) will accept that we already treat individual and corporate taxpayers differently. That is why I believe that we must be careful to put Lloyd's names on an equal footing with other taxpayers.

I have some sympathy for the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed: having backed the Government in Committee, he must feel badly let down on discovering that they are now backing Labour on Report. I was pleased to note that Government amendment No. 6 is phrased in almost identical terms as new clauses 1 and 2, which I drafted in about 40 seconds. I wonder whether the parliamentary draftsman is being paid at the same rate as I am to draft Opposition new clauses. I was surprised that the Government met the aims of our new clause as they did, but I am pleased nevertheless.

My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) were right to stress the position of Lloyd's names who are also Tory Members of Parliament. The rules of the House allow them to vote, but if they speak they must declare an interest. The fact is that most will not speak and will declare no interest; but, when the Division Bell sounds, they will walk into the Lobby along with other Conservative Members to vote themselves a tax concession. It is all very well to say, within the rules of the House, "It is not just them; it is others outside." I am sure, however, that many taxpayers would like their representatives to secure for them the same benefits that Lloyd's names in the House are able to secure for others outside.

The situation is unsatisfactory, and I consider that Opposition Members are right to draw attention to it. The Government's judgment is tainted by the fact that so many Conservative Members—double the party's majority—are Lloyd's names. Four members of the Cabinet are Lloyd's names: of course their judgment is called into question. When members of the public consider the funding of the Tory party, they are bound to ask whether the Government are fit to run the country when they cannot exercise unfettered, untainted judgment in this regard.

Mr. Dorrell: Where is the tax break in a series of proposals that are revenue neutral?

Mr. Darling: I was coming to that.

The Minister was plainly uncomfortable when I drew attention to the general issue—the difficulty in which he and his right hon. and hon. Friends now find themselves. It is no wonder that, over the past few weeks, the country has been preoccupied with the question of who funds the Tory party, and that so many Tory Members of Parliament have substantial interests outside the House. It is astonishing that some of them find time to be Members of Parliament, given the interests that they have to declare. I think that legitimate and important points have been raised in this short debate—not just about the reserve provisions available to Lloyd's, although it was right to draw attention to that, but about the fact that the Government have and represent so many vested interests that they cannot exercise the objectivity that most people expect of a Government.

As I have said, we broadly welcome this part of the Bill. It is important to establish matters on a proper footing. That is why we were very selective about the amendments that we tabled. If the Minister had been right, it would have been very tempting for some people to vote against the entire provision, but we did not do that—we wanted to focus criticism where it deserved to be focused. Before the acceptance of our proposal today, a tax shelter was being created. The Government have accepted that that has happened. They have therefore tabled an amendment that closes that tax shelter loophole.

One remaining matter must now be dealt with, and——

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: No, I am just about to finish. The hon. Gentleman has not been here for the entire debate. He cannot expect to walk into the Chamber when it suits him

in order to raise a matter. If he wants to speak on Report, he can do so when we debate the many other matters that are before us.

Amendment No. 21 deals specifically with unfinished business. We are not persuaded by what the Government have said; therefore, we shall seek to press the amendment to a Division. I understand that, for technical reasons, the amendment will not come before the House until tomorrow afternoon, so we shall vote on it when we reach it. In the meantime, as the aims of our new clauses 1 and 2 have been fully met by Government amendment No. 6, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 3

HOME INCOME PLANS (INVESTMENT BOND SCHEMES)

'.—(1) Where a person has sold since 6th April 1986, more than ten investment bond related home income plans to individuals, the provisions of this section shall apply to them.

(2) A person falling within the provisions of this section shall be entitled to a reduction in their tax liability for 1993-94 of the amount specified in subsection (3) below if the condition of subsection (4) below is met.

(3) The reduction in tax liability referred to in subsection (2) above shall be £1.

(4) The condition referred to in subsection (2) above is that no more than 10 per cent. of the investment bond related home income plans they have sold since 6th April 1986 have subsequently been terminated.

(5) The Board is empowered by this subsection to issue regulations defining the term "investment bond related home income plans".'.—*[Mr. Darling.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Darling: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

This is a different matter which, as the House will recall, was debated almost exactly a year ago. Indeed, the terms of new clause 3 are almost identical to those of the new clause that was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) on 8 July 1992. We make no apology for raising the matter again. The position has not changed substantially since the House last debated it.

We want to draw attention to the plight of between 10,000 and 15,000 people, some of whom lost substantial sums of money by purchasing home income plans in the 1980s. The plight of those people is yet another nail in the coffin of the faltering system of self-regulation that was set up by the Government in the 1980s. Those people, most of them elderly, did not want to be such a nail, but their plight highlights the failure of the self-regulatory system and its inability to prevent the sale of manifestly unsuitable products and to provide an effective and efficient compensation scheme.

This matter concerns Members on both sides of the House. Sales of home income plans were eventually stopped in 1991. The question that must be asked is, why not before? I believe that a proper system of regulation would have done so long before then.

Let us examine first the poor advice that was offered to these people. No regulatory system can ever make it impossible to sell unsuitable products; what it can do is to make it less likely to happen. Of course, the buyer must beware. He or she should take advice. If, however, the Government set up a regulatory system, members of the public are entitled to rely on it and to assume that it works. The problem is that the present self-regulatory system does not work. In the case of home income plans, most people took advice but were given deliberately false advice by some very unscrupulous salesmen.

It is likely that in future more and more people will have reason to buy financial products, as a means either of saving or of providing a pension for themselves. If we intend to ask people to make such provision for themselves, it is essential that Parliament puts in place a regulatory system that is worthy of respect by the public and the industry. An efficient and effective regulatory system is good for the industry and for the public, but that is not what happens at present.

The problem is that the self-regulatory system is falling into disrepute, not just in the eyes of the public but in the eyes of the industry and the City. Hon. Members will no doubt have seen the remarks of the chief executive of the Prudential Assurance company, Mr. Mick Newmarch, and others. More and more people are calling for an end to the fiction of self-regulation and for the setting up of an effective, statute-based regulatory system in an area that is playing an increasingly important part in people's lives. That is why we have called repeatedly for a complete overhaul of the regulatory system.

I believe that we could draw on the experience of the Securities and Exchange Commission in the United States. I do not advocate its importation, but we need a single, powerful, regulatory body—perhaps building on the Securities and Investments Board that we have at the moment—that commands respect and strikes an acceptable degree of apprehension in the minds of all those whom it regulates. It should be free to set up regulatory bodies, as it sees fit. It should ensure, among other things, that there is a compensation scheme that works quickly and effectively. We do not have such a scheme at present. A review of the City's regulatory system, together with the enforcement of the criminal law for market-related offences, is long overdue. The Government should accept that, rather than sit back and wait for something to happen.

Investment-linked home income schemes were sold in the late 1980s to mostly elderly investors. Many of them have lost everything that they had. The idea was to unlock the capital in their homes, in the hope of earning a large enough return to make the repayments, as well as to provide extra income. Some of the people who bought those plans have told me that they were encouraged to do so by the remarks of Lady Thatcher when she was Prime Minister. She urged people to unlock their savings in that way. They feel especially bitter and let down because the Government's self-regulatory system has left them high and dry, following the failure of those plans.

Many investors were never told of the difficulties attendant on such schemes. Furthermore, it was not brought to their attention that those schemes were fundamentally flawed because, before any money was invested, the salesmen's fees and commissions were deducted. To illustrate the point, in one case a couple were to invest about £20,000, but subsequently found that over £2,000 had been deducted for the salesman's commission and fees, leaving insufficient capital to generate the required income.

Some of the schemes were sold by sharks—that is the proper word for them—who should never have been allowed to conduct business under the Financial Services

[Mr. Darling]

Act 1986. To its credit, the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Organisation has made valiant efforts to remove those people who should not have been allowed to trade, but it is a long haul. When the system was set up, more or less anybody who was trading previously was allowed to carry on business, although those people should never have been allowed to do so.

At stake is not just the character of individuals but the suitability of these people. The role of the regulator in ensuring that mainfestly unsuitable products are not sold must also be considered. A function of proper regulation is, I believe, to ensure, first, that the sales force is properly equipped and regulated and, secondly, that where manifestly unsuitable products are put on the market they are not allowed to be sold or, if they are sold, the circumstances in which they are sold are strictly regulated.

In this case, following the sale of home income plans in the late 1980s, the SIB received more than 1,500 complaints. I understand that more than £23 million has been paid to just under 2,000 investors. Others, however, are still waiting for compensation.

It is important to deal briefly with compensation. That is where some of the problems inherent in the present system are now becoming apparent. It should be remembered that, even where compensation has been paid, many people have lost heavily. One pensioner told me that it cost him £7,000 to get out of the scheme.

One of the difficulties is that the plight of these people depends to a large extent on who sold them their plan. If they were able to go to the insurance ombudsman, until fairly recently they received an extremely efficient service. The ombudsman took a broad view. If we look at his most recent report, we see that he took the view that

"the elements of such Plans can only sensibly be regarded as parts of the same transaction. I therefore ask insurers to deal with the loss on the mortgage as well as that on the bond."

The ombudsman was prepared

"to compensate policy holders in respect of any sums withheld from the mortgage funds, or withdrawn from the bond."

The ombudsman was also willing to make payments in respect of distress. He also, quite rightly, took the view that those who had sought advice were entitled to seek advice and that the cost of their advice ought to be recoverable from the insurer.

Unfortunately, because of a recent ruling, the scope of the insurance ombudsman's remit has been curtailed. I am not sure that he wanted it to be curtailed, but in a recent finding it was said that, due to technical reasons which I do not want to go into, it is not possible now for the insurance ombudsman to take as wide a view as he previously took about the scope of his powers. The fact remains, however, that we might want to examine the role of the insurance ombudsman. The victims of these schemes who until now were able to go to the insurance ombudsman found that most of, if not all, their claim was met.

That is not the case with other bodies. If individuals who lost out were able to go to the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation, the chances are that they would have received full compensation because there is no ceiling. Indeed, I have received few complaints from such people. If, however, people attempted to attach a building society, many would have encountered substantial difficulties.

Some building societies eventually proved to be co-operative—I emphasise the word "eventually" because even some household names have proved reluctant to become involved. They were happy to take the profits that would have accrued had the policy worked out, but they seemed reluctant to become involved in compensation. Others refused to co-operate—for example, the Alliance and Leicester, the Bristol and West, the Chelsea, the Leeds, the National Counties, the Newcastle, Northern Rock, the Staffordshire and the West Bromwich building societies. They trade on their reputation, but the public should be aware that, where those building societies have been found wanting or where people have lost out, they have been reluctant to become involved, or have refused to become involved, in the ombudsman's scheme.

Unfortunately, the building society scheme is such that it needs the building societies to volunteer to co-operate. When the Government eventually embark on a review of the regulatory system, they should look long and hard at the compensation scheme which depends on the voluntary effort of building societies to co-operate. That seems absolutely intolerable.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): I shall deal with this issue later, but I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that the Leeds proceeds on a case-by-case basis. I know that it was listed as one of the societies that had refused to become involved, but it has, in fact, been helpful. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would welcome the opportunity to set the record straight for that particular society.

Mr. Darling: I am all in favour of forestalling correspondence that may ensue. The information that I received, which was given in good faith, was that the Leeds had not agreed to co-operate. The Minister tells me that it has agreed, and I am very pleased; perhaps the other building societies will take a leaf out of its book.

In any event, building societies should not be reluctant in the first place. Everyone agrees that the people whom we are discussing, who are mainly the elderly, have lost substantial sums of money though no fault of their own. I fully accept that a building society might take the view that it is not the prime mover—the real villain of the piece may be the independent financial adviser. However, the building societies became involved. I should have thought that, as a matter of good will, if nothing else, some would be willing to be a little more co-operative than they apparently have been prepared to be until now.

I repeat that it should not be a question of volunteering to co-operate. A proper compensation scheme should ensure that when people are in difficulties, having relied on advice and been completely innocent victims, they should not have to spend weeks, if not months or years, worrying and becoming involved in considerable expense to get reluctant volunteers to come to their rescue. The Minister will find that that is not the view of the Labour party alone.

If an investor found that he had to go to the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association, which regulates independent financial advisers, and then on to the investor compensation scheme, I am afraid that the chances are that he would have experienced substantial difficulty because the maximum payout under the investor compensation scheme is £48,000. It will not pay compensation for any sums withdrawn, unlike the insurance ombudsman. It does

not compensate for stress or illness, and those who operate it do not believe that the people involved should have taken legal advice; if they had not done so, the chances are that many would not have received a penny. Of course, the scheme will not pay compensation for those who bought plans before 28 August 1988; nor will it pay if the independent financial adviser did not receive full authorisation. The difficulty in some cases is that the independent financial advisers held themselves up as being full FIMBRA members when they were not. A decent compensation scheme worthy of the name would not have left the victims high and dry.

I know that the ICS has had its difficulties. It is mindful of the fact that its payouts are an increasing drain on the industry as a whole. Indeed, it is the cost of compensation, among other things, that is holding up the formation of the new personal investment authority because, understandably, those who are to be members are worried about compensation. It is in the interests of the industry to ensure that we have an effective and efficient compensation scheme which does not cause further trouble to people who are in difficulties through no fault of their own but which accepts that, where mistakes have been made, investors should be compensated without making them jump through hoops to satisfy criteria that, in many cases, are unjustifiably stringent.

I should welcome an effective one-stop shop. Efforts to set it up have been fraught with difficulties. Initially, the Securities and Investments Board, albeit under slightly different management, was reluctant to set up a system. It did when pressurised to do so, but the SIB should reflect on the interests of the industry, let alone those of the public, and ensure that any scheme works and that it does not put investors to undue trouble in the exercise of remedies to which they are entitled.

Under Andrew Large, the new chairman, the SIB is attempting to clear up the matter, but the House should not be under any illusion: we are by no means anywhere near the end of the road. The fact is that people bought products that should not have been sold to them. Institutions such as some building societies want nothing to do with people who have lost out. Unlike Lloyd's names, who have also been the victims of difficulties, elderly people do not have a Lady Archer to stand behind them. They understandably feel very bitter at the fact that the Government are apparently indifferent to their suffering. That is a further illustration, if one were required, of the need for the Government to establish an effective regulatory system.

The House will know that there is a plan to set up a personal investment authority, if it ever gets off the ground. There have, however, been two years of horse trading between the vested interests. If trade unions had been left to put their affairs in order, the Government would have passed dozens of pieces of legislation in the intervening period; but, because of vested interests, one suspects, the Government have done absolutely nothing to ensure that an effective regulatory body is put in place to deal with this end of the market.

I suspect that we shall be told by the Minister that the SIB and others are making valiant attempts to deal with a difficult situation; that the Government intend to do nothing to amend the present law but hope that the industry will set its house in order; and that the industry has another last chance. The Government are very keen on giving people last chances when it suits them. Members of the public, and especially the victims of the home income plan disaster, want action from the Government; they do not want platitudes or to be told that it may not happen in the future. They want a firm sign of government.

The Government have abdicated their role. They are paralysed and transfixed in the glare of growing criticism of the system and of calls for action. We have been calling for change, and the chairman of the London stock exchange has called for a new body to examine the criminal law and the prosecution of market-related offences. As I said, the chief executive of Prudential Assurance has called for an end to self-regulation, and others are doing the same. In today's *Financial Times*, the Lex column calls for an end to the present system. The 10,000 to 15,000 people who suffered because of the failure also demand action. In the face of those calls, surely we deserve better than another tepid, uncertain response from the Government.

In an interview with the *Financial Times* last November, the Financial Secretary threw in the towel and said that there was to be no new legislation. He told the SIB that the Government would not legislate, and I suspect that Lloyd's has been told the same thing. The Government have a role to play in putting the present system to rights. We need a proper system of regulation to deal with such a crucial part of the economy and to protect members of the public. I hope that tonight the Government will at least say that, for a change, they are prepared to change from their present tack of doing absolutely nothing.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): I warmly welcome many of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), but when he went into rhetorical flights of fancy about the Government I parted company from him. Nevertheless, his general analysis of the problems faced by those who purchased home income plans was accurate. He is right to say that the unfortunate scandal—and it has been a scandal—has revealed gaps in our regulatory system. I congratulate him on giving valuable time to raising the matter this year, as he did last year.

I also pay tribute to many of my colleagues on both sides of the House who have devoted a great deal of time over the past year to fighting on behalf of their constituents who have suffered grievously as a result of this scandal. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), who has raised the matter in Adjournment debates on more than one occasion. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who has acted as chairman of the all-party committee on home income plans which set up so many important meetings with the various bodies concerned.

I pay tribute to all my colleagues on both sides of the House who, in relation to the West Bromwich building society, have contacted me as a result of the way in which their constituents have been afflicted and affected by the extraordinary way in which that building society has behaved in connection with this matter.

I shall devote my short remarks to the way in which the West Bromwich building society has tried to wiggle and wriggle to avoid its responsibilities in a very serious matter. Many of my comments will come as a shock to those in the west midlands who have trusted in the good name of the West Bromwich building society. I will refer to individuals and to conduct which is criminal in its nature.

[Mr. William Powell]

About 800 people took out home income plans which were ultimately backed by cash from the West Bromwich building society. There was always an intermediary and that intermediary was usually an organisation known as Frew Fisher Smith. In effect, it introduced clients to the West Bromwich building society which advanced money. Those of us in this House who have tried to seek some small measure of justice for our constituents have met a brick wall. It would appear that everything was down to the intermediary and had nothing to do with the building society.

The way in which the West Bromwich building society has behaved and has tried to avoid its responsibilities has been utterly scandalous, deeply shocking and would certainly merit much closer investigation, particularly by the police. I choose my words carefully. I believe that a great deal of criminal activity has been taking place involving forgery and fraud.

In respect of forgery, I have seen and am quite aware of documents, which have been signed by constituents of mine and of other hon. Members, which have undoubtedly been changed after they were signed by the person who was seeking to borrow money. Incomes have been falsified. There have been greatly enlarged falsifications to justify the pushing out of much larger sums of money than our constituents wished to borrow in the first place. Documents were altered after the event without the knowledge of our constituents. That forgery led to fraud and no doubt very high commissions for those involved in that activity. The result has been misery across the country.

So far as I am aware, every one of my constituents who took out a home income plan took one out which was backed ultimately by the West Bromwich building society. As I have said, about 800 people are affected across the country. Literally hundreds of hon. Members have drawn to my attention the fact that constituents of theirs have been involved through the West Bromwich building society. Everyone who has lost money and has faced considerable difficulty owes a debt to hon. Members who have pursued the matter, often in circumstances of great difficulty and in the face of the utmost indifference on the part of that particular building society.

I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to those who took out home income plans and have grouped together to campaign on behalf of those who have been losers. A dedicated group of people across the country has devoted many hours to fight for those losers.

The matter has been so serious that, in one case, an elderly constituent of mine committed suicide. There is absolutely no question but that the behaviour of the West Bromwich building society triggered that. As one would expect, that has led to enormous problems for the family.

As this matter has been going on for so long, we find that elderly people are becoming more and more worried. They see their debts growing and they are extremely worried about how they can meet those debts. They are terrified that the building society will move against their estates and that the modest inheritance, which they hoped to pass on to their children and members of the family, is likely to go to the building society and all those involved.

Whenever I tried to approach the West Bromwich building society, I met with indifference and a total refusal, on the building society's part, to face up to the gravity of the situation. That refusal was exhibited by the chairman, Mr. Baker, and by the chief executive, Mr. Elliott. From my experience of those two gentlemen, I believe that they should not be holding the kind of posts that they hold. Neither of them has shown the slightest interest in coming to grips with what has happened. It is a serious scandal that people who hold positions of trust, as they do, should seek to brush aside what has happened and pretend that it has absolutely nothing to do with them.

6.15 pm

I concentrate my remarks on the West Bromwich building society. I have had almost no dealings with any other body. I am aware that, where people have borrowed from other societies, some have had satisfactory outcomes and conclusions, and others less so. However, I know about the West Bromwich building society.

When my constituents and the constituents of other right hon. and hon. Members asked for a holiday on the interest payments while the matter was sorted out, the West Bromwich building society absolutely refused even to contemplate the idea of freezing the interest at the point of the problem and trying to resolve the matter thereafter. As a result, compound interest is being added to the debt and that debt is growing larger and larger. As nearly all the people—if not all—who borrowed through the home income plans had modest levels of savings, they increasingly find that their debts are at least as big as, if not in excess of, the asset that they currently hold. That is obviously desperately worrying for those people.

That is not the only point which is so scandalous and which makes it necessary for changes in the regulations and the regulatory framework to ensure that that kind of thing can never happen in future. We must also consider the fact that our constituents were told that if they simply signed the document put before them everything would be taken care of. No adequate explanation was ever given about what those people were signing up to in the first place.

It is worth bearing in mind that many of the people who signed up were exactly the kind of people who needed an explanation of what was contained therein. Responsible lenders, responsible banks and responsible solicitors would have ensured that a copy of the documents which our constituents signed would have been available to them and that the contents were carefully explained, clause by clause, so that the borrowers were aware of what they were signing up to.

In the case of nearly every one of the West Bromwich building society borrowers, through the intermediary, that did not happen. That is a very serious state of affairs. By lending money on the basis of home income plans and not ensuring that that happened, that is a flagrant breach of the duty of trust which the West Bromwich building society owed to its own depositors. It lent depositors' money in risky circumstances without taking the most elementary steps to ensure that the borrower was aware of the obligation being entered into. I indict the West Bromwich building society for that as well.

One has to say that there is precious little evidence that the financial status of those people who were buying home income plans was carefully and properly investigated. Indeed, I have already asserted, and believe it to be true and am aware of documents where this has happened, that the financial status was subsequently altered, by forgery,

after the income had been declared in order to justify the kind of advance which the intermediary wished to obtain with, of course, the commission that went with the much larger loan than might otherwise have been the case.

It is an absolutely scandalous state of affairs. If anything required police action, it is that each and every one of the mortgage applications to the West Bromwich building society now needs to be examined by the police. There are cases in which there was subsequent forgery of the financial declaration. Those matters need to be investigated and persons need to be brought to trial. If they are found in the intermediary or found in the building society, there should be no hiding place for those who have done this.

Mr. Darling: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. He has pursued these matters vociferously and vigorously on behalf of his constituents. Has he reported any of them to any authority, whether the police, a supervisory body or the Government? The hon. Gentleman's allegations are extremely serious and should normally be reported.

Mr. Powell: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. All those matters are available; they have been reported, and they need to be further reported. I have not reported them to my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, but I have made others aware. They are matters for the police. There are West Bromwich borrowers—if I may refer to them as that, although the West Bromwich would always hide behind the intermediary, as the hon. Gentleman identified in his own speech—who have been in touch with the police about these matters.

I hope that, as a result of what is said tonight, there will be a much more determined investigation than has currently been the case. That is precisely why I am taking advantage of the opportunity to ensure that matters which have been clear just below the surface for some time are now brought out in the open. Those who have responsibility for them have to face their responsibilities.

Although the new clause may not be exactly the right way of proceeding—I am open to argument about that—it paves the way for an important discussion about this matter which has concerned many of our constituents. We have always been faced with the fact that the West Bromwich building society relies upon the existing methods of regulation. Those methods have been shown to be wrong. It would be absolutely unacceptable to hon. Members if we discovered that people are selling home income plans. I am not aware of it, although there is the suggestion that some intermediaries might be trying to market such plans now, but, in view of experience from the mid to late 1980s, if any financial agent was seeking to market such plans, it would be a matter of the greatest scandal.

We cannot shut the stable door after the horse has bolted in relation to those who have already purchased, but for new purchases to be taking place, with people not being advised of all the difficulties that there are in law and so on, would be truly scandalous.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the hon. Gentleman join me and other hon. Members in calling for the Securities and Investments Board to deregister the West Bromwich building society from being able to practise investment business, as that organisation has clearly proved itself to be incapable of looking after the interests of people who lend to it or borrow from it?

Mr. Powell: The hon. Lady raises a very important point. She has been most assiduous on behalf of her constituents who have been affected by the West Bromwich building society. Therefore, she makes her request to me from a position of personal and close knowledge of the way in which that building society has been operating. I very much agree with the sentiments behind what the hon. Lady has said.

I hope that the building societies' authorities will look extremely closely at this matter. If I had any deposits in the West Bromwich building society, I would be extremely anxious and concerned about the competence of the people who are presently entrusted with looking after those deposits. I hope that the authorities that have overall responsibility for building societies will take close note of what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) has said.

I do not want to go on very much longer; I think that I have said enough to show how deeply unhappy I am at the way in which my constituents have been treated. I know that constituents of my right hon. and hon. Friends and others have been affected. Unfortunately, that disgraceful pattern of events has already taken place. It is obvious that the existing pattern of regulatory law has proved to be too insubstantial to deal with it.

My experiences of the West Bromwich building society have been so serious that I have felt it necessary to take advantage of this opportunity to try to bring out into the open what I regard as some of the most disgraceful behaviour by people who are entrusted with looking after other people's money that it has been my misfortune to learn about.

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), who has amply demonstrated the fiasco behind home income plans. He has made several serious allegations, and I am pleased that he has brought them to the attention of the House. I hope that the Economic Secretary to the Treasury not only listened to what the hon. Gentleman said but will say what action he intends to take as a result of those allegations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) dealt comprehensively with the failures of the self-regulatory system and the need to change that system and learn the lessons of the disaster of home income plans. As he said, up to 15,000 people were caught as a result of the sale of those plans in the mid to late 1980s. The trap that they are now in is certainly not of their making. Some of them have lost their homes, many of them have lost their life's savings, and many of them presumed that the home income plans that they purchased would not only pay off their mortgages but guarantee them a substantial slice of additional income for many years to come. When they were sold those plans, they were told that they were as safe as houses. Home income plans have not only turned out to be unsafe in respect of their mortgages but have cost them a pretty penny.

As the hon. Member for Corby said, when they were sold, none of the home income plans was issued with a health warning. Many people who bought home income plans are among the most vulnerable members of society. Many were elderly people, looking to pay off their

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

outstanding mortgages and for some additional income. The Financial Services Act 1986 has obviously failed to stop the sale of those plans, and it did not ensure that they carried a health warning.

The chief executive of the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association, Godfrey Jillings, has called home income plans inherently flawed. He made that statement after the event, because it was not until 1990 that FIMBRA and its counterpart, the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation, wrote to their members reminding them of their duty to recommend only policies geared to an individual's specific needs. The lack of public health warnings meant that many unauthorised firms, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central said, were able to continue selling to unwitting victims even when it started to become clear that a home income plan scandal was brewing. It was not until a year later that the regulatory organisations effectively banned home income plans.

The mess was the making of the regulatory organisations and their failure to make clear to the public the inherent dangers of investing in those plans. Clearing up the mess has been as inadequate as the system that created it in the first place. My hon. Friend alluded to the rather different treatment available to the victims of home income plans, depending on whether they bought through an independent financial adviser or from elsewhere. He went into that in some detail.

The miserly conduct of the investors compensation scheme was thrown into sharp relief recently in a court case when it became clear that the ICS was refusing to pay any compensation on behalf of a victim who had died before the rogue firm was declared in default. That meant that a widow or widower might get only half the compensation that she or he had hoped for, which would not be enough to keep them in their home. According to the solicitor who was dealing with many of the victims, in the two and a half months since the ICS took that decision, it had halved the compensation paid to a surviving spouse in at least 12 cases. He warned that many more people would be affected unless that practice was reversed.

6.30 pm

There are a number of lessons to be learnt from the mess. The hon. Member for Corby has called for police investigations. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central alluded to the need to change the regulatory system and to introduce reform as quickly as possible. As a result of the home income plan débâcle it has become clear that lax regulation costs people their homes; it costs people their lifetime's savings; it leads to a great deal of stress and worry. It even led eventually to one person's suicide.

Too many independent financial advisers are simply incapable of doing the job and of looking after their customers responsibly. Unless change is made, many of us will be left with the impression that the industry is run by cowboys. I am sure that the Minister does not wish that impression to be conveyed, and that he will have something positive to say.

We need tighter regulation because many of the people who are sold home income plans are not in a position properly to assess them unless public information is made available. The regulatory organisations are running a telephone helpline and making information available through citizens advice bureaux, but it is too little, too late. Information should have been available to people contemplating investing in home income plans before they got into trouble.

Lax regulation does not work. I hope that some lessons have been learnt from the débâcle and that when the Minister replies he will tell us the Government's thinking on compensating the victims and ensuring that they get a decent deal, and on ensuring that this kind of fiasco does not happen again.

Mr. Nelson: It is not surprising that the debate has evoked strong emotions on both sides of the House. I welcome the opportunity to make a few remarks in response to the new clause because I acknowledge that the issue has caused great personal distress to those who have been affected. It has come to the attention of many Members of Parliament who have taken up cases on behalf of their constituents, and it is right that the House should have an opportunity to be brought up to date with how those cases are being dealt with, as well as to examine some of the more fundamental issues of supervision, regulation and compensation.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) used the debate—as he has some others—as an opportunity to call for a fundamental overhaul of our supervisory system, and he reiterated his call for a full-blown statutory system. I have expressed my views on the issue and shall not repeat them, save to say that whatever system one has—statutory, self-regulatory or semi-self-regulatory—it does not, of itself, ensure that no losses will arise, that no fraudulent activities will take place and that no bad advice will be offered. One must not confuse the structures with the need to provide adequate supervision and regulation under whatever structure there is.

Mr. Darling: Will the Minister tell the House whether he and the Government are still wedded to the existing system of self-regulation, and whether there is any hope for any change originating from the Government?

Mr. Nelson: The Government have made it clear on a number of occasions that we believe that the structure provided by the Financial Services Act 1986 has been a considerable improvement, and that further measures can be taken to improve the system of supervision provided under that legislation. That was the purpose of Andrew Large's review, and it is the purpose of some of the changes being prepared by self-regulatory authorities.

I anticipate problems and great damage if any Government were to visit upon the financial services industry the blight of major reorganisation without a consensus as to what should replace the current system, and without confidence that such a reorganisation would result in a better system of supervision. When there is scope under the existing legislation significantly to improve the effectiveness of investor protection, it seems to me that the responsible first recourse of government is to take that approach. That is precisely what we are doing.

I do not rule out, for the long term, changes in response to events and I am always prepared to have a running review of those issues. However, when I am trying to support moves, for example, for the personal investment authority to get off the ground, it would not be responsible or helpful to suggest that we intend to throw the deck of

cards into the air and start dealing again, as far as our system of supervision and regulation is concerned. I prefer to address the issues of inadequacies in supervision and regulation where they occur, and not just the structure. It is the human decisions, as much as the institutional structures, which result in good or bad investor protection.

Many hon. Members have spoken about home income plans. Some home income plans are fairly benign; others have caused very serious problems. Home reversion schemes, whereby the owner of a property sells all or part to the scheme provider for an immediate cash sum and carries on living there until he dies, are sometimes a source of distress to next of kin and inheritors, but they are popular and there is nothing necessarily wrong with them, provided that people are well informed and know what they are entering into.

Purchase life annuity schemes can be a sensible source of additional marginal income for people. As the House will know, under such schemes the home owner takes out a mortgage loan on the property and uses the cash to buy an annuity, which services the loan interest and leaves an income. As tax relief up to £30,000 is available on the loan used to buy the annuity, the scheme can provide a positive —if modest—income after meeting the interest due on the loan.

The schemes that have caused most concern are those in which the owner takes out a mortgage on part of the value of his home and invests the proceeds in an investment bond. I understand and fully sympathise with hon. Members' concerns about the plight of home owners —usually elderly—who have been sold unsuitable home income plans. As the House may be aware, action is continuing to deal with the problem and I shall describe a little of the progress that has been made.

The financial services regulators, the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Organisation and the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation, have amended their rules to prevent further marketing of inappropriate schemes and have taken disciplinary action against the firms concerned. To answer the point mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), therefore, such schemes should not be sold in the future.

In addition, action is being taken to help those who find themselves in difficulty. Many life offices have made good the damage that investors have suffered. Some investors may alternatively be eligible for compensation, either from the investment company or from the investors compensation scheme set up under the Financial Services Act 1986. Last week I went to see for myself, at first hand, how carefully the ICS staff investigate those cases, and I should like to take this opportunity to pay a tribute to them. I watched and spoke to the staff, and in my judgment they are extremely thorough and as expeditious as they can be in dealing with the many claims that have been brought to their attention.

Firms regulated by LAUTRO have now paid out £8 million.

Mr. Darling: I am glad that the Minister mentioned the ICS. No one is criticising the staff; the system is at fault. Is it not an anomaly that an investor who goes to the insurance ombudsman will get more or less full compensation, including compensation for legal costs, stress and any payments made, while for those who go to the ICS the upper compensation limit is £48,000 and no other payments are made? In other words, for the latter there is only partial compensation. Does the Minister agree that it is anomalous for the end result to depend entirely on a stroke of luck or bad luck as to which regulator or authority the investor approaches?

Mr. Nelson: I acknowledge that there are differences in the overall amount of compensation that might be available—although in the vast majority of cases the amount will be less than the £48,000 for which the scheme provides. I acknowledge also differences in approach. That aspect was subject to judicial review, which ruled in favour of the fair basis of compensation provided by the ICS. It is an inherent problem of mixed-product schemes—and one which legitimately gives rise to concern—that where a number of institutions or intermediaries are involved in packaging a product sold to an investor one may find different acknowledgments of the liability which may be met. LAUTRO has generally been rather fast and, some would say, more generous. Compensation has certainly been paid more quickly than in cases that are the subject of resolution by ombudsmen or the one-stop procedure.

Each case is different, and many cases are complicated. That explains why a number remain outstanding. Considerable progress had been made in clearing up and resolving cases since the issue was last raised by the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) in a similar amendment last year.

Firms regulated by LAUTRO have paid £8 million in compensation to more than 920 investors, and investors have been restored to the final positioin in which they were before they became involved in the scheme. Between 400 and 500 cases are still being considered by the insurance ombudsman. Many cases are complex and may involve the responsibility of a number of different parties—for example, the financial adviser, the solicitor and the lender.

The liaison group established by the Securities and Investments Board announced in March 1992 a one-stop procedure for handling complaints under which investors in such a scheme on the recommendation of a FIMBRA member who are in difficulty as a result and who have received no satisfaction can pursue all their complaints through FIMBRA—even if their complaints involve others besides the FIMBRA member. The majority of complaints against FIMBRA members received so far are being handled by the ICS, which deals with cases in which firms are in default. The making of an award under the FIMBRA arbitration scheme can drive a firm into default.

So far, 15 of the independent investment intermediaries that were members of FIMBRA—that is, most of them —involved in marketing the schemes have been declared in default under the investors compensation scheme. Payment or offers of payment amounting to more than £16 million have been made to more than 1,000 investors with those firms, and a further 600 claims are being considered.

In many of those latter cases, investors have been told that they are eligible to receive compensation but that their claims cannot be finalised until financial details are received from the various third parties or because the investors have not yet encashed their investments. That might include the insurance company whose insurance bond was used or the solicitor who dealt with the mortgage documents. Some building societies have agreed to co-operate with the building societies ombudsman in using the one-stop procedure. Discussions continue with others with a view to encouraging them to do likewise. No doubt

[Mr. Nelson]

those societies and other organisations will note the strictures and comments of hon. Members who contributed to this debate. The Government hope that they will feel able to co-operate in that way.

More than 120 cases have been processed through the one-stop procedure, 29 cases remain in the FIMBRA arbitration process and 19 are being investigated. The remainder have been settled, rejected or referred to the ICS. Meanwhile, the building societies concerned have made it clear that they want elderly borrowers to remain in their homes, resolve their worries and avoid hardship.

The regulators are concerned to ensure that no one who took out such a plan is overlooked. On 7 June, the SIB published a fact sheet, "Home Income Plans: Grounds for Complaint", which sets out the characteristics of investment bond based schemes and encourages anyone who has taken out such a scheme and thought that they were given bad advice, or were not adequately informed of the risks, to contact the SIB. It has also established a helpline for two months to advise those who have not complained before on the action that they should take. Since it was established, a further 24 cases have been identified and referred to the appropriate complaints handling body under the one-stop procedure.

I was amazed that when that fact sheet was sent out and investors were invited to say whether they thought that they had grounds for complaint, and a number completed a questionnaire—when 24 cases were identified as being serious enough to merit investigation—13 respondents wrote to express their interest in home income plans and asked how they could take one out. If anything, that emphasises the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby that the public need good advice—whether it is independent, professional or simply sound common sense. Even now, the public are not necessarily aware of the dangers involved.

6.45 pm

I have said previously that, although those involved in selling or wrongly selling such schemes must bear the principal responsibility, and although a statutory compensation scheme is available for those who cannot be assisted in other ways, ultimately the public must exercise a degree of buyer beware. They should observe five rules. They must beware, spread their investments or risks, seek good advice, read the small print and not confuse authorisation with compensation. We cannot provide a fail-safe system of statutory regulation or even self-regulation in this or other areas. We can do our best, and we can take action against those who are in default. That is being done, substantial progress has been made, and the remaining cases should be dealt with over a period of time. I hope that all parties concerned, and particularly the institutions, will play their full part in co-operating to bring this sad episode to an end and to ensure the rightful restitution of funds to those who have undoubtedly suffered greatly.

Mr. Darling: At the start of this debate, I indicated that I had borrowed heavily from last year's amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) and, with respect, I believe that the Minister has borrowed very heavily from his speech last year. As he spoke, I recognised several passages that appeared in the columns of *Hansard* in July 1992.

I emphasise that no one is suggesting that we should throw the existing regulatory system into the air like a deck of cards and wait to see what lands. There is a growing consensus about what needs to be done. I suggest that we build on the present system but remove the self-regulatory element to end the present situation whereby people can pick and choose between regulators. People can decide to do nothing because there is no pressure on them to do anything. Above all, we must get away from the state of affairs that the Minister signalled again today, in which the Government will do nothing because that is to give the green light to those outside who wish to do nothing to put their house in order.

I remind the Minister that the financial services industry is of crucial importance to the economy, the people whom it employs, and those who buy the industry's products. We are calling for an overhaul of the present system and the establishment of statute-based regulation to protect not only the public but the industry itself.

I am sorry that the Government will not accept that proposal. I am sure that the 10,000 to 15,000 people who bought fundamentally flawed schemes will be bitterly disappointed. Our proposals are made not in any partisan sense. There is support for change outside the House as well as in it.

I am astonished that the Minister made no reference to the comments of the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) about the West Bromwich building society. I thought that the Minister would say something—even if he only expressed concern. I hope that the Minister realises that concern is felt by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Earlier this year, I tabled two early-day motions which attracted more than 100 signatures. I was astonished at that level of interest. Conservative Members tabled early-day motions that were slightly different, but they also attracted supporters.

The Minister must accept that there is concern and that it is not a question of criticising the industry, but a recognition that the industry is of crucial importance. People will want to buy more and more products and it is therefore important that we have a system of regulation and compensation that works. We do not have that at the present time.

In his tour round the compensation scheme, the Minister might have commented a little more on the anomalies between the various schemes. He said that the ICS scheme was fair and that he was glad that the judicial reviews found in its favour. The judicial reviews are to do not altogether with fairness and objective assessment of the pros and cons of such schemes, but with a narrow interpretation of administrative law, which is not quite the same thing. I hope that the Minister will realise that many people will find it curious that one scheme gives help for legal costs while another does not. There must be something wrong with that system when they are dealing with the same product.

The hon. Member for Corby and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) have said that one of the problems is that we have mixed-product schemes which allow the various organisations concerned to duck behind one another, saying that it is nothing to do with them. The hon. Member for Corby also made the point, which the Minister must accept, that even if the

Minister does nothing else and even if everything in the regulatory system needs no alteration, there is something wrong in this area. I am sorry that he did not do anything more.

By tabling the new clause, I hoped at least to provoke the Minister to say something different. Since the interview in the *Financial Times* last year, he has a new boss, a new Chancellor—a man of the people, who comes from the industrial midlands, no less. I had thought that with that new broom we might have seen some changes in financial regulation, but we have not.

My new clause is highly technical and was engineered to produce this debate. I am sorry that the outcome has not been more positive. I can only hope that those who are trying to resolve the situation will redouble their efforts. I am sure that many people long for the day when we have a Government who are prepared to govern in this area. They are keen on interfering in all sorts of trivia, yet when it comes down to such an important, fundamental point, the Government have absolutely nothing to say. I wonder why that can be.

Question put and negatived.

New clause 8

POWERS OF THE BOARD OF INLAND REVENUE

"(1) The Taxes Management Act 1970 shall be amended as follows—

(a) section 20, subsections (2) and (7A) shall be deleted;

(b) section 20B, subsections (6)(a) and (6)(b) shall be deleted and replaced with "the Commissioner giving the consent has also given approval to the exclusion.".'.—*[Mr. Beith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Beith: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause seems rather technical and raises a wider issue. It seeks to ensure that the agents of Government charged with collecting taxes are doing so in a fair, even-handed and responsible way. It specifically seeks to guarantee that, when a tax inspector tries to obtain documents or information from a taxpayer or third party, he does so only with the appropriate judicial approval and that the board of the Inland Revenue does not give the impression of acting as judge, jury and executioner.

Section 20 of the Taxes Management Act 1970 deals with the powers of inspectors to demand the production of documents from a taxpayer and third parties. Under that section, an inspector who believes that he needs access to a document in the possession of the taxpayer or some third party, for example a bank, can get an authorisation to serve a notice for material in two ways: by seeking the approval of the board of Inland Revenue itself to serve the notice, or by asking for the approval of a special or general commissioner. That appeal, whether to the board or the commissioner, is heard in private. The taxpayer need never be told of anything said about his tax affairs and has no chance to put his case against the inspector. The commissioner is under no obligation to keep minutes of the hearing, so often it is impossible to verify what has been said.

There are circumstances in which a degree of secrecy may be necessary. A crooked taxpayer could take advantage of the advance warning of notice. That is all the more reason why the process should be seen to be completely above board and should carry the most stringent checks on the correctness of its application.

There is a further reason why the process is of importance to certain innocent taxpayers. There is increasing evidence that section 20 actions are being used by banks as a reason to limit and even to withdraw credit or access to banking facilities. We all share the anxiety that, if some inquiry were made about us for no reason by a credit reference agency, it might panic our bank into not treating our account in the normal way. That inquiry becomes a real fear when it comes to light that there are cases where banks have ceased to operate an account in the normal way or have not allowed the taxpayer to do so when the section 20 notice comes to them. The bank might not even tell the taxpayer, the small business man or whoever why it is doing that, because it does not wish to alert him to the Inland Revenue's action and it would not be proper for it to do so. Suddenly the business man, who has already been adversely affected by his protracted arguments with the Revenue, finds that his bank is not operating in the normal way for no apparent reason. It is hard to imagine anything more likely to give someone a persecution complex.

In that context, it is not acceptable that the Inland Revenue should be able to act alone and without regard to outside control. The new clause removes the powers of the board to issue its own notices so that, in future, the only way in which an inspector could get a notice under section 20 would be to seek the approval of a commissioner acting in a judicial role or independently of the board.

It is not that tax inspectors are crooked or that they engage in anything other than proper tasks on our behalf, but occasionally there is an excess of zeal, as Ministers know from the cases in their constituencies, where power seems to have been used in circumstances that are not merited and which represent an unfair imposition on what turns out to be an innocent taxpayer.

It is equally important that the work of the Inland Revenue be seen to be carried out in a fashion that is transparently honest and fair to the taxpayer. That is part of the process of maintaining confidence in our system.

There is another aspect that has been brought to light, as so many things have been, by the Asil Nadir case. What a lifting of the stone that case was and how many things were found beneath it. One thing that curiously came to light was that tax officials had given details of Mr. Nadir's tax affairs to the stock exchange. Although few Opposition Members have any sympathy for Mr. Nadir, it raises the possibility for other taxpayers that there may be unauthorised disclosure by the Revenue of documents to somebody or some agency through which they might pass to a business competitor, to a potential creditor or to someone who in some way might, with no proper legal authority, use that information to the detriment of the taxpayer. The discovery that the Revenue is not above disclosing information in a way in which it is legally precluded from doing must add to the arguments for proper protection when the procedure is used to obtain documents.

There are reasonable ways in which that protection can be achieved by following certain procedures. First, hearings for the approval of an inspector's request for notice should have to be properly recorded and the taxpayer should be given a right to see what was said about him and his affairs at any later appeal.

[Mr. Beith]

Secondly, looking back to the House of Lords decision in 1991 in the case of T. C. Coombs and Co., to authorise a notice, the commissioner should be satisfied that, in all the circumstances, the inspector is justified. There is an implied duty on the inspector to divulge all relevant information, even if it does not support his case.

With that case in mind, we should ensure that both aspects are guaranteed. The first is guaranteed in section 20, but the second is not. There is no guarantee that the implied duty to divulge all relevant information will be exercised. If that were to be made a statutory requirement, and if the taxpayer were given the right to discover what had been said, it would be a reasonable safeguard.

Thirdly, we should ensure that when a commissioner hears a case for a notice under section 20, he should not be able to hear a future appeal relating to that taxpayer. It is not clear how often, if ever, that actually happens. The Minister may know how often the commissioner who hears an application for notice under the existing procedure turns out to be the commissioner who deals with that taxpayer's affairs at a later date. If a commissioner has already heard in private and without challenge many arguments of detail about that taxpayer's affairs, it may not be proper for him to be the person judging independently at a later stage that taxpayer's affairs. We believe that we should have such a safeguard. To what extent it is a safeguard observed in practice at the moment we do not know. The Financial Secretary may know the answer.

Those are the grounds on which we tabled the new clause. We believe that an important principle for the protection of taxpayers is involved even in the limited area in which, we all recognise, there may need to be the use of powers for the disclosure of documents so that fraud and evasion of taxes are not allowed to continue.

7 pm

Mr. Dorrell: I of course agree with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) that the question of the powers vested in the Inland Revenue to secure the proper collection of taxes is a proper concern of civil liberties and that we have to ensure that the balance between the powers of the Inland Revenue and the rights of the taxpayer is maintained. However, it is important to be clear about the circumstances in which an information notice can be served on a taxpayer.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that there are two routes by which an information notice can be served on a taxpayer. Either—this is the normal case—an inspector applies to the commissioners for an information notice and the commissioners grant it in the normal conduct of their duties—that is, on the commissioners' authority on the initiative of the inspector—or there is a power for the board to issue an information notice on its own authority without needing to go to the commissioners.

The right hon. Gentleman did not draw the attention of the House to the provisions in the Finance Act 1990 that limit the circumstances in which the board may legitimately use that discretion to circumstances in which the board can be satisfied that completion of the normal process—that is, applying to the commissioners—would lead to the danger that the right of the Revenue to collect tax that is due would be prejudiced. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman recognises that that is a legitimate concern and that the due process can on occasions lead to delay. Where there is a danger that the delay caused by due process would lead to a taxpayer avoiding tax that is legally due, it is reasonable for us to have a special process to avoid that happening.

The Inland Revenue has in place a code of practice which ensures that the power that is vested in the board of the Inland Revenue to issue information notices in such circumstances is delegated only to a very few senior officials. The inspector who seeks an information power has a choice between applying to the commissioners as an independent body or applying through the internal processes of the Revenue to one of the senior officials who has the power to issue the information notice only if he is satisfied that the conditions of the 1990 Act are satisfied, which is the key point.

That process achieves the objective that I set out at the beginning, which is that we need to maintain a proper balance between the right of the Inland Revenue to secure the information that it needs to collect tax that is properly due and the proper right of the taxpayer to insist that his interests are safeguarded. I shall consider the point that the right hon. Gentleman made about the ability to go back to examine records of decisions made by the commissioners and by senior officials at the Revenue in these circumstances. But I would not be in favour of the further legislative constraints which the right hon. Gentleman envisages because I am satisfied that the existing arrangements provide proper safeguards and maintain the balance that all in the House want to see.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the Financial Secretary for agreeing to look at some of my specific suggestions, some of which could be implemented without following a statutory route. His reply on the main point had the blandness that one associates with Revenue defences of its existing powers. I cannot imagine a situation in which an official of the Revenue conscientiously going about his duties would not believe implicitly that he should not fail to use the most expeditious power—in this case, the power to go to the board of the Inland Revenue rather than to a commissioner. He would believe implicitly that that power was being exercised to avoid loss to the Revenue of tax that it should properly collect—collection that might be prejudiced by any further delay. Inland Revenue officials go through life suffused with confidence that they are acting on that principle. It was some external check on the exercise of that power which I sought and which I still think desirable.

Mr. Dorrell: The right hon. Gentleman should take note of the fact that the senior officials of the Inland Revenue have been satisfied that the test is passed only in roughly 15 to 20 cases a year.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the Financial Secretary for that clarification, which is some reassurance. I hope that when he considers my detailed suggestions, he will bear in mind not only the point about unauthorised disclosure, which I hope causes people in the Inland Revenue to think again, but even more my point about the effect on banks and financial institutions of such notices. If the procedure is exercised at all, it could prejudice the conduct of the taxpayer's affairs and it might do so in circumstances in

which the taxpayer is wholly innocent. I hope that the Financial Secretary will bear that point in mind. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 11

ENGLISH WINE SALES (RELIEF OF DUTY) (NO. 1)

'. In section 56(1) of the Alcoholic Liquor Act 1979 (Power to regulate making of wine and made-wine provide for charging duty thereon) after paragraph (e) there shall be inserted—

"(f) relieving duty on sales of wine bought directly from vineyards by way of farmgate sales.".'.—*[Sir Anthony Grant.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this it will be convenient to take new clause 12—*English wine sales (relief of duty) (No. 2)*—

'. In section 56(1) of the Alcoholic Liquor Act 1979 (Power to regulate making of wine and made-wine provide for charging duty thereon) after paragraph (e) there shall be inserted—

"(g) relieving duty from wine sold in vineyards of under 10 hectares of production.".

Sir Anthony Grant: I did not expect to move the new clause, although I wholly support it. I know that some of my hon. Friends will wish to speak at rather greater length than I do, so I shall not detain the House. The new clause is designed to rectify the grossly unfair position in which English vineyards find themselves. I have in my constituency a vineyard called Gamlingay. It produces on a fairly small scale a very nice dry white wine which I commend to hon. Members and to anyone else who likes to participate.

One reason why the vineyard has difficulties is the imposition of duty. The producers sell the wine for £4·50 a bottle, of which approximately £1·20 is duty. If it were sold in France, in Germany, in Luxembourg, in Portugal, in Italy, in Greece or in Spain, the £1·20 would not arise. If our producers were on a level playing field, they could sell the wine for £3·30.

This problem applies not only to that vineyard, but throughout the British wine trade. If an Englishman, a Welshman or a Scotsman buys 10 cases of wine by direct sale from a vineyard in any of those European countries, he would pay no excise duty. If he bought the wine in France, the duty would be about 2p a bottle, which is negligible. He could bring that wine back home to the United Kingdom without having paid any duty. That same person buying at an English or Welsh vineyard, whether Gamlingay or anywhere else, will pay £1·16 or £1·20 a bottle in duty, or as much as £1·92 if the wine is sparkling. That is patently unfair to English vineyards. We talk about a level playing field in Europe. That should apply to everything, and certainly to wine.

It is with absolute confidence that I move the new clause. I believe that Treasury Ministers wish to support British wine as well as to consume it. I believe that they wish to encourage the trade and that they want to put us on the basis that applies in Europe. There is no excuse for discrimination, and the sooner that it is got rid of the better. One way to do that is to accept the new clause with pleasure and with alacrity.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): We have heard an enchanting case for the merits of English wine and the prospect of the garden of England being bedecked with new vineyards. I can see the case which is being made, but the new clause amounts either to a plan to subvert EC fiscal legislation—I can well understand why some hon. Members want to do that—or to an invitation to open a Pandora's box of delights concerning the consequential effects on other alcohol taxation.

Unless the Paymaster General tells us to the contrary—I fear that he will not—we will be told that, first of all the new clause runs foul of the agreements on harmonisation, which the Government signed with other European countries, and that if the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire South-West (Sir A. Grant) and his right hon. and hon. Friends wish to have the new lower duty on English-produced wine they will have to have that duty on all wine sold in this country.

Although we suggested in Committee that there was a need for some adjustment in the relative fiscal scales on alcohol taxation, I do not think that anyone suggested reducing the duty on wine in this country to the same level as that of some of our European neighbours.

One of the new clauses would make farm gate sales free of duty; the other would exempt from duty smallholdings smaller than 10 hectares. If the change is applied to wine, why not apply it to beer or spirits? That would invite small-scale duty free sales of home-distilled brews across the country, which may have many attractions but would subvert the basis of charging duty on alcohol and would give rise to a curious distortion in the structure of the industry, as our breweries and distilleries had to get themselves down to the farm gate sales threshold, or the 10 hectares, to take advantage of selling cheap booze.

Although the hon. Gentleman's move to give a special boost to English wine is attractive, I fear that the Paymaster General will have no alternative but to knock it firmly on the head.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I have a constituency point that causes me to support the new clause. I also support in general the need to make English vineyards as competitive as possible. Although they make fine wines, they do not compete on price. Much of that is a result of the burden of over-regulation and excise duty.

My point relates entirely to our new clause on farm gate prices. The custom of the vineyards in my part of Sussex had dropped dramatically as a result of the single market. I am not criticising the single market—thank goodness for it—but it is having a definite effect on the vineyards in east Sussex because they are not able to sell wines—as they have done—from the vineyards. We must encourage them to be as competitive as possible vis-a-vis the French vineyards. One has only to spend a brief period on holiday in France and see how much of its product any vineyard will sell to people who turn up at the farm gate to notice what a substantial part of sales it is for many vineyards and how much it contributes to their annual output and hence their profit.

I hope that the Paymaster General will, in a general review of English vineyards and the Customs regime to which they are subject, have a good look at helping to make English vineyards considerably more competitive, particularly at the farm gate.

7.15 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I am glad to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over a topic about which I have spoken in the House for the past 15 years. On one occasion—I want to assure the Whips that this will not be such an occasion—I had the Adjournment debate at 10 o'clock. As the business of the House had collapsed, the debate started at 4.30 pm. I had a wonderful three hours —4.30 pm to 7 pm and then from 10 pm to 10.30 pm. My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) was engaged in that operation with me and I am pleased to see him here tonight.

I should declare an interest at the outset. I was interested in English wine long before the English Vineyard Association was even thought about, and before we had an English vineyard industry. I now advise the association, which has 400 commercial vineyards in membership. I do not think that many hon. Members realise that there are 400 commercial vineyards in this country. They now produce just short of 25,000 hectolitres of wine a year, some of which is very good.

The trouble is that English wine is out of the reach of the majority of the population, not because it is too difficult to get down in a glass, but because it sells for too much. For most people, the average price of a bottle of wine is £2·99 or less. As the duty on a bottle of English wine is £1·16, one can see that that leaves only £1·83 for a bottle of wine to be produced, marketed and retailed.

I have to declare a second interest, as I have five vineyards in my constituency, and they are very good indeed. I make it a point to visit them to ensure that they are doing what they should be doing and in the way in which we would like it to be done. Devon has 10 vineyards. Somerset has 10 vineyards. Norfolk has only four, but Kent has 170 acres of vines. In the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) there is one vineyard of more than 200 acres. The industry is quite big now.

The vineyards in Britain are so far north that they do not yield as much wine as the French or Spanish vineyards. They need help from the Government——

Mr. Andrew Smith: And sunshine.

Mr. Steen: Sunshine, yes, but they can be helped with the duty as well, which is what this issue is about. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) quite rightly said, people go to France, not only in charabancs but in large transit vehicles, and they can buy any amount of still and sparkling wine at the French level of duty, which is 2p on the bottle. Much more significantly, if they go to any vineyard in Germany, Italy, Spain or Greece and buy over the gate, which is what the new clause is about, there is no duty at all.

Only one country apart from Britain imposes duty on farm gate sales—France. France imposes a duty of 2p a bottle, which includes VAT. In Britain, the duty is £1·16 a bottle, including VAT. There is thus no incentive for British vineyard owners to show tourists around their vineyards because those who would like to take away a little souvenir bottle of wine discover that there is a large amount of duty to be paid on each bottle. In any other European country apart from France such bottles are excise duty free because they are counted as farm sales for personal use. In France people can take six cases of wine, sparkling or otherwise, from a vineyard and pay only 2p a bottle duty on it. In Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece or Germany cases of wine can be bought without paying duty on them—or VAT.

The new clause tries to establish a level vineyard across Europe. I look forward to hearing what the Paymaster General has to say about this. He will probably say that he has not appreciated that there was a problem. We are, after all, talking about a drop in the ocean—the amount of duty involved, to mix a metaphor, is no skin off the Treasury's nose. We are talking about a few pence at most.

The present injustice hurts vineyards in constituencies such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait). Many people cross the channel and then drive along the coast. The French, who are understandably rather careless of English wine, drive into vineyards on the Sussex coast and get the shock of their lives when they find that they have to pay £6 for a bottle of wine when they can buy as good wine for a third of the price in France or elsewhere——

Mrs. Lait: Half the price.

Mr. Steen: Quite so.

The new clause is only about farm gate sales and is designed to deal with our Government's discrimination against our own vineyards. The Government have shown clearly that they realise that we must back British goods, and it would help vineyards' commercial viability—they are experiencing difficult times—if they were not charged for farm gate sales to people who buy wine for their own use. Accepting the measure would do such vineyards a great service.

New clause 12 has to do with relief of duty on wines sold from vineyards of under 10 hectares. Most of our 400 commercial vineyards are very small, and it would be marvellous if the Government gave them some relief. There is a precedent for this: the arrangement giving those who produce wine a growers' allowance. I do not know how much they are allowed to consume without paying excise duty, but the point remains the same.

I should have thought that the Government could easily accept this new clause, which would merely give statutory form to the growers' allowance, which is already well established here. Cider producers also enjoy some arrangement allowing them to produce some cider for their own consumption without paying duty on it.

I hope that the Minister appreciates the great interest in the House in English wine. Certainly Conservative Members have a great many vineyards in their constituencies. I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle), who runs his own vineyard and who can speak with experience. We also look forward to hearing other hon. Members speak——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Which other Members are called is entirely the choice of the Chair. It is not up to the hon. Member who is speaking.

Mr. Steen: I apologise without reservation, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You, of course, choose the speakers. I was just hinting that you might choose a speaker who happened to own a vineyard.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I am very interested to hear about the hon. Gentleman's knowledge of the wine industry, and I have great sympathy with what he is saying. I only hope that the farm gate price

of whisky can come down too, so that Scotland can enjoy some of the stuff that we produce more cheaply—but I take the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Steen: What the hon. Gentleman says is precisely what I feared—the Minister will say that he cannot give way on wine because other people will start saying that the same should be done for whisky. There may indeed be a case for that. We are anxious to be fair to those who produce our wine. At the moment wine producers operate with both hands tied behind their backs—we seem to be shooting them not only in the foot but in the brain. We are not allowing them to encourage tourists to visit their vineyards and leave with bottles of wine, because we are tripling the amount that they have to pay for it.

Many other Members wish to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I will conclude. If the Minister gets this one right, he will perform a great service to the nation —and solve a lot of problems.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): I begin by declaring an interest. On my farm in Suffolk we have a vineyard, which we planted five years ago. We planted seven acres with 12,000 vines, and we are proud to be part of a new and, we hope, growing industry in the United Kingdom.

I was appalled to hear the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) talking about cheap booze. That just shows how little he knows about the quality of wines that can be produced in England. The closer a producer is to the geographical extremity of where a fruit can grow, the better that fruit can be. Even though the process is more risky, the longer maturing period enables production of a better quality fruit.

We in the countryside have all been encouraged to diversify, and this is a diversification—not to mention a large investment, which I and many others who have tried to make a living in the countryside have made. The industry needs encouragement: not help, but fair competition.

The industry also creates employment. By the time we have looked after our vines and made and marketed the wine, our little venture employs six people, part or full time. It thus makes a contribution to local prosperity—another point for the Minister to bear in mind.

What we produce is drunk and enjoyed in this country. It substitutes for imports, another laudable achievement. We do not want help; we just want fair competition. My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) made a good point about that. At present, vineyards near France suffer greatly from unfair competition owing to the new regulations.

Mr. Steen: Am I right in thinking that my hon. Friend's very small vineyard has been extremely successful of late?

Mr. Carlisle: That remains to be seen. We have entered a competition and I look forward to hearing the result. I am hopeful that we have produced good quality wine.

I hope that the Minister will listen to the arguments. The wine industry is not a big one, but it is developing. It is a serious industry, which is becoming more professional and capable of producing good wine. Given a level playing field, we are confident that we will not only create employment in rural areas but help to cut imports.

Mr. Graham: I did not intend to speak in this debate, but I have a lot of sympathy with what hon. Members have said, for example, about employment, which is very important.

I understand the rules that apply in other parts of Europe, and I agree that we should have a level playing field. I would like to extend it to the social chapter and other areas, but that is not the point.

7.30 pm

For years one tremendous growth industry in Scotland has been the tourist trail to distillers. As many hon. Members are aware, people from all over the world visit the distilleries to take a wee dram and encourage them to buy whisky when they get back home. I understand the point about possible visitors to the new wineries in England, or whatever they are called, and how that could be a new growth industry in tourism.

Last night I was reading a book about the history of Great Britain, starting with the Roman times. There was a paragraph about the wine that was produced in those days. Some of the finest wine in the Roman world was produced in Britain. Apparently, the climate then was slightly better than it is today. I came here from Scotland today, and I know how different the weather is in Scotland. I think that, given the heat down here, not only grapes but bananas can be grown.

On a less frivolous note, I think that what hon. Members have said tonight is very serious. I believe in a level playing field and if wine can be bought duty free at the farm gate in France, Germany, and other countries, that should be possible here.

I genuinely believe, based on historical facts, that we can produce wine as good as that produced by any other country. I would encourage the folk in England, who are lucky enough to have the right weather, to produce the wine. The Government could take a wee lesson and give strong support to the new flourishing art—or rather ancient flourishing art—of wine making in Great Britain.

Like every other hon. Member, I like a wee glass of wine. I do not know a good wine from a bad one. I would follow the advice of the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), who seems to have visited all the vineyards. Next time perhaps he would like to take me and my family with him.

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex): I am grateful for the support of the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) for the new clauses to which I have put my name. Perhaps we could have a useful twinning association and organise exchange visits to the vineyards in Sussex, Kent or Suffolk and the distilleries that are near the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle)—and this is an unsolicited comment: I have drunk his wine and it is excellent. I hope that soon the Chairman of the Catering Select Committee will ensure that it is available in the Members' and Strangers' Dining Rooms.

I am happy to support the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). I spoke in support of him a number of years ago in the debate to which he referred. In my part of the world, in the county of Sussex, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and

[Mr. Tim Renton]

Rye (Mrs. Lait) has already said, vineyards are a growing business. That is a bad pun, but the fact is that tourism has always been immensely important to Sussex.

In recent years, coastal towns such as Hastings, Eastbourne and Brighton have not found it easy to develop their tourist industry. One of the good recent developments is the vineyards, which are increasingly flourishing. Those on the downs in my constituency, inland from the coast, provide a pleasant stopping place during the day for tourists who have been to Brighton, Eastbourne or Hastings. In the afternoon, tourists and their families can go to somewhere like Drusilla's vineyard, where there is a wine shop that sells farm produce as well as English wine.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams has rightly pointed out, there is an anomaly. We want to sell more English farm produce and English wine from our local shops, but the duty on English wine sold at the farm gate is £1·16 a bottle as compared with 2p a bottle in a comparable establishment in France, or nothing at all in other comparable continental establishments. I am sure that my right hon. and good Friend the Paymaster General will say something encouraging about that when he winds up the debate.

Many people in Sussex now take their cars on the ferry over to France from Newhaven, which is next door to Hastings and my constituency. They fill their car boots with dozens and dozens of bottles of wine at the hyper in Dieppe or Pas de Calais. I am a great supporter of the single market, but it is wrong that there should be such a tax differential against our English wine.

Mr. Graham: Is the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) aware that coach loads of people come down from Scotland every week, or every day, and go over to France to buy wine? They could possibly stop in his area, load up there with wine and save the cost of the petrol necessary to go to France. That would increase the amount of money that would go to the Exchequer.

Mr. Renton: I am delighted that Scotland is so prosperous under a Conservative Government that so many of the hon. Gentleman's constituents are able to take a bus down to fill up with wine in France. I hope that they will also stop at our wine shops in Sussex on the way back.

The tax differential poses a serious problem in Sussex. It is not a frivolous matter. Wine growing is an important young industry and we wish to be able to compete against our continental neighbours on a level vineyard, to use the memorable phrase of my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams.

Sussex has often prided itself on the slogan "Come to Sussex, Sussex by the sea". We would like to add a word in the middle of that. We would like people, when they come, to drink Sussex "Sauvignon" by the sea.

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): I should like to endorse everything that my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) has said, which applies equally to the vineyards of Kent.

I do not think that it is up to the Chairman of the Catering Select Committee to decide which wines are supplied in our Dining Rooms. All I know is that the excellent Syndale valley wine from my constituency—it is produced close to my home—got on to the wine list. I was privileged to be a member of the Select Committee when it tasted the wines. It was done without any knowledge of the origin of the wines, but that local wine still got on to the wine list. That is a tribute to my local vineyard and explains why I wish to add my voice to the powerful voices that have been heard today in support of the new clause.

Mr. Steen: I am a member of the Catering Select Committee, and I can inform the House that there are moves afoot to remove English wine from the list. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should resist that with all the enthusiasm that we can muster?

Sir Roger Moate: It would certainly be sad if that happened. The important thing is that consumers should be allowed to make their choice.

There is tremendous international competition to supply the wine drinkers of this country. The English vineyards do not produce volumes of wine and cannot compete easily with the flood of high quality wines that now come into this country. What is of tremendous importance is that they can compete by offering tourists and others the opportunity to visit vineyards that are found in some of the loveliest parts of the countryside.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General and his colleagues, when considering the new clause or other proposals, to remember that the fact that people can go into the countryside, visit the vineyards and buy wines there is a tremendous and fast developing asset. That is the key point. It is even more important because of the international competition.

If it is true, as we are informed, that virtually no excise duty is charged at the farm gate in France, and that in most other European countries no tax is imposed, what is the justification for imposing it here? It cannot be because of the revenue raised because the amount collected must be very small. But if we can encourage tourism, diversification, conservation and the improvement of the countryside, I should have thought that my right hon. Friend would accept our overwhelming argument.

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): I, too, like English wines. Indeed, I have a constituency interest in the form of a small vineyard at Thornbury castle. I understand what my hon. Friends are trying to achieve in tabling the new clauses, which are designed, as their title suggests, to assist English wines. However, they do not do that. They demonstrate my difficulty in distinguishing between English and other wines under the tax system.

The basic principle of international trade was laid down many years ago, after the war, in article III of the general agreement on tariffs and trade, which says:

"the products of the territory of any Contracting Party should not be subject, directly or indirectly, to internal taxes or other internal charges of any kind in excess of those applied, directly or indirectly, to like domestic products."

Since 1947, there has been a lot of case law on that and it covers the matters that we are discussing. Under GATT we are not permitted to distinguish in favour of English as opposed to imported wines. The principle behind it is that no country's tax system should discriminate against imports. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was doing his best the other day to achieve improvements in GATT and to lower all sorts of trade barriers.

It is also against article 95 of the treaty of Rome and European law to distinguish between products in that way.

Dr. Godman: Is the Paymaster General confident that his decision to reject the new clauses is compatible with European Community law and hence not challengeable in the European Court of Justice?

Sir John Cope: Yes. I have just quoted the GATT article and mentioned the treaty of Rome and subsequent bits of European law.

In trying to get around the problem of not contravening GATT or the treaty of Rome, my hon. Friends have hit on two ideas, which are incorporated in the new clauses: first, so-called "farm gate sales"; and, secondly, the 10 hectare suggestion.

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Paymaster General has given the answer that I expected about European and international law, but how would he reply to the argument that in other European countries, with the exception of France, those farm gate sales are not charged duty?

Sir John Cope: I should not have given way to the hon. Gentleman and I apologise to the House for having done so because I was just coming to that point.

New clause 11 deals with farm gate sales, or rather vineyard gate sales. There is no difference in any European country between duty at the gate of a vineyard, or within a vineyard, and duty at a supermarket or anywhere else, nor can we introduce a difference under European law. The overall duties on wine imposed by France are less than that imposed by this country, and other European countries impose no duty at all. But that is true across the board; it is no advantage to sell wine at a vineyard, nor can we introduce such an advantage.

It is a question of the difference in excise duties between this country and the other countries named by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). Our neighbours in other directions, such as Ireland, impose a duty similar to or higher than that imposed by this country. We have often discussed the difference between our excise duties and that of other countries. My hon. Friend discussed a direct function of a much wider argument about excise duties, particularly in the light of the single market.

Mr. Steen: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir John Cope: I should first like to discuss new clause 12, which deals with the 10 hectare limit.

Sir Roger Moate: Before my right hon. Friend leaves that point, may I say that the English Vineyards Association informed most hon. Members that all those other European countries pay no excise duty at the vineyard? Is my right hon. Friend saying that that is simply because they pay no excise duty at all on all wine sales, or is our information wrong?

7.45 pm

Sir John Cope: I am saying exactly what my hon. Friend suggests. No excise duty—in some cases, VAT is charged—is payable on wine in the countries named, apart from France which imposes a small amount of excise duty. The rate of excise duty and VAT is exactly the same for sales at vineyards and in supermarkets or anywhere else in France and other European countries.

New clause 12 suggests that we should discriminate on the basis of size, but 10 hectares is far too large for discrimination to be of value. The vast majority of vineyards throughout the continent are under 10 hectares. I am told that most premier cru Burgundy comes from vineyards of under 3 hectares. Those small vineyards have a small production because they believe in being exclusive to maintain their markets. There are approximately 1·9 million vineyards on the continent, of which only 90,000 measure more than 10 hectares. Therefore, the difference of 10 hectares would be of little use and the same would be true if we changed that figure to 5 hectares or fewer.

Because of the international agreements that I mentioned earlier, we would be unable to distinguish between European and English wines in that way. If we said that the produce of small vineyards under 10 hectares or some other size should carry a lower rate of duty, we would have to apply that rule to continental vineyards of the same size, which is the vast majority of them. It is another way of saying that we would reduce the rate of excise duty on wine from almost anywhere in the world. Under GATT, an Australian vineyard of over 100 hectares or a large Californian vineyard would have to be treated in the same way as we treat our most favoured vineyards. We would have to offer the 10 hectare rate even to the most enormous vineyards imaginable, provided that they were overseas. It would discriminate only against large United Kingdom vineyards, not against large vineyards elseshere.

For all those reasons, I do not think that either of the solutions offered by my hon. Friends provides a way forward for us. I believe in free international trade; I also believe in the single market. I recognise the problems caused by the difference in duty rates, which is not confined to wine, but is a wider issue. In the circumstances, it is not possible to use a duty device to benefit English wine. I hope that the trade flourishes. The best way to ensure that is by improving marketing techniques and by extending the ways in which grapes are grown and wine is produced and marketed. We cannot ensure that the trade flourishes by trying to seek duty advantages, which would cause immense difficulties.

Mr. Steen: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the English Vineyards Association is planning to set up stalls in French ports to sell English wine to English travellers returning from France so that they can buy English wine at £1·16 a bottle less than in England? It is crazy for English people to go to France to buy English wine to bring back to this country because it is cheaper in France. If the new clauses are incorrectly drafted, can my right hon. Friend help us to table some helpful new clauses?

Sir John Cope: I do not believe that there is a method of distinguishing, through the duty, in favour of English wine. Perhaps somebody else can find a way, but I have not found a method consistent with GATT or European Community agreements that benefits English wine through the use of duty.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams has mentioned a marketing method. I was commending innovative marketing methods, and my hon. Friend has drawn attention to just such a scheme. I recognise the difficulties of which he has spoken, but it is true that English wine or any other wine bought in France for personal consumption and either brought back to this country or drunk in France bears French duty. The important factor is the country in which the wine is

[Sir John Cope]

bought; it is not the specific farm gate or place where the wine is bought or where it is produced. I cannot accept the new clauses.

Question put and negatived.

New clause 23

TAXATION OF FISHING VESSEL DECOMMISSIONING GRANT

'(1) Any grant received under the Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning) Scheme 1993, shall be taxed in accordance with subsections (2) to (4) below.

(2) For the purposes of capital gains tax, a sum payable to an individual by virtue of the scheme referred to in subsection (1) above shall not be treated as part of the consideration obtained by him for, or otherwise as accruing to him on, the disposal of any asset.

(3) Where a vessel is scrapped in compliance with grant conditions under a scheme referred to in subsection (1) above, then for all the purposes of capital allowances legislation, and in particular Part II, Chapter II of the Capital Allowances Act 1990, the disposal proceeds to be brought into calculation of the balances adjustment for the purposes of section 24 of the said Act and the value attributable under section 26 of the said Act or otherwise shall be deemed to be nil.

(4) No part of a sum payable by virtue of a scheme referred to in subsection (1) above shall be treated as a trading receipt in the Schedule D Case/computation of profits of the applicant.'.—*[Mr. Wallace.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I hope that the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) will remain in the Chamber as she said in last Wednesday's debate on decommissioning that she was very much on the side of the fishermen, and I think that today's debate will give her the opportunity to reaffirm that. Last Wednesday the House approved the decommissioning scheme for 1993-94, which is expected to be the first of three annual decommissioning schemes amounting to £8·4 million per annum.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I am not sure that the order says £8·4 million per annum, but it says £25 million over three years.

Mr. Wallace: I think that the hon. Gentleman is right. I do not think that the order specifies the amount, but the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food stated what the amount was likely to be over three years. In the present year the figure is expected to be £8·4 million, and the same in each of the two succeeding years.

An official explanatory leaflet sent to people in the industry stated that, in order to qualify for a decommissioning grant—for which hon. Members on both sides of the House have called for many years—three specific conditions must be met. First, the vessel must be scrapped—permanently broken up or disabled so that it is incapable of going to sea. Secondly, registration in the register of fishing vessels must be cancelled. Thirdly, all valid fishing licences must be surrendered.

The leaflet comments on the tax treatment and states:

"Decommissioning grants are taxable in the same way as other grants to the agriculture and fishing industries".

That is an unilluminating statement which begs the question of what prompted the new clause. I hope that the Treasury team will be prepared to accept what I believe to be the most favourable taxation treatment of decommissioning grants. If that is not acceptable, it would be helpful to those in the industry if the Treasury team could state how decommissioning grants are to be taxed.

The hon. Members for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) have all taken part, over many years, in debates on decommissioning. I think that they, like me, will recall that when we have tried to do the sums, the Fontainebleau agreement has often been introduced into the debate so that it becomes unclear how much the scheme will cost the Treasury. We have always asked what sum will be taken back from the fishermen in tax. I do not recall fisheries Ministers ever giving a clear answer to that question. There is an opportunity this evening for Ministers to clarify the position.

We are asking businessmen to submit tenders and make serious business decisions to scrap their vessels when a key element in the calculation is unclear. I very much hope that tonight we can do something to clarify the position, not least because it was announced last Wednesday that fishermen have until the end of this month to make their submissions for decommissioning grants. Any further information that can be given this evening will be most welcome.

Dr. Godman: Is the hon. Gentleman confident that the scheme will not be hogged by Humberside trawlers in the same way that the previous scheme was so manipulated?

Mr. Wallace: The previous scheme was much criticised, not least by the Public Accounts Committee, and we shall want to watch how the new scheme operates. We do not want money to go only to one port. I shall be ruled out of order if I become too embroiled in a debate on the merits or otherwise of the decommissioning scheme. Many of us would argue that money is not enough, but this evening we are concerned with the tax consequences.

It appears that there are four ways in which the sums can be taxed. First, the receipts could be taxable as trading income. Although nothing in the scheme requires the applicant to cease trading, it would, for the most part, seem reasonably self-evident that if a person scraps his boat, he is unlikely to carry on trading. Such a method will probably not commend itself to the Treasury, particularly, as has been said, if the licences have been returned. Secondly, the receipt could be considered to relate solely to the scrapping of the vessel and accordingly to be taken into account when calculating capital allowances. I suspect that the Treasury may wish to pursue that policy.

Thirdly, the receipt or part of it could be treated as a capital gain. In addition to receiving compensation for the vessel, it could be argued that the value received also includes an element for the surrender of a precious stock licence and the forfeiture of the right to fish with that vessel. I believe that there is case law to support the argument that payments for those items—which amount to goodwill attached to the vessel—could be regarded as capital receipts.

When a grant is allocated, no indication is given as to the amount awarded in respect of the vessel and the amount awarded in respect of the licence. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department may consider that no value is attributable the licence on the basis that nothing was paid for it. I understand that in the north-east

of Scotland the Inland Revenue routinely pursue a policy of attributing value to a licence as a capital asset when a vessel is sold. It is possible that a grant in excess of the vessel's current market value could be treated by the Revenue as capital.

Fourthly, it could be accepted that no tax is to be paid on the grant—a proposal that I commend to the House. I believe that that may have been the case in some previous decommissioning grant schemes, although the status of some of those grants has not been made clear from the commissioners' decisions. Perhaps the Ministers will tell us about the operation of decommissioning grants under previous schemes.

8 pm

The new clause has no implications for capital gains or income tax and it has some precedent. I refer the House to the tax treatment of grants under section 27 of the Agriculture Act 1967. That Government grant was to encourage people to reinquish the occupation of uncommercial agricultural units. The parallel between relinquishing such units and the decommissioning of fishing vessels is immediately obvious. Section 249 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 states:

"For the purposes of capital gains tax, a sum payable to an individual by virtue of a scheme under section 27 of the Agriculture Act 1967 (grants for relinquishing occupation of uncommercial agricultural units) shall not be treated as part of the consideration obtained by him for, or otherwise as accruing to him on, the disposal of any asset."

The leaflet from which I quoted said that the method of taxation would be similar to that which applies to other agriculture and fishing grants.

I have given an example of an agricultural grant that is not included for the purposes of capital gains tax. I am sure that the Financial Secretary is aware of other agricultural grants such as those payable under sections 9 and 12 of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968. Section 9 deals with grants for reorganisation compensation. When dealing with it the then Minister of Agriculture, Fred Peart, said:

"This is a difficult matter, and right hon. and hon. Gentlemen opposite are right to ask whether the new payments will be liable to Capital Gains Tax, Income Tax or betterment levy.

Tenants will not be liable for Capital Gains Tax, Income Tax or betterment levy on sums received under Clauses 9 and 12. These sums do not constitute a capital gain or, in the Land Commission's view a realisation of development value, nor do they constitute part of the tenant's taxable income."—[*Official Report*, 21 February 1968; Vol. 759, c. 473.]

That is another example of agricultural grants not being taken into account for tax purposes.

The new clause seeks to have the grant accepted as non-taxable and to permit the balancing allowance to be granted on the vessel. I do not purport to be an expert in understanding how balancing allowances and balancing charges work. However, they may be of little practical use to taxpayers who have applied for a grant and who have accumulated trading losses in recent years. It would preserve a measure of equity between those who have claimed allowances to augment losses and produce relief against other income and taxpayers who have sought to preserve the tax value of their vessel to set against future taxable balancing charges on a sale.

The share fishermen system operates in Scotland and there are differences throughout Scotland. Unlike parts of the north-east of Scotland, the practice in my constituency for a new person joining a partnership is for continuation elections to be signed when there are partnership changes. The effect of that is that the new partner takes on a share of the tax written down value of the vessel which reflects previously granted allowances. Subsequent allowances do not reflect the price that he pays for his share. There is always the possibility of that person having to pay tax on a balancing charge in excess of the allowances to which he may have been entitled. That means that there may well be a disincentive to Shetland fishermen applying for grants or at least to gross bids up more than would otherwise be the case.

That brings us to the purpose of the grants. The primary obligation is to reduce capacity to meet multi-annual guidance programme targets. Value for money can be measured in how much capacity can be taken out of the fleet. Many of us would have liked to see more money for decommissioning, but surely the effect of the small amount that has been made available should be maximised. An applicant must include the tax impact of accepting a grant in his calculation. If the effectiveness of the scheme is to be judged on catching capacity taken out, the clear efficiency argument says that if no tax is levied on the receipt there will be lower tenders and, therefore, more bids accepted and more capacity removed from the fleet. There will be greater value for money. I accept that that may not mean so much revenue for the Treasury, but it would be pleasant for once to see the Treasury trying to support the policy of another Department rather than trying to frustrate it.

Dr. Godman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the developments that we wish to see with a sensible decommissioning scheme in some of our ports is the pulling out of the older vessels so that the fleet can remain fairly modern? Does the new clause encourage that development?

Mr. Wallace: I suspect that it would certainly help. If I recall correctly, it was said in the debate on Wednesday that vessels had to be at least 10 years old.

If a person applying for a tender has to gross up to take account of the tax that he must subsequently pay, fewer vessels will be taken out of the fleet and the relatively small amount of money will not go so far in reducing capacity. Making the grant tax free would be the best contribution towards achieving the object of the exercise. Those who are engaged in the exercise should know where they stand on taxation before making important business decisions.

Mr. Salmond: I should like to be associated with the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). He has presented the detail of the technical argument and I shall concentrate on why the industry needs some additional tax incentive as part of the decommissioning package. It is highly appropriate that this matter should be debated during consideration of the Finance (No. 2) Bill because many of the decisions, not just for the fishing industry but for all resource-based industries, have been Treasury and Revenue led. That is true for oil, gas and whisky and it is certainly true for fishing.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has argued for some time that its original two-year decommissioning scheme was extended to three years with no more money because of pressure from the Treasury, perhaps from the Financial Secretary himself. In a debate on fishing on Wednesday, I quoted an example given to me

[Mr. Salmond]

by Mr. Hugh Allen, the secretary designate to the Mallaig and North West Fishermens Association, on the precise detail of the proposal by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland.

I do not propose to quote the example again because it is available in *Hansard*. Mr. Allen reasonably set out a case study whereby a fisherman putting in a decommissioning bid of £150,000 on a 15-year-old capital asset that might be worth that amount would be left, after the operation of taxation and other obligations on the decommissioning grant, with a grand total of £4,000. That money would have to be disbursed among four members of his crew.

If that is the current taxation system, it will severely inhibit a successful decommissioning scheme and will lead to one that is designed merely for the convenience of the Treasury. In the past few years, virtually every other fishing fleet in Europe has had access to substantial structural funds of hundreds of millions of ecu. Only the United Kingdom fishing fleet—the fishing fleets of Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales—has not had access to that sort of structural funding. I hope, and it would be a triumph of hope over experience, that when the Financial Secretary replies he will go beyond the narrow Treasury accounting view of what is absolutely convenient and look to the possible success of the decommissioning scheme.

It has not escaped those of us from fishing constituencies that when Ministers argue about the costs of a decommissioning scheme, they always take the costs net of the deduction resulting from the Fontainebleu agreement—for example, even a scheme that is financed 75 per cent. from the European Community would have an impact greater than that on Treasury revenues because of the deduction from the United Kingdom rebate under the Fontainebleu agreement. Yet those same Ministers have always refused to look at the scheme net of taxation and net of the effect on the Treasury of taxation. That argument has been used to produce a very modest decommissioning package for the fishing industry.

Surely, tonight, the Financial Secretary should show that he appreciates that, without some tax concession, the decommissioning scheme could flounder and not have the effect that we all want, which is to bring capacity in the fishing industry into line with catching potential.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): For some years, the Labour party and the fishing industry have urged the Government to introduce a decommissioning scheme. Despite the existence of European Community funds towards the cost of national decommissioning schemes, the Government have repeatedly declared their opposition to such schemes. In February 1992, they announced that £25 million would be made available for a two-year scheme. That scheme is now to last for three years, but the money being made available—which includes EC grant—is unchanged.

That money is quite inadequate for an effective decommissioning programme. Indeed, the House of Lords Select Committee on European Affairs concluded that the £25 million

"is not even enough to prevent the fleet from expanding; four or five times that amount is now needed to make up for the lack of a decommissioning scheme in the United Kingdom during the last decade."

Given the wide agreement that the Government are putting forward too little money for decommissioning, the House should not reject the opportunity to lighten the tax burden on decommissioning grants.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) accurately said that this evening we are here to discuss the tax treatment of decommissioning grants, not their level or nature or the rules surrounding the scheme. The issue of the tax treatment of payments under the scheme is relatively simple. Tax law provides that those payments should be treated in exactly the same way as any payment that a boat operator would have received had his boat been sold. That is the principle that needs to be applied.

On the sorts of specific tax charges that might arise, the main case is that of fishing boats being sold at less than the full new value paid by the operator. In that case, as with any other capital asset sold by a trading entity, if it is sold for less than the tax written down value, no tax is payable; if it is sold for more than the tax written down value, a balancing charge is made. That is the usual provision in income tax for an individual or in corporation tax for a corporation when a capital asset is sold.

If a boat were sold for less than the new price paid for it by the business, that is the only circumstance in which tax would not be payable. If, however—I suspect that it would be relatively unlikely—a boat were sold for more than its original cost, there would be a balancing item because it would have been sold for more that the written down value. Potentially, a capital gains tax charge would be payable and the normal capital gains tax would apply. In calculating the charge to capital gain, the first consideration would be the new price paid for the boat, and then that would be indexed in accordance with the usual indexation provisions. If the boat were sold for an amount greater than the index-based value, once again —in exactly the same way as is with all other businesses operating in the economy—a capital gains tax charge would be payable.

8.15 pm

Dr. Godman: Given the seriousness of the issue and the good sense of the new clause, will the Financial Secretary tell us whether his officials have costed the proposal? It is an important matter. If the hon. Gentleman rejects the new clause, many fishermen may reject the decommissioning scheme.

Mr. Dorrell: Every time a proposal is made to us, we estimate its cost. The cost of the proposal in the new clause is not just the cost that would arise from the benefit to the fishing industry; it is the cost of establishing the precedent of treating Government grants as tax-exempt payments and the distorted incentives that would be built into the system. It would not be rational to build into the system a set of rules to provide that a payment under the decommissioning scheme was tax free, whereas if a boat operator had sold his boat on the open market he would incur a tax liability. That would build in all sorts of distortions, almost all of them undesirable.

In the circumstances surrounding the decommissioning scheme, the main case is not the capital gains tax charge that I described, although that is the law, but the fact that a boat operator is likely to be selling the boat for less than

he paid for it, in which case all we are talking about is a balancing charge. That is familiar to any practising accountant dealing with business accounts.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Having considered the provisions of the decommissioning scheme and the likely price of the vessel if sold, has the Financial Secretary calculated what that would mean for the Treasury? Although he says that most accountants can understand the matter, those who have to make the decision do not necessarily understand it. Will the Treasury issue guidelines in clear language that everyone can understand?

Mr. Dorrell: I understand that the calculation of the balancing charge can sometimes be complex, but it is a well-established concept of tax law. We are not dealing with circumstances that differ from the circumstances of a farmer or any operator of a manufacturing or other trading business.

Mr. Hughes: Has the Minister done that calculation? Given the great importance that everyone in the fishing industry attaches to the decommissioning scheme and the paramount need for the scheme to succeed, will the Treasury issue letters of guidance so that the matter is clearly understood and no one is under any illusions about the exact position?

Mr. Dorrell: I have tried to set out the position in very clear language. It would not be clarified further by issuing what would be represented as a special guidance letter. I have said that, in determining whether a tax charge is payable on the disposal of a boat under the decommissioning scheme, the tax rules that would apply are the general rules that apply to all trading businesses when they sell a capital asset that has been employed in their trade.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall give way, but I sense that the House wants to get on to the next business.

Mr. Harris: I appreciate the pressure on my hon. Friend, but we are discussing important matters. I want to ask him two questions. First, will he deal with the point fairly raised by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) that an operator selling a boat is not just selling a capital asset; in most cases, he is going out of business? Secondly, will any allowance be made for the considerable cost of scrapping the boat? According to last week's debate, as much as £10,000 might be involved in the disposal of the asset. It is not just a question of a sale to someone else; the seller must then physically carry out the scrapping—or, in most cases, get someone else to do it.

Mr. Dorrell: Obviously, I shall need to take specific advice. As I have conceded to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), these issues are not 100 per cent. simple; however, I assume that, if the business received a payment for the disposal of the boat under the decommissioning scheme and then incurred a cost, scrapping would be an allowable expense. It appears that the hon. Gentleman agrees with me. I emphasise, however, that those rules would be applied in the general case of traders disposing of a capital asset, whether in the course of their trade or on the day on which they closed down —which, sadly, is not unknown in the fishing industry.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Dorrell: I will give way once more to the hon. Gentleman; then I will end my speech.

Mr. Hughes: I think that we would all feel reassured if the Minister would state specifically that the Treasury was not banking on obtaining revenue from the scheme.

Mr. Dorrell: I have clearly stated that the amounts involved are extremely small from a tax-revenue point of view. However, if we are talking about establishing a precedent and about a sense of grievance among other traders in precisely similar circumstances, I do not believe that a tax-principle case has been established for departing from the general rules that any fishing boat operator would be able to secure from any practising accountant.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister's reply was very disappointing. He does not dispute any of our arguments; he does not deny that the new clause would be the best way in which to maximise the effect, and the objective, of the decommissioning scheme. He has virtually conceded that the cost to the Revenue would be minimal, possibly nothing. He seems to have based his argument on unwillingness to set a precedent; yet in his speech—in which he refused to give way to me—he singularly failed to address the precedents that I cited in my speech.

Fishermen should know that the tax treatment to which I referred applies to any other trader. As I said, the official leaflet sent to fishermen referred to taxation that applied in the same way to other agricultural and fishing grants; however, I referred to two—if not three—agricultural grants involving no tax treatment. Section 27 of the Agriculture Act 1967 contains a concession that was re-enacted as recently as last year. The precedents are already there; those in the fishing industry, hard pressed as they are, will wonder why on earth they cannot be given a little additional help, at virtually no cost to the Treasury.

Mr. Salmond: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will agree that some hon. Members are better briefed than the Minister in this regard. It is clear that the Minister still does not wish to contradict the interventions that have been made.

The Minister said that small amounts were involved, and that he was not very worried about that aspect. We have been given to understand that Treasury pressure turned the decommissioning scheme into a three-year scheme rather than the two-year scheme that was originally proposed. How do the two propositions sit together?

Mr. Wallace: It is not for me to try to understand that; I do not entirely understand it either. The opportunity to explain exists; the Minister has clarified the law as he sees it. However, we are here to legislate. The House had an opportunity tonight to change the position at no cost to the Treasury, but the Government have not sought to take that opportunity. I believe that the hard-pressed fishing communities on our coasts will notice that.

Dr. Godman: I, too, find the Minister's response disappointing. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) claimed—with considerable confidence—

[Dr. Godman]

that such tax-free concessions were not unknown in agriculture; if that is true, his claim that we must not distort the tax system does not hold water. I feel that a general principle is involved. Let us suppose that several fishermen own a vessel, that they are involved in a share arrangement. They may well feel reluctant to give up that vessel for scrapping if they are not to receive such a concession.

The object of such a scheme is to reduce the capacity of the fleet. Without such small concessions, fishermen who —in many instances—have no alternative occupations to turn to in the community may be deeply unwilling to agree to a decommissioning scheme. We shall then be forced to continue with a fleet that is far too big for the stocks on which it relies.

I am extremely disappointed by the Minister's rejection of this sensible and fair-minded proposal.

Question put and negatived.

Clause 42

FUEL AND POWER FOR DOMESTIC OR CHARITY USE

Mr. William Powell: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 24, leave out lines 3 to 26.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may take the following amendments.

No. 22, in page 24, line 6, leave out 'supply,'.

No. 23, in page 24, line 6, leave out ', acquisition or importation' and insert 'or acquisition'.

No. 24, in page 24, line 6, leave out ', acquisition'.

No. 2, in page 24, line 7, after 'place', insert—

'(a) in the case of a qualifying use within the meaning of Note (1)(a) of that Schedule (domestic use)'.

No. 1, in page 24, line 7, at end insert

'where the supply, acquisition or importation is for a qualifying use within the meaning of Note (1)(a) of that Schedule (domestic use)'.

No. 3, in page 24, line 7, at end insert

'and

(b) in the case of a qualifying use within the meaning of Note (1)(b) of that Schedule (use by a charity), on or after 1st April 2004'.

No. 25, in page 24, line 7, at end insert

'and

(b) in the case of a qualifying use within the meaning of Note (1)(b) of that Schedule (use by a charity), on or after 1st April 1988.'.

No. 5, in page 24, line 9, at end insert

'as respects supplies of the descriptions specified in Group 7 of Schedule 5 to that Act which are made for a qualifying use within the meaning of Note (1)(a) of that Schedule (domestic use)'.

Mr. Powell: One of the fascinations of Finance Bill Committee and Report stages is the huge variety of subjects that we manage to discuss in a comparatively short time. This afternoon, we have discussed home income plans, English wine, decommissioning of fishing vessels and other matters. Amendment No. 7, however, takes us to the heart of political controversy—a matter raised in the Budget speech of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont). We discussed the matter fully in Committee, when I was lucky enough to catch the eye of the Chair: some of my speech caused some controversy.

Let me repeat the central assertions that I made then. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames made a serious error of judgment in advancing this proposal in his Budget speech; moreover—as I said in May—I personally feel ashamed that my party could have introduced such a proposal.

A good many things have happened since May. Perhaps the smallest development is this: I have received hundreds of letters from all over the country about the justice of this proposal. I had received such letters before, of course, but I believe that the debate in May promoted much more discussion in the country. I have engaged in much debate with my right hon. and hon. Friends on the subject, and I am confident in asserting now that Ministers realise that the Budget proposal resulted from a serious error of judgment. I regret that, so far, we have seen no sign that they are prepared to accept that in public.

The truth is that all of us, from time to time, make errors—often serious ones. However, when we realise that we have made such errors—perhaps not at first, but on subsequent examination—the best course is not to persist, but to own up and withdraw what we said initially. I oppose clause 42, which my amendment would strike out lock, stock and barrel. If my amendment is carried, the proposal for VAT to be extended to heating and cooking, fuel and power would go. My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General is, I know, under no illusions whatsoever, but if any hon. Member imagines that at the end of the debate I shall ask for permission to withdraw the amendment, I must point out that I have no such intention.

I hope that my right hon. Friend intends to accept amendment No. 7. I shall have no hesitation in voting for it, just as I voted against clause 42. Although the Finance Bill contains many excellent provisions, I feel so strongly about this issue that it will not be possible for me to support my right hon. Friend in the Division Lobby in favour of giving the Bill a Third Reading if this provision remains in it.

8.30 pm

The reason for my strong opposition to clause 42 concerns social justice. The then Chancellor of the Exchequer was entirely within his rights to come forward in his Budget speech with proposals to raise taxes, if he felt that the public sector borrowing requirement made it necessary for him to include proposals to narrow the PSBR gap over a period of time. I understand that it was his hope to raise more than £2 billion a year when this tax is running at the full rate.

My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General may recall that when he said why the extra £2 billion had to be raised by extending VAT to heating and cooking, my right hon. Friend's answer included no justification whatsoever for it. Every hon. Member can identify other ways of raising £2 billion or more a year. Some of us might even be prepared, in certain circumstances, to allow the VAT base to be extended.

One of the proposals which I very much welcomed in the Budget was that changes should be made to the VAT rules to enable our bloodstock industry to overcome the terrifying fiscal disadvantages with which it was faced. A benefit was therefore given to racehorse owners in the Budget. I am a keen follower of the turf, as many of my right hon. and hon. Friends know. I welcome that provision. When it comes to social justice, however, the

imposition of a £2 billion a year tax increase on heating and cooking while allowing a fiscal advantage to the owners of racehorses, not all of whom are British, is an extraordinary statement of social priorities.

If VAT has to be extended, I should find it much easier to justify extending it to newspapers and magazines. I enjoy reading *Country Life*, and I enjoy reading the articles by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) in *Horse and Hound*, but it does not seem to me that there is a compelling reason for not imposing VAT on magazines. That would be preferable to imposing VAT on heating and cooking.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is an overwhelming necessity to reduce public borrowing? Somebody has to pay for the enormous losses that were incurred on white Wednesday. My hon. Friend will recollect that Sir Samuel Brittan, as he has now to our great pleasure become, is a great supporter—though perhaps not so great a supporter as Mrs. Hogg—of the exchange rate mechanism. Sir Samuel estimates that the cost to the public finances of white Wednesday is £2·5 billion. We can therefore assume that it is at least that sum and that somebody has got to pay for it. It is not a matter of social justice. It is a matter of a near bankrupt Government trying to find somebody to pay for this appalling mistake of being in the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend makes his point in his own distinctive and interesting way, but he has not taken on board the central point that I am making: that he and the then Chancellor of the Exchequer were entitled to say that taxes should be increased by £2 billion, or whatever the sum is, but that to select heating and cooking as the essential and necessary way of imposing that tax increase was a most bizarre social judgment. I have already pointed out that if it has to be done through VAT, why not do it by means of *Horse and Hound* or by means of newspapers? If *The Sun* is so confident today about its market position that it can reduce its price to 20p on a daily basis, it may be able to absorb a 17·5 per cent. VAT imposition and still be able to reduce its price.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Is my hon. Friend not forgetting his European obligations? Does he not recall that under the Single European Act, repeated at Maastricht, we have accepted an obligation to harmonise indirect taxation? Is he not aware that at the ECOFIN meeting that took place as recently as July 1992, we accepted the legal obligation to remove all zero rates by the end of 1996? Although I understand and fully appreciate the important point that my hon. Friend makes, does he not appreciate the Euro-obligation that he has taken on?

Mr. Powell: I was confident that my hon. Friend would raise that point before very long. I had hoped, however, that I might be able to deal with it in such a way as to make it unnecessary for him to intervene. His impatience was such, however—I do not blame him for this, for I have been on my feet for longer than I intended—that he felt that he had to raise the point in the way that he did. The European aspect is one of the most unfortunate and regrettable aspects of the issue. If the Bill contains this appalling clause 42 when it receives Royal Assent, I am afraid that it will be impossible for us to correct the error that was made by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer when he introduced the proposal in his Budget. This therefore, is our last opportunity to say no to it.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Powell: Perhaps my hon. Friend will contain himself for just a moment. I want to make progress, for other right hon. and hon. Members may wish to speak in the debate. There will be a terrifying finality about this proposal, if we allow clause 42 to reach the statute book. That is why we must take this opportunity to say no to it.

I am strongly opposed to the inclusion of clause 42 in the Bill on the ground of social justice. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has sought in the past to reassure the House that those who are most vulnerable will be compensated through the social security system for the increase in their tax, which is estimated to be £1 a week in the first full year of its operation and £2 a week in the second year, when the tax will be running at 17·5 per cent.

One of the most striking features of our community, however—every hon. Member has constituents who are in this position—is that many people with modest incomes are not in the social security system. They have modest savings. They may own their own homes. It is not enough to say that the housing benefit system will compensate them, or that they will receive council tax rebates, an argument upon which my right hon. Friend has sought to rely in the past.

Millions and millions of people of modest means have seen their incomes fall substantially in the past few years. Until fairly recently, people derived income from savings at the rate of 15 per cent., greatly to the regret of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West. Interest rates then fell to 6 per cent. and, like me, my hon. Friend wants them to come down further. However, people found that their income from their savings also fell. It is not a question of the increase in their incomes failing to meet inflation; it is a question of an absolute decline in income, and yet people have to pay their fuel and water bills and all the other essential bills for living.

Mr. Budgen: To do justice to his argument, which he is making with such force and eloquence, would my hon. Friend like to expand on what he said about the European element being one of the most unfortunate? All of us who have admired him and his tremendous support over the years for the President of the Board of Trade know of his tremendously progressive European idealism. It has generally been thought that the European ideal demanded a common system of taxation in all subordinate countries. I should have thought that my hon. Friend would have been grateful for the surveillance of the European superstate in ordering us to impose value added tax on some of the items that have hitherto passed unnoticed by our European masters. I hope that he is not saying someting inconsistent with the role that he has adopted so forcefully in the past.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): The hon. Gentleman should be making not a speech but an intervention.

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend has allowed himself to get into a little rut about this matter in recent months. He has had many opportunities to make that intervention and I shall not hold against him the fact that he has chosen me

[Mr. Powell]

as his sacrificial victim. I enjoyed what he had to say about hunting in *Horse and Hound* much more than his repeating the point about VAT for the 200th time.

I was on the theme of social justice.

Mr. Graham: Up to now, I have thoroughly enjoyed the hon. Gentleman's speech and have agreed wholeheartedly with it. The people that I know who are on low pay have no savings and have never had any savings. Some of my constituents live from day to day. They receive their pay on Thursday or Friday, but use it to repay what they spent in the previous couple of weeks. The Government's proposal to increase VAT will drive these folk into an early grave.

Mr. Powell: The hon. Gentleman has a point, but I do not wish to take it up in great detail because my right hon. Friend will remind the House yet again how the social security system will help the hon. Gentleman's constituents to the most generous extent possible. We can all make up our minds as to how generous "generous" will be in those circumstances.

In dealing with social justice, one must also have regard to those who will undoubtedly be affected by the proposal but who will receive no assistance through the social security system. They will face the increase next year and the following year without the possibility of any reimbursement, compensation or whatever one likes to call it. Many such people have modest incomes; many are elderly, or widows. They feel strongly that the Government for whom many of them voted have let them down badly.

I represent very few people who are affluent and still fewer who are wealthy, but I represent many tens of thousands of people who will be severely affected by the proposal. Some are puzzled and some are deeply angry. Some, of course, have political motives for rejoicing at the large, deep hole that the Conservative party has dug for itself by making this proposal. Others who are and have always been Conservative voters remain puzzled as to how a Conservative Government could possibly make such a proposal which is not only unjust but, even more important, is perceived to be unjust.

You will be relieved to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I am drawing my remarks to a close, but I wish to make two further points. When we debated the issue before, there was no question but that the House was influenced by the result of the Newbury by-election and the county council elections. The Government's business managers confidently told us that the worst was behind us. Of course, I and many of my hon. Friends told them that they could not have been more wrong.

8.45 pm

One has only to consider how public opinion has changed in the past two months to realise that the Conservative mavericks—a word that many on the Treasury Bench are keen to use from time to time—are those who persist in pushing this proposal rather than recognising that they were wrong. Unwelcome though it will be to hundreds of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I make this confident assertion: because the Government will not withdraw this proposal, the Conservative party will lose the Christchurch by-election. One could not imagine a constituency——

Mr. Budgen: A very helpful speech.

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend has a considerable imagination. One could not imagine a constituency with more voters who were likely to be adversely affected by the proposal than Christchurch. It is a misfortune that such a by-election has to be faced, but one of my hon. Friends was heard to use a phrase, which has been adopted—and I apologise for the fact that I am not its author—to the effect that the Government appear to have a death wish. This proposal comes closer to asserting the truth of that than anything else. It is a disgraceful proposal, but I add one gloss.

From time to time, I have mentioned the impact of VAT in the charitable sector as it will affect village halls. It is a subject close to my heart. Village halls will find raising money for voluntary associations——

Mr. Budgen: Now he will say that we are skint as well.

Mr. Powell: Well, they are and I can give my hon. Friend many examples, most of which are run by Conservative supporters who are simply aghast at the extra fund raising that they will have to do because of the proposal.

I have said enough. The proposal should never have been put before the House. Having been made, it should be withdrawn. I hope that my right hon. Friend can yet find the courage to withdraw it. The proposal has done, is doing and, if it remains, will continue to do enormous damage to the Conservative party. It should be rejected.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): The House will recognise the truth behind the words of the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) when he said that the Tories' fortunes in Christchurch will hang on whether the Government press on with the vote on VAT on gas and electricity tonight. He addressed himself to Treasury Ministers. However, he should also address his comments to his fellow Back Benchers because they have an opportunity tonight to do what Government Front Bench Ministers do not have the honesty or courage to do and withdraw the proposal on VAT for gas and electricity.

When it was first announced in the Budget statement on 16 March that the Government planned to put tax of 8 per cent. and then 17·5 per cent. on gas and electricity bills, there was a sense of shock that the Prime Minister had felt able to break his promise not to put VAT on gas and electricity which was so clearly made in the general election campaign.

There was also dismay at how it would hit hardest those who could least afford it. There was incredulity that the Government should seek to justify it as a measure merely to help the environment. All that was nearly four months ago. Since then, it has become clear that the shock and dismay expressed in the House when that announcement was made is felt around the country.

The opposition to VAT on gas and electricity has grown. It was expressed in the Newbury by-election and it was one of the reasons why more than 400 Tory councillors lost their seats in the May county council elections. The Prime Minister said then that he would listen and learn and he brought in a new Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, VAT on gas and electricity is still in this Finance Bill.

The Labour party and the other Opposition parties have been clear and unequivocal in their opposition to this

provision. It is now time for Tory Back Benchers to think again and to use their votes tonight to make their Government think again. I say to Conservative Members, "Remember the elderly in your constituencies. Remember those who are just above income support levels, but who will have to pay this tax in full. Remember what you said in your election address about cutting people's taxes. Listen to what people in this country are saying. Even Conservative councillors are voting against this measure at local level. They will not support it. Heed the warning today of the Social Security Advisory Committee, which has stated that to compensate the poorest, the Government will have to put an extra £400 million into benefits."

Tory Back Benchers must know that if they vote tonight to impose VAT on gas and electricity, they will be whistling in the wind for a compensation scheme. Can we not just hear the Chancellor saying, "Of course I planned a compensation scheme, but I didn't realise that growth would be so low. I didn't realise that the PSBR would carry on getting so big. My hands are tied." Do Tory Back Benchers really think that the Government, already looking for ways to slash the social security budget, will add another £400 million to it—the figure that the SSAC states is necessary just to protect the poorest?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that the winter months are already a nightmare for so many pensioners on income support level and just above it? The cold weather payments are made only if the weather has been freezing for seven consecutive days. Is it not therefore obvious that for so many of our elderly constituents the situation is already a nightmare and tonight's proposal will simply make the situation worse?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and that point was reinforced in today's report by the SSAC.

Government Back Benchers may not always feel that they have much power. Indeed, they complain about that. However, public opinion will be firmly on their side if they vote tonight to tell their Government that they have got it wrong and that they must think again.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): As the hon. Lady is speaking so eloquently about manifestos, how would she finance closing the £50 billion deficit gap and then pay for all the promises made in the Labour party manifesto?

Ms Harman: We tabled 14 new clauses and amendments to the Finance Bill which would have closed tax loopholes and dealt with tax abuse. They would have raised more money than the VAT on gas and electricity. But the Government were not prepared to end tax relief for private health care—they would rather put VAT on gas and electricity. The Government were not prepared to make the privatised water, electricity and gas companies pay corporation tax—they would rather make the elderly and the poor pay tax on their electricity bills.

The simple fact is that the Government are not prepared to close the tax loopholes, which would bring in more income than the proposal would raise, because they would much rather protect the vested interests of their friends who donate to the Tory party and make the pensioners, poor, elderly and disabled pay the bill for the Government's economic incompetence.

The issue of VAT on gas and electricity is a question of the integrity of the Government. The Prime Minister promised in the clearest and most direct terms, using his familiar "honest John" style, that he would not put VAT on gas and electricity. During the election campaign, Labour's then shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), constantly warned that a Tory victory would mean the imposition of VAT on gas and electricity. That was brought to the public's attention through the "VATman" campaign.

Those suggestions were met with denials and injured outrage from Conservatives and with accusations of scaremongering. The Prime Minister was forced to respond and say, in his "honest John" style:

"I've made the pledge in the past, I've made it clear. We have no need and no plans to extend the scope of VAT."

That in itself should be enough for Tory Members to vote against VAT on gas and electricity because it breaks such a clear promise.

Even if Conservative Members are not moved to vote against the measure because it breaks an election pledge, they should certainly vote against it because of its effect on the elderly, the poor and the disabled. Pensioners up and down the country have signed our petition against VAT because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said, they already struggle to pay their gas and electricity bills—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There are too many seated interventions and a few private conversations.

Ms Harman: For those who need extra heat, such as the housebound and the disabled, fuel bills are a major item of expenditure. Their health is at risk if they have to cut back on the heat that they need. The reason why people have queued to sign our petition against this tax on domestic fuel is that they know that it is unfair. The SSAC report published today bears out their concerns.

The facts are these: the poorest 20 per cent. of households spend more than three times the proportion of their income on fuel as the richest 20 per cent. spend. This tax will hit everyone, but it will hit the poorest hardest. Tory Members must not lull themselves into a false sense of security about compensation for those who will be hit by the tax. The Government have yet to make known what their compensation scheme will be. They have not revealed how much the compensation will be. The only thing that the Government have made clear is that even for the poorest, those on means-tested benefits, there will not be full compensation. Even the poorest will have to pay some of this tax from their benefits.

It is equally clear that those who are not on means-tested benefits will receive no help to pay the tax. I can tell Conservative Members that those with small occupational pensions, who are just above income support level, will be writing to them. They will attend Conservative Members' surgeries and ask how on earth they can manage to pay this tax. There will be 17·5 per cent. on heating and cooking bills for elderly people just above the income support level. Before voting tonight, Tory Members should think about what they will say to those people. They will not be able to sympathise with them because they will have done it to them. It is already clear that the compensation scheme will not reach some of the poorest—those who are entitled to income-related benefits but who do not claim them.

[Ms Harman]

Of course, it is not a green measure, either. Birmingham city council, when passing a resolution to write to the Chancellor asking him to think again, commented that it is not so much the Government turning green as the poor turning blue. It is important, of course, to reduce energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. The way to do that, however, is not to put up fuel prices so that more elderly people die of hypothermia but to have a comprehensive home insulation programme, as Labour has suggested.

VAT on gas and electricity will raise for the Treasury £950 million next year and £2·3 billion the year after, but all the VAT on gas and electricity will pay the unemployment bill for just six months for the south-east alone. The Government cannot turn to pensioners and expect them to rescue public finances from a problem created by the failure of the Government's economic policy. That is not fair and it will not work. VAT on heating is nothing more than an unfair way of trying to finance the growing dole queue. However much pensioners dip into their pockets to pay tax on basic essentials, public finances will simply get worse until the Government sort out the economy.

9 pm

The county council elections saw 472 Tory councillors lose their seats. They know that VAT on gas and electricity was one of the reasons why people simply would not vote for them. It is no wonder that the Tory councillors who are left will not support it. A survey that I did of some local councils shows that Tory councillors are voting against VAT on gas and electricity. Some examples are Sandwell borough council, Bedfordshire county council, Dover district council, Bath city council, Darlington borough council, Solihull borough council, Devon county council and Berkshire county council. In all those councils, and in numerous others, Tory councillors have voted against VAT on gas and electricity. In the city of Glasgow, Tory councillor Baillie Young described it as an iniquitous tax, and in North Kesteven a resolution to write to the Chancellor opposing VAT on gas and electricity was seconded by a Tory councillor.

Tomorrow, my hon. Friends and I will present to the Chancellor at No. 11 Downing street a petition containing tens of thousands of signatures. The Government have failed to make a case for VAT on gas and electricity, even among the Tory party's own members. It is not enough, of course, for the Prime Minister to say that he has listened and that he has learnt. It is not enough for him to change the Chancellor, either. The Government must do more than listen to people's concerns. They need to act on them, and they have failed to do that. Tory Back-Bench Members have a choice tonight: they can either stand up for their constituents or follow a discredited Government through the Division Lobby.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I accept absolutely that it would be very unpopular indeed to vote for VAT on gas and electricity. Some people would not vote for us and would condemn us—there is no question of that. However, hon. Members must appreciate when the Government are in an appalling financial situation for all kinds of reasons. The money has to come from somewhere. We would be running away from what I believe is a responsible attitude to say that it should not come from somewhere. The obvious alternative would be income tax, but, when we have more than 3 million people effectively unemployed, an increase in income tax would almost certainly prevent the recovery for which we hope.

I wish to make four brief points. I advise members of the Labour and Conservative parties that nothing makes me more sick than hearing them talk about the problems of poor people when most of them have supported a policy which is forcing the average working-class family—the average family on low incomes—to spend an extra £20 a week on their food and which has forced the taxpayer to pay hundreds of millions for the dumping and destruction of foodstuffs. It would make me a lot happier if the people who were concerned about the poor and the under-privileged showed some concern for something over which we have some control.

Nothing sickens me more than hearing hon. Members complain bitterly of the consequences of policies that they have voted for. Why the blazes do we have VAT? It is not because it is a good idea. We know that VAT, compared with purchase tax, is cruel to poor people—inevitably it is. It is an across-the-board tax, but it was one of the necessary consequences of membership of the EC which some hon. Members have consistently voted against. Those who voted for the EC have no right to complain about VAT.

I remind hon. Members that it is pure hypocrisy to complain about VAT on gas and electricity when they voted for the Single European Act and for the Maastricht treaty which commits this country absolutely and completely to the harmonising of VAT in so far as is necessary to complete the internal market. That is clearly and precisely laid down.

Will the Government state the consequences of the ECOFIN meeting in July 1992? According to information provided by the Library that backs my own belief, we accepted an obligation—subject only to one definition—to remove our zero rate by the end of 1996. Either that is true or it is not.

Sir John Cope: My hon. Friend has misunderstood the July 1992 agreement. It did not oblige us to abolish our zero rate, as he suggests—on the contrary. We are of course committed to negotiations on moving on to the so-called origin system, hopefully by 31 December 1996. However, our zero rate is entirely preserved in the 1992 agreement, as it was in all previous agreements. Part of the July 1992 agreement was that our standard rate should not fall below 15 per cent. for four years from the time that it was made, but that is a different matter. In any case, that has nothing to do with the position after that.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making that clear, but I assure him—having received clarification of the position in writing from the Library, but I will check this again—that under the July 1992 agreement, although it was accepted that the definition of origin had to be resolved, there was a clear obligation, subject to definition of the origin system, to remove the zero rate by the end of 1996, if not necessarily operate a rate of 17½ per cent.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): Now that the hon. Gentleman has received the Minister's clarification, and given that he is totally opposed to the House of Commons giving any power away to Europe,

how does he intend to vote tonight? There can be no doubt that, if zero rating is removed tonight, it can never be reintroduced.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The same as I voted before. If one's country is bust and it has a £50 billion deficit, that is partly because of exchange rate mechanism policies for which right hon. and hon. Members voted. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have voted against every European treaty against three-line Whips. We are effectively handing over a power of this place. There is nothing more hypocritical than for Labour Members to go on platforms and to say, "We'll stop this dreadful tax" when it is clear that, once the decision has been made, they can do nothing.

There is no doubt that we have secured some reasonable concessions. We have received an assurance that every person on benefit will get something on 1 April next year, before the first bill arrives, and that pensioners will get something because the tax will be taken into account in the cost-of-living index.

As to the remarks of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), mine was one of the few constituencies in England that held every one of its Conservative council seats with a good majority. I assure the hon. Lady that Conservative councillors did not lose everywhere.

It is nonsense to pretend that we can stop the march forward of VAT. Under the Single European Act and the Maastricht treaty, we have a clear and precise obligation to achieve harmonisation in so far as that is necessary to compete in the internal market—and that is impossible without total and complete harmonisation. The House is kidding itself. It is sad to hear people complain like mad when we come up against the consequences of our own decisions, in voting for measures wrongly and against the public interest.

Sadly, we have to accept that VAT is here to stay. There is no doubt at all that, effectively, VAT is to be part of our style of life. Unless we do something, and do something quickly, all such debates will be pointless, a waste of time and at best will buy us just a little more time before we are taken over by an unjust and unfair system that will hit the poor of this country. I hope that those who complain about the impact of VAT on the poor will ask themselves how they can justify the accursed, filthy system that puts £20 a week on the average family's food bill and spends hundreds of millions of pounds dumping and destroying food that should go to help the poor and to help those on low incomes.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir. T. Taylor) is simply playing rotten in seeking to argue that the Government have been obliged to levy first 8 per cent. and then 17·5 per cent. VAT on fuel as a result of our membership of the European Community or our signature on the Maastricht treaty. If that was so, I am sure that the Government would be rushing to say that it was so. That would at least give them some sort of alibi to use in by-elections, county council elections and everywhere else.

However, as the Minster has already pointed out, that is simply not so. To start with, the Government are under no obligation to levy 17·5 per cent. VAT at all. That figure arose from the Government's difficulties over the poll tax. It seems especially absurd that pensioners will now face 17·5 per cent. VAT on the standard charge on a gas bill when we had 17·5 per cent. VAT in the first place only as a consequence of the Government's poll tax chaos. There is no move whatever to advise the Government to levy more than 15 per cent. VAT, for example, or not to have a lower rate—for the first year there will be an 8 per cent. rate. Why not have a lower rate still? There is nothing to prevent the Government from abandoning the whole venture and retaining zero exemption.

Several hon. Members from different standpoints have been right to warn the Government that, if they give up the zero rate tonight, it will be gone for good. If the hon. Member for Southend, East had chosen to make that point, he would have been right. We should place ourselves under a European legal obligation not to reintroduce that rate.

That is what I find so surprising about the Government's supposedly sturdy defence of our standard rate. As the Minister pointed out, at every ministerial meeting the Government have stood up for zero rates and the right to retain those existing rates. Why has the Minister gone to such trouble if he is prepared to throw away the most important rate in terms of its impact on poor families and pensioners? The defence of that rate will seem a vain exercise—a battle fought for little purpose, when the Government have thrown away the use of that zero rate in an area in which it is most important and have done so permanently with no chance of ever reintroducing it.

The zero rate affects not just gas and electricity, but anything bought for use as a domestic fuel: gas, electricity, oil, wood, coal and even peat. Some consumers have relatively little choice over what fuel they use. For example, some consumers do not have access to gas for their domestic heating or cooking and often have to use more expensive means of providing heat for their homes. In parts of my constituency, some do not even have access to electricity.

Many of the families who are most likely to be adversely affected by the measure have no choice in the matter and no help with the energy efficiency of their homes. Any Government who sought to increase energy taxation on environmental grounds ought to ensure that those who have modest incomes and face an increase in fuel bills have access to help with making their home more energy efficient. So many of the people affected are either unable to command the resources to make their home more energy efficient or have no choice about the kind of home in which they live, whether it is a badly insulated council house or a privately rented house, because they have no means of moving into a better and more energy-efficient house. They may have bought their houses in the turbulent housing market of recent years. They now cannot sell those houses, so they cannot exchange them for more energy-efficient houses. They find it impossible to sell their houses at anything like the prices they paid for them. A lot of people are trapped, for one reason or another, in their houses. They do not command the resources to make those houses more energy efficient. They will be hit very hard by the measure, and they will be hit in two stages.

9.15 pm

The Government have already felt the wrath and anger of the people at Newbury and in the county council elections. That has happened before the bills have come in. The 8 per cent. and 17·5 per cent. stages are yet to come. The story will run and run, and it will not end with the Christchurch by-election, unless the policy ends at the time

of that by-election, just as it did not end with the Newbury by-election. The policy will have to be changed if perceptions of the Government are to be changed.

The hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), who moved the amendment so eloquently and in such a determined way, was right to stress that Governments should recognise when they have got it wrong, when they have made a mistake and when their policy is not only impossible to sell, but cannot be justified in its own terms.

If the Government try to justify the measure as an environmental tax, we must ask what changes in behaviour it will lead to. It will not lead to people at the poorest levels saving on energy consumption unless they do so at the risk of their own safety and health. We are talking about people who simply do not have the means with which to provide alternative forms of heat or with which to heat their homes more efficiently. We know that the disabled, the poorest and the unemployed spend a larger proportion of their time at home and that they are more dependent on the heating of their homes for their basic health. We know that families with young children are also in that position.

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): I agree very much with the right hon. Gentleman's point. However, it is a matter not just of heating, but of lighting. Elderly people whose eyesight is failing need a bright light to enable them to read, even in broad daylight. People whose memories are failing often leave the lights on because they have forgotten to turn them off. People may leave the lights on when they leave home to prevent the house from being robbed because they cannot afford burglar alarms and safety locks. Their energy consumption is much higher than that of people with greater means and with better health.

Mr. Beith: That is an important point which enables me to say how much better it would be if the Government said that they would make a scheme available under which elderly people could have access to low energy-consumption light bulbs at a cost far lower than the present high capital cost. If the Government wish to have an environmental policy based on tax, if would be better to have such a measure so that elderly people could reduce their energy consumption in a way that they are not able to do when they face the cost of £15 for a low energy-consumption bulb as opposed to the cost of £1 or so for an ordinary bulb. Such an option is not open to them out of their weekly pension.

I was referring to the groups of families who would be adversely affected. I asked what change in behaviour would be made. One thing that will not happen as a result of this form of taxation is that there will be a switch from polluting and environmentally damaging sources of energy to less polluting or less environmentally damaging sources of energy because it makes no distinction between them. It does not separate wind power or tidal power from coal, from oil or from orimulsion. All fuels along the spectrum of pollution and resource depletion are treated identically under the measure. It is not an environmental tax measure in that sense. It is not an effective environmental tax measure in its focus because it will not lead to behavioural change.

A stronger argument is that behavioural change could be brought about by changes in petrol taxation. Such changes would have to be accompanied by compensating measures. We can see the prospect for behavioural change by people on reasonably adequate incomes in that area. I cannot see much prospect of change for some of those on modest incomes who will be so adversely affected by this tax.

The Government have not only made a mistake, but have put a lot of fear into the minds of many elderly people and of many families. Of all the issues about which we have received correspondence recently, this is the one about which people are, according to their letters, most filled with fear and anxiety. As the hon. Member for Corby pointed out, that is especially true of those who know that they are just above benefit levels. They do not see how they will meet the costs or how they will cut their energy consumption. They know that they will get no benefit. They already have to put up with the fact that alongside them are people who, for one reason or another, have no savings at all and who therefore get housing benefit and council tax benefit. They see themselves getting none of those benefits and facing extra costs while their income, if based on a little savings capital, is declining.

There is real fear in people's minds over the issue. This is the Government's last chance to put an end to that fear. They show no signs of doing so, so the House must take its last chance of putting an end to that fear and force the Government to drop the proposal.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I had not intended to take part in the debate, but such is the extent of public feeling—certainly in my constituency as I know from having spent the morning speaking to a large number of pensioners—that I think that we must express much more vividly the great disillusionment that there is about the proposal.

When I listened to the Budget speech by the previous Chancellor, I was appalled by the suggestion that we should apply VAT to domestic fuel. It is a great pity that the present Chancellor and the Government are now, in effect, laden with the decision of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont).

The debate is useful in other respects. We must address ourselves to the reason why the large increase in tax, which is what it is, was decided. The answer is simple—the enormous borrowing requirement that the Government face.

Those of us who are honest must accept that there has to be a considerable increase in taxation of one form or another if the Government are to be credible in the eyes of those for whom the strength of sterling and our international financial situation depends. That is why the Chancellor effectively gave a future hostage. He did not increase taxation in the present Budget. He offered a considerable increase in the next year and the year after. In that sense, he was quite clever, because he put off paying the price for trying to keep international confidence in this country.

Unfortunately, clever though it was, as I have made abundantly clear, it was not a clever political choice, hence the speeches by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) and one or two other of my hon. Friends and many Opposition Members.

I find myself in a tremendous dilemma. I do not like VAT on domestic fuel. I have said so publicly and refused to vote on the issue when it was last before the House. On the other hand, I hope that I am a realist and know that the Government have to do something about the enormous borrowing requirement.

What would happen if we voted against the increase and it did not go through? There would be a great hole in the Government's strategy to keep international confidence, because the increase in taxation, which the Bill contains, would be swept away. Therefore, we would put my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General in a situation where he would have to try desperately to fill that gap. That gap could not be filled at a moment's notice.

I do not like the proposals. On the other hand, I do not want the Government's credibility to be totally undermined.

Mr. Beith: If the amendment is carried, surely it is open to the Chancellor to announce tonight that he intends to ensure that the tax hole is filled and that he will announce in the November Budget the precise means by which that is to be done, but to leave no doubt about it. Because the tax does not come into force until next year, he has the opportunity to do that.

Mr. Fry: I take the right hon. Gentleman's point. However, to ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to come forward with an alternative strategy at a moment's notice is asking too much.

Let no one be under any illusion. This VAT application is a tax increase. It is an indirect tax increase but it is a tax increase. Therefore, we should move it a step away from the people who will be hurt most, or at least apply ourselves to the effect of that tax increase on various sectors of the community. I say bluntly that those of us who are on better incomes must accept that tax increase as part of the price of trying to get the Government's borrowing requirement down. Unlike some hon. Members, I also accept that those who are on related benefits will obtain substantial assistance. I am worried about a group that has already been mentioned—those who are just above the level of any income-related benefit, who will suffer tremendously. Already, they have seen their water rates soar out of comprehension. They are the ones who are most anxious.

I hope that I am not one of those people who just mentions a problem and does not offer any solutions. As with any taxation system, it is necessary to soften the effect on those who will be hit hardest and there is a solution that will enable the Government to get out of their dilemma. I do not honestly expect my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General to get up at the end of the debate and say that he will not proceed with the implementation of VAT on fuel. Indeed, I would rather that he said that he would apply it to newspapers—I do not see why the Government are so terrified of doing that.

However, the Government could say that they will increase benefits to those who are worst off and, above that, they recognise the problem of many people—perhaps 3 million or 4 million—who have small occupational pensions or a few thousand pounds, usually in a building society, and who have seen their net incomes drop dramatically over recent months with the decrease in interest rates.

The Government should look closely in the autumn Budget at increasing the basic retirement pension by rather more than the retail prices index. I do not want that increase to be paid for out of the borrowing requirement. I want us to accept squarely that the only way to pay for it is through a higher contribution from the rest of the working population. I return to a point that I have made already. We are talking about a tax increase. In all justice, it should be borne by those who are still in a position to earn and are better able to afford such a tax increase.

If my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General will give me the assurance that the Government will look closely at the uprating of the basic retirement pension this autumn, above the RPI, he will get me into the Government's Lobby tonight. Without such a statement, the credibility of the Government and belief in what they say, certainly in my constituency, will be greatly undermined. I am not asking for specific promises about amounts of money. I am asking for consideration of that group of people who proudly say that they are not dependent on state handouts, who have saved a few thousand pounds and who, frankly, feel that they have been kicked in the teeth. We have expected them to support us as a political party, and they have been the bedrock of our society. To say to them and to future generations that the only way that they will avoid such an increase in the future is to fritter away their money so that they are totally dependent on state handouts gives the wrong message.

I understand the Government's dilemma. I have much sympathy over the need to provide funds to cover the borrowing requirement but a message needs to go from the House that we understand the problems and fears of a vulnerable section of our community.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): The hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) referred to the public sector borrowing requirement. The Government should be under no illusion—our constituents see an incompetent Tory Government who have managed to run up a PSBR of £50 billion and who now expect people on low incomes to pay for that deficit.

Like many other right hon. and hon. Members, I have been inundated with letters from constituents on this issue. I should like to quote from some of those letters which say it all much better than I can. I have questions like, "Why is it that the unskilled, low-waged manual work force bears the brunt of the tax burden to prop up the country?"

Another pensioner said, "I know that we have to set the country back on its feet, but do OAPs have to be hit so hard?" An old person aged 81 years wrote to me saying, "I shall have to cut off my central heating. I will not be able to pay for it. My gas bill last April was £133 and I cannot afford any more."

9.30 pm

An Age Concern report has found that 81 per cent. of the elderly people surveyed had a living room temperature below the World Health Organisation recommended level of 20 deg C. More than a third—34 per cent.—do not heat their bedrooms at all. Britain loses more old pensioners in winter than any other European country. That is not because our winters are colder, but because we pay the worst state pension in Europe. The Government are now telling those people who are struggling desperately that they must pay VAT on domestic fuel and power.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): The hon. Lady provided statistics alleging that the United Kingdom pays the worst state pension in Europe. Does she agree that those statistics do not add up when contributions are considered or, in other words, when one compares like with like? Does she agree that when contributions are taken into account, the British pension is not the worst by any means? Does

[Mr. Rupert Allason]

she further agree that, while the German state pension is larger, the German contributions are proportionately greater?

Mrs. Campbell: I know that my constituents who are existing on the ordinary state pension are badly off. Nowhere in Germany, France or any other European country do pensioners live in poverty as they do here.

I was visited recently by a constituent who was, until recently, a loyal Tory voter. He has now retired and manages a small charity trust for the company for which he used to work. He made the point—as did the hon. Member for Wellingborough—that those people who are just above the income support level will be hardest hit by the proposal. My constituent cited cases of pensioners who have written to him in utter desperation. Those included one who was already reduced to heating one room only. He said, "To meet current fuel bills and repairs to our boiler, my wife and I are now going short of food."

My constituent also said, "I have already had two old folk on the phone, both saying that they hope that they will die before the 17·5 per cent. increase comes in, as they fear the cold so much." It is a terrible indictment of the sort of society in which we are living when we cannot afford, as a society, to tell pensioners that they need not pay any more money.

Last week I visited three residential homes run by Mencap for the mentally and physically handicapped. Many of the residents of those homes have severely restricted mobility, and need consistently high levels to be maintained. The added burden of VAT on that vital provision cannot be accommodated by current care budgets that are already suffering at the hands of the Government.

I do not intend to detain the House for long. Much of what I wanted to say has been said by hon. Members on both sides. I would like briefly to draw attention to the position of Lupus sufferers. Lupus is a chronic, non-infectious, auto-immune disease, mainly affecting young women of child-bearing age—between 13 and 45. The symptoms of Lupus are many and varied, but one symptom is called Raynaud's Disease. Sufferers are, in general, extremely sensitive to changes in temperature. Those can affect the blood flow to fingers and toes and can cause constant pain in severe cases. There is great concern about the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel costs in view of the fact that, for those sufferers, heat is not a luxury but an essential commodity.

When these sufferers experience an attack due to the change of temperature, cumulative tissue damage may occur, and that in turn may lead to more severe forms of the condition—ulceration, gangrene and, at the very worst, an amputation may be required. It is important to minimise the number of attacks and to minimise the tissue damage and the resulting intense pain.

The problem is that many of these sufferers are not eligible for state benefits and will not benefit from any increase in them introduced as a result of the imposition of VAT. So the promised increase in benefits to counter-balance the VAT increase will have no positive effect.

In the course of proceedings on this Bill we have been able to present Ministers with many ways in which they can close tax loopholes and raise the £2 billion which they say this measure will generate. They can raise the money in a much more humane way. I join Conservative Members who have promised the Government that if they carry this measure through they will almost certainly lose Christchurch and any other by-elections that take place in the next few months and years.

I sincerely hope that the Government will rethink their proposal, and that enough Conservative Members vote against it to defeat it.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I rise to support my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), who moved the amendment in his eloquent style. I endorse most of what he said, even though he and I find ourselves in different camps when it comes to Europe and the Maastricht treaty—fortunately, we are not debating that tonight, and I hope that you will ensure that we do not, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I commend the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). His speech was made in a non-partisan way; he merely presented the issues, and I am delighted to support what he said—not only because his family used to live in my constituency for many years but because he went to the famous King's school in Macclesfield.

I deeply regret the fact that the Government have gone back on many election pledges by widening the scope of VAT. I never thought to see a Conservative Government and Chancellor doing that. Over two years we are to introduce a tax at 17·5 per cent. on two essentials of life: heat and light. They are, of course, particularly essential to the vulnerable groups mentioned by other hon. Members this evening.

What is so grossly unfair is that this charge will be levied not only on the consumption of gas and electricity but on the standing charges for them. Many of us believe that those charges are already grotesque and appear to have been mainly used to increase the salaries of the directors, chairmen and senior executives of the public utilities that have been privatised.

I endorse the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby. This tax is perceived to be socially unjust, and it is quite wrong that the most vulnerable people should have to pay so much for mistakes made by the Government.

I believe that it would be far better, far more honest and far more honourable—we are all honourable men and women here—if Ministers were prepared to increase the standard rate of income tax to raise the necessary money: £950 million in the first year, and £2·3 billion in a full year when the rate is 17·5 per cent. I do not believe that we should seek to mislead people by saying that we are not increasing taxation. As has been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry), we are increasing taxation, so why mess about as to whether it is indirect or direct?

The people of this country believe that the fairest and most appropriate way in which to help the Government balance their books and reduce the Budget deficit is to increase direct taxation. In November, I would, at a stroke, increase the 25 per cent. standard rate of tax to 28 per cent. for two years only. I would also increase the top rate of tax from 40 per cent. to 45 per cent. The people would then see that those who are in the best position and most able to pay would be making the major contribution to reducing the Budget deficit, which is causing the Government so much difficulty.

As my hon. Friends have rightly said, the present proposals are perceived to be grossly unfair and impinge mainly and most heavily on the most vulnerable groups—the elderly, those on low incomes and, as has been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough, those who are just outside any form of state income-related benefit. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough should note, however, that I do not think that giving an assurance that the old age pension will be increased by an amount above the retail prices index adequately reflects the concern that is felt in this country, nor will it provide the money that those in the vulnerable groups need for a reasonable quality of life.

My own women's association gave me 100 per cent. support in a motion that it submitted to the Conservative women's conference recently. It was not selected, of course—I do not think that the association expected that—but the grave and serious opposition to what the Government seek to do was reflected at national level on the agenda of the women's conference of the Conservative party. The one mistake that my women's association made was to ask the Government—if they were insistent on implementing the measure—whether, after the Budget deficit had been reduced, they were prepared to remove it. As has been said by my hon. Friends, however, once the zero-rated exemption has gone, we can never restore it.

It is wrong to extend a tax to the essentials of life such as heat and light. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, is extremely assiduous and hard working and has had considerable responsibility for social security matters. He knows that the Government have given no guarantee that the position of those on benefit, pensioners and those just above any form of income-related benefit will be fully protected by any steps that the Government may announce before the implementation of the VAT extension to heat and light.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed is absolutely right; to make the excuse that this is being done as our contribution to improve the environment and reduce carbon dioxide emissions is an absolute nonsense. It will have absolutely no effect. It is extraordinary that no proposal has been made to introduce an ambitious and helpful home insulation scheme to go with the Government's announcement.

I will not make as many unhelpful remarks as my hon. Friend the Member for Corby about the political implications of what the Government are doing. All I can say to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench is that I have not had a single letter from any person in favour of extending VAT to heat and light. I have received hundreds of letters from my constituents—my area is relatively well off compared to those of some of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members—who perceive the measure to be unacceptable.

9.45 pm

The Government would lose nothing by saying tonight, as the Prime Minister has said, "We have listened to the people of this country." He should go on to say, "Clearly, they are hostile and overwhelmingly opposed to what we seek to do. We will come back to the House in November" —as is absolutely possible—"with a proposal to plug the gap in the Budget to ensure that the Government's overall economic strategy is not undermined."

Like those of my hon. Friends who belong to the No Turning Back group, I want us to bring our budget into balance, but I do not want to do it on the backs of the vulnerable, the elderly, the low-paid, the handicapped, the mentally ill and all those groups of people who will suffer as a result of that misguided measure. We have heard little about the impact that the measure will have on private residential establishments that cater for some of those people. They will have to increase their fees to meet that additional charge.

If my right hon. Friends want a further Conservative Government after the next election, they must listen not only to the people of this country but to Conservative Back Benchers because the measure is fundamentally flawed and extremely damaging and will hurt the most vulnerable groups in our society. My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General would receive immense support from the House—perhaps more than he thinks from Conservative Back Benchers—if he were prepared to think again about that measure.

Why are we so against increasing direct taxation? Why must we dishonestly say that we are not increasing taxation, when we are widening the scope of VAT and increasing contributions under national insurance, which is also something that we said we would never do? What is so sacrosanct about direct taxation? If we raised it for only two years, we would have to seek a renewal if the budget was not in balance. What is wrong with that?

The Under-Secretary of State for Social Security—my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North—and I were with a group of members of the Confederation of British Industry on Friday. Surprisingly, many of those at that meeting would have been perfectly happy to see the Government increase the standard and 40 per cent. taxation rates to get the country's economy right.

I am honoured to have represented my constituency for 22 years in this place—rather longer than the overwhelming majority of the Cabinet—*[Interruption.]* When Disraeli was heckled during his maiden speech in the House, he said:

"There will come a time when you will listen to me."

There will come a time when my right hon. Friends will listen to me.

Mr. Graham: I have never heard such a tremendous fighting speech from the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and I am delighted to speak after him.

Time and again I have asked the Minister to tell us the price of a bottle of paraffin or a hundredweight of coal and how much it costs to heat a house, and he has never attempted to answer. How can the Government understand the suffering that they are inflicting on the good people of Britain—the people whom they expect to vote for them? Yet they put VAT on fuel. The people of this country know that the weather in Scotland is different from that in England. In recent months, the south has been sweltering in the heat, but in Scotland there have been various weather conditions. When I left home this morning, my wife had the fire on. I wonder how many elderly and disabled people in Scotland can afford to put on a fire in the morning—not very many.

One of the reasons for the fighting fury in Scotland—and, I am sure, in the rest of the country—is the Government's disgraceful commitment to putting 17·5 per cent. value added tax on fuel. One hon. Gentleman said that he would support the Government as they would

[Mr. Graham]

otherwise lack credibility. That is nonsense—we have been elected to fight and campaign for our constituents, and to ensure that the Government run the country for the good of our constituents. We should not support bad government.

Mr. Fry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Graham: I shall give way in a minute.

Hon. Members are here to represent our people on a burning issue. Many of our constituents will not be able to light fires or light their homes in winter when they are dark. Back Benchers on both sides of the House have a golden opportunity to join together to ensure that VAT of 17·5 per cent. is not imposed.

I have deliberately spoken to many of my pensioners about the issue. The Government have got away with plenty of things, but one thing that they will not get away with is the imposition of VAT on fuel. I have spoken to people on low pay and I remember the days when I was on low pay. I remember the difficulties that I faced in heating my house to ensure that my two sons went to school warm in the morning and came home at night to warm food and a warm house.

I had difficulties paying my fuel bills in Scotland. Some weeks, 25 per cent. of my income went straight into heating the house. Many hon. Members present tonight do not know the cost involved. I had to heat the house with paraffin as I could not afford the high cost of electricity. Ultimately, I had to use calor gas because paraffin was not good for my two children, who suffered from asthma.

Does the House realise that there are thousands and thousands of people who do not heat their houses as they would wish? They do not heat them to maintain their health because of the Government's mismanagement of the economy. When I look at the Government Front Bench team I do not see an ounce of compassion. I heard the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) make an impassioned plea, which I totally supported. I also heard the hon. Member for Macclesfield make a speech which was absolutely bang on the button.

Tonight, the Government have a chance to show some heart, but I am afraid that they will be hard-headed, and show a hard, cold face. The caring face of Government will be shown tonight as Government Members march through the Lobby and inflict damage and suffering on the elderly, unemployed, disabled and those on low pay. The Government do not have the guts to say that the previous Chancellor was wrong. They bumped him out into the cold, but at least he will be able to heat his house. Our folk, our constituents in Scotland and other regions will not be able to heat their houses.

Will the Minister find out the price of paraffin, calor gas and a bag of coal? Will he find out what it costs to heat a house in Glasgow, and what that costs a family in which one person is on low pay and the rest are unemployed? There is no benefit good enough for the dignity of mankind in Britain. We are all entitled to the dignity of having a warm house and hot food, and seeing in the dark. Let us give our folk their dignity, not impose VAT on fuel. I hope that many Conservative Back Benchers will support us tonight.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I am one of the Conservative Members who has a reputation for being loyal to the Conservative party. That means that when I speak out against my Government it carries extra currency. When I first came to the House, I voted for tougher immigration controls and tougher trade union reforms, and in their little grimy books, which they are writing in at the moment, the Whips wrote one word about me—unpromotable. They were right, but by the time I have finished my speech perhaps they will wish that they had promoted me.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell). Never in my experience have I seen such a politically naive, unfair and unjust measure. It is common knowledge that we have to find some money. The world recession has gone on for longer than all the industrialised nations had thought it would, but there is no disgrace in telling people the truth about that. If that causes us to break an election promise, it is not the end of the world, as long as we explain carefully to people why we are breaking that promise.

I guess that the Government thought that it was clever footwork to put VAT on fuel because they were not raising VAT but introducing another category. It was not a rise in direct tax and therefore did not place the Government in conflict with the electorate, as the Government did not have to say that they had broken a promise. If it is necesary to break a promise to straighten out the nation, the Government must do so, but people must be told why that is being done and it must be done fairly. To do it unfairly is inexcusable.

How will this affect young families? A young man who is a rising executive in his company may not have much money but may earn too much to qualify for income support. If he has a young wife and children, the washing machine will be on the go all day. Heating will also be on all day because the house must be kept warm for young children. The family is too rich to get benefit but too poor to pay ever-increasing costs, some of which we are inflicting on it.

Hon. Members have mentioned the elderly and people in other categories who are too rich to get benefit but too poor to pay ever-increasing costs. Many pensioners have had to take early retirement because of unemployment in their companies and have not even reached the state pension age. Out of the small amount of interest on their savings, which has been decreasing, they will have to pay extra fuel costs. That is inexcusable.

As hon. Members have said, there are other ways to raise money, and if hon. Members want me to list them, I shall do so. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) listed about four or five different ways and my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) suggested a basic tax rate of 28 per cent. and a higher rate of 45 per cent. That would be fairer than what the Government propose. VAT could be increased to 20 per cent. rather than nibbling at fuel costs. Many options are available to the Treasury, but I shall not detain the House by listing them further.

It is strange that in Tokyo we were able to offer President Yeltsin millions of pounds to help his country, but when we need money for our own country we cannot find it. We were able to find it to send an armada to the Falklands and we can send military aid to Bosnia and take part in the Gulf war, so there must be a contingency fund somewhere. We cannot be absolutely broke, because we seem to be able to find money from some source. Where is the money and how deep is the contingency fund purse?

I want the Government to withdraw the stupidity of VAT on fuel. It is unfair and unjust and we shall rue the day that we impose it. I did not go to university and I know that it sometimes shows. I did not rush out to advise Ministers with two firsts from university. I attended the university of life. The university of life does one thing above all else—it makes one streetwise. If only Ministers and civil servants had consulted a few streetwise Back Benchers, they would never have pursued such stupidity.

10 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I support the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell). I am sure that he is aware that, as shown in the Order Paper last Thursday, I tabled an amendment along similar lines to his. I know that we share a deep concern about the issues at stake.

I am aware that there is no requirement for the House to vote at 10 o'clock. When hon. Memberrs want to register their views on an important issue, they should be prepared to stay in the building to enable all hon. Members to do so. In that way, our constituents can judge how we feel about the issue.

It is almost with a sense of despair that yet again I speak about fuel poverty. I have been in the House since 1974, albeit with an interim absence. In the 1970s, I raised the question of fuel poverty and the problems faced by many of the elderly, the disabled and those on fixed incomes. I watched the actions of the Labour party when it was in government and the actions of the Conservative party when it was in opposition. I do not say that with any sense of immodesty.

My concern is that the House has never objectively addressed the issue of fuel poverty, especially against the background of the wealth from North sea oil, Scottish oil and gas and all the natural resources throughout the United Kingdom. The House has never drawn up a strategy or a policy—*[Interrruption]*—to ensure that no one has to face the realities that were so eloquently described—*[Interruption]*—by the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham)——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but there is now a general buzz of conversation such that it is not easy to hear her. That is extremely discourteous and I ask the House to be very much quieter.

Mrs. Ewing: I suspect, Madam Deputy Speaker, that hon. Members from the two main parties assumed that there would be a vote at 10'clock. They have come here specifically for the vote, rather than to listen to the arguments.

There has been a great deal of argument about the political implications of imposing VAT on domestic fuels. I have registered my view on that during previous debates on the Bill. It may be that fear has been struck in the hearts of many people, from Basildon to Brechin, from Newbury to New Pitsligo, from Christchurch to Cullen. The vote tonight should not be about votes for political parties: we are voting on something that will affect the lives of individuals, people who are citizens of our constituencies and of the United Kingdom. I urge all hon. Members to search their consciences before casting their votes.

The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde spoke about the need to define the cost of fuel for each and every individual. We have already done a great deal of research on that. I do not believe that it is an issue only of wealth; it is also an issue of climate. We must recognise the differentials in that regard between the north and the south of the United Kingdom; indeed, I have introduced several Bills to that effect.

Let me remind Ministers that it costs 36 per cent. more to heat a house in Dundee, Edinburgh or Glasgow than it costs to heat a house in Bristol. It costs 38 per cent. more to heat a house in Inverness and Stornoway, 48 per cent. more in Aberdeen, 60 per cent. more in Lerwick and 74 per cent. more in Braemar. Those statistics were produced by the Department of Energy, and they underpin the need to review our attitude to ensuring that those on low or fixed incomes—for instance, the disabled—can fulfil their requirement for a decent, warm house.

A dry, warm house is not a luxury; it is the right of every individual. Far too many of our people wake up to find condensation running down their windows—or, in winter, ice on the insides of their windows—and fungus creeping up their walls. This is not a commitment to Rio; it is a penalisation of the most vulnerable members of society. If the Government really want to meet the environmental requirements made at Rio, they should consider releasing the capital receipts of local authorities to ensure that they can implement the energy efficiency needs of our housing stock. They should ensure that all new build meets the requirements necessary to ensure decent insulation and heat conservation.

I believe that, if the Government proceed with their proposals, they will not only lose votes—possibly—in by-elections here and there; they will have on their conscience the lives and, ultimately, the deaths of many people in our society.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): My purpose in tabling amendments Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 5—which are grouped with amendment No. 7—is much more limited than that of my hon. Friends the Members for Corby (Mr. Powell) and for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). Indeed, I differ from them. I accept, reluctantly—how could I do so other than reluctantly—the Government's main argument for the extension of VAT to domestic fuel and power; I recognise the need to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement and, indeed, the need to reduce global warming. My aim is to exclude charities from the requirement to pay VAT on fuel and power, and I have tabled a number of amendments that seek to approach that objective from different angles. I do not mind which my hon. Friend the Minister chooses, as long as he chooses one of them.

The Government have promised to protect the needy from the burden of the additional charge on heating and cooking. My right hon. Friend the former Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that in his Budget statement, and the Government were right to make the commitment. I simply ask the Government to be consistent. They intend to help the needy directly; correspondingly, they should help the charities whose purpose is to help the needy.

I am talking of charities whose role is supportive of the state, or complementary to the state; charities, for example, that care for the elderly and the disabled. These are among the areas of growth in social expenditure where the Government are particularly worried about how they are to finance meeting the need that they foresee. Charities operate in these fields sensitively, in two senses. They

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

target need more accurately than state agencies commonly do; and they approach their human dealings in a sensitive manner. They are also cost effective, tending to have lower overheads than public agencies, and they mobilise voluntary energies.

In his excellent Mais lecture, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security set out some of the principles that he thought should govern the reform of social security. One was the principle that policy must harness popular energies. Charitable activity certainly does that, on an enormous scale.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind those hon. Members who have just come into the Chamber that it is grossly discourteous to chatter away while somebody else is seeking to make points that are important to him.

Mr. Howarth: Those who give money to charities may ask why, if the Chancellor is to take away money from charities by extending the burden of VAT on them, they should give money. Those who work for charities may ask why they should work for charities if the Government make their task harder by increasing their costs.

I shall give one or two examples of what the costs to individual charities will be as a result of extending VAT to fuel and power. Methodist Homes for the Aged will have to pay an extra £143,000. Barnardos will have to pay an extra £122,500. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children will have to pay another £31,000. The Royal National Institute for the Blind will have to pay another £126,500. Mencap will pay an extra £170,800. The National Children's Home will pay another £100,000. Those are significant additional burdens on charities that are acting in partnership with the state to provide very basic social support.

The Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund gives a third of its grants to sick people who face additional fuel costs. Applications to that fund and to other grant-giving charities will undoubtedly increase as people find it more difficult to cope with the increase in the cost of domestic fuel and power.

The Government have said that they want the needy to be helped. Why, then, do they intend to make it harder for charities to help those in need?

The Government increasingly want charities to do things. The problem with VAT is that it penalises charities that do indeed do things. The inequalities of the VAT system hit charities discriminatorily. It is a mistake to extend its scope. It would be much better to remove the existing £300 million burden of irrecoverable VAT that charities already carry. If the Government feel unable to exempt charities from having to pay VAT on their non-business activities, they should provide a VAT refund scheme.

It is important for the Government to think carefully about how to achieve a better balance in their fiscal policy relating to charities between relief on giving and relief on expenditure. I received a letter today from Mr. Peter Berresford of Mencap, who said:

"Assuming we receive tax relief on all our voluntary income, we actually receive tax relief on 7 per cent. of our activities!"

I can quote figures that have been supplied by other charities that face heavy VAT burdens on the activities which they undertake—activities which, surely, we all want them to undertake. The Royal National Institute for the Blind incurs £1·2 million of irrecoverable VAT. In its last financial year, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children had to pay £615,000 of irrecoverable VAT. Methodist Homes for the Aged currently pays £405,000 worth of irrecoverable VAT.

The Government have not put forward strong arguments to support their case for extending the imposition of VAT on charities. They argue that charities should make their contribution to reducing global warming, but the charities most affected by this change would not be able to do so. They are already energy efficient. Those for whom they care—the old, the ill and the disabled—need more heating.

Charities have a duty of care to look after those who depend upon them. The Government require charities to do so—for example, under the Registered Homes Act 1984. The Act requires charities running residential homes to maintain temperatures at a certain level. It is inappropriate to tax charities for complying with the Government's legal requirements. It is also discriminatory to do so, because of their inability to recover VAT.

The Government argue that the extension of gift aid and payroll giving will provide compensation, but it will not compensate the same charities, nor will it do so to a sufficient extent. The National Children's Home tells me that at best it would gain £10,000 from the extension of gift aid and payroll giving that is provided for in the Finance Bill. At the same time it will have to pay an additional £100,000 in VAT on fuel and power.

The Government also argue that charities already pay VAT on their business use, but it is not a good idea to establish further precedents. If we remove this zero rate, for which the Government fought, we may well create a precedent and encourage the attitude that, if charities pay VAT on fuel and power, why should they not pay it on their new buildings or building alterations for disabled people?

It is estimated that the Exchequer will gain £27 million from this extension of VAT to charities, but the net benefit to public funds will be very much less because, on a reasonable estimate, about three quarters of that will come back as a charge on public funds through increased fees charged by charities. It is disproportionate to abolish the zero rate for such a token gain to the Exchequer. I therefore ask my right hon. Friend to exclude charities from this extension of VAT. If he feels unable to do so, I ask him to make a positive commitment to consider constructively the possibility of introducing a VAT refund scheme in the autumn Budget.

10.15 pm

Sir John Cope: We have today covered much of the ground that we covered in our debates on the Budget, on Second Reading and in Committee of the whole House when we debated the clause stand part motion to which the amendment relates. Very little that is new has been said today, and I do not suppose that my response will change much.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) mentioned charities in which I know he takes a great interest. Other hon. Members, too, expressed concern about their charities under this legislation, especially those involved in residential care. I acknowledge at once that charities provide a valuable service and I pay

tribute to them. Charities in general provide many useful services in the community, which is why we already grant them large tax reliefs—especially, as my hon. Friend said, on charitable giving. Tax reliefs have been increased elsewhere in the Bill. I regret, however, that we cannot exempt charities from the national need to conserve energy; nor can they be immune from the problems of national financing.

Besides, charities are not alone in providing residential care. The amendments would disadvantage commercial residential care, which also provides a valuable service. They would also disadvantage the elderly at home, thus cutting across the care in the community policy. I would not want to introduce a measure that would encourage people to put the elderly into homes. In addition, because of the way in which the amendments are drafted, they would make some difficult and probably unintended distinctions between individual charities that provide residential care. Of course, we keep all such matters under careful review and will be reviewing taxation of charities again, as we always do, before the next Budget.

Mrs. Ewing *rose*——

Sir John Cope: I must make some progress in dealing with the general points which the hon. Lady and others have raised.

The House knows very well, because we have said it over and over again in the debates to which I have referred and elsewhere, that the clause was included for two reasons: first, to help to deal with the public sector financial deficit; and, secondly, to contribute towards meeting our Rio commitment. Both reasons remain valid and important.

Contrary to what has been said this evening, the clause is not the only way in which we are dealing with either of the problems, but it will make a contribution in both cases. From the Budget speech onwards, we have made it clear that we would make additional help available, through the benefits system, for those hardest hit. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce more details in the usual uprating statement in the autumn. That will allow increases to be put into effect when the VAT increases also come into effect.

There have been arguments, which I have observed today and on previous occasions, about whether we should tackle the public sector deficit by restraint on public spending or through tax increases. The fact is that we are tackling it by both methods and both are necessary given the scale of the deficit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) seemed to think that we were somehow denying that this was a tax increase. We are not: it is a tax increase and we accept that. We have been asked to choose between direct taxes and indirect taxes. We are increasing both in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield quoted Disraeli's maiden speech. My hon. Friend should note that Disraeli said those words in his maiden speech and not after he had been a Member for a very long time—longer than I have been here, and I have been a Member for only 19 years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), who moved the amendment, said that it was a matter of judgment and responsibility. I accept that. My right hon. Friends and I have not claimed that this is the only option. Of course it is not. My hon. Friend the Member for Corby seemed to think that it is, but, as I have made clear, we had to choose and this is the way in which we have decided to make a contribution in both cases about which I have spoken. During this debate, we have been urged constantly by my hon. Friends, and even those who have spoken against the amendment, to tackle the deficit and that is what we are doing. That involves difficult decisions. We realise that those decisions are difficult; nevertheless, they are necessary.

We have been reminded again this evening that it has become a sackable offence on the Labour party Front Bench to say anything in favour of a tax on fuel. Lord Desai discovered that the other day. Perhaps his real offence was embarrassing the Leader of the Opposition during Question Time. That is, after all, quite a recent position for the Opposition. The Opposition's policy document of May 1990 entitled "Looking to the Future" contains the heading "Value Added Tax". They promised to keep many of the zero rates, but they did not promise to keep this one. That document states:

"We will also use the tax system . . . to help protect the environment."

Exactly so, and that is what we are doing. The present leader of the Labour party made environmental taxes part of his leadership platform.

The Liberal Democrats have, in their time, also spoken in favour of taxes of this kind. In one of their policy documents in August 1991, they said:

"The UK is unusual amongst EC members in not applying even standard rates of VAT on domestic fuels."

Of course the Liberal Democrats say different things now —that is politics. We must take the difficult decisions and that is what we have done. That is why I commend clause 42 to the House.

Mr. William Powell: This has been, to say the least, a lively debate. None of us who listened to it will forget the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) stimulated the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) in his contribution.

I want to make two very brief points. First, there is absolutely no doubt that the Conservative party and our leader gave an unequivocal promise to the electorate during the election campaign that we would not extend VAT in this way. I also gave that promise to my constituents. I meant it and I propose to keep it.

Secondly, this debate is not about whether there should be a tax rise. It is quite obvious that, in the proposals which were made, the Government accepted that there would be a tax rise. The question is, what is the priority in imposing that tax rise? I opened the debate by saying that the chief criticism which could be made was that it was socially extremely harmful. I have to say that, after all the hours of discussion on different occasions, I remain absolutely perplexed as to how anybody could select this as the socially most just way of raising tax. It is the most bizarre decision that could be made. I know that, although many of my right hon. and hon. Friends will join the Government in the Division Lobby, they, too, are thoroughly perplexed as to how this selection came to be made.

I note also that, although my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General justified the rise in tax—I do not criticise him for that, and I praise the way in which he faced that matter absolutely directly—he made no attempt whatsoever to justify to the House why this method had been selected, in terms of where the increase should fall,

[Mr. William Powell]

and not some other option. Quite obviously, every hon. Member could put forward two dozen options that would raise the same amount of tax and would be perceived by our constituents to be socially far more justifiable than the option that is presently before the House.

As my right hon. Friend said, we have not made much progress. The House has debated this matter fully. I simply ask right hon. and hon. Members to join me in the Division Lobby in supporting the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 299, Noes 307.

Division No. 327] **[10.25 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hollywood, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James

Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Spellar and
Mr. Andrew Mackinlay.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel

Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 78

RATE OF ADVANCE CORPORATION TAX AND TAX CREDITS

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I beg to move amendment No. 26, in page 54, line 38, at end insert—

'(1A) The amendment made by subsection (1) above shall not have effect as respects so much of the amount or value of any distribution as is payable to a section 505 body which, in accordance with regulations made by the Board, supplies a certificate to the company making the distribution to the effect that it is such a body.

(1B) A body is a section 505 body if it is—

(a) a charity (as defined in section 506(1) of the Taxes Act 1988);

(b) a body mentioned in section 507 of that Act (heritage bodies); or

(c) an Association of a description specified in section 508 of that Act (scientific research organisations).

(1C) The Board may by regulations make such incidential consequential, transitional provision as they consider necessary or expedient in connection with subsections (1A) and (1B) above (including provision amending any provision of the Taxes Acts).'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 8, in page 54, line 41, at end insert—

'(2A) The amendment made by subsection (1) above shall not have effect as respects so much of the amount or value of any distribution as is payable to a section 505 body which, in accordance with regulations made by the Board, supplies a certificate to the company making the distribution to the effect that it is such a body.

(2B) A body is a section 505 body if it is—

(a) a charity (as defined in section 506(1) of the Taxes Act 1988);

(b) a body mentioned in section 507 of that Act (heritage bodies); or

(c) an Association of a description specified in section 508 of that Act (scientific research organisations).

(2C) The Board may by regulations make such incidental, consequential, transitional and supplemental provision as they consider necessary or expedient in connection with subsections (2A) and (2B) above (including provision amending any provision of the Taxes Acts).'.

No. 9, in page 57, line 24, *[Clause 80]*, leave out from beginning to end of line 25 on page 58.

Mr. Brown: It is appropriate that, having discussed one tax rise, albeit an overt tax rise, we now proceed to discuss a substantial concealed tax rise, and one which bears in a most unfair way on charities—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I should be grateful if hon. Members would either listen to the hon. Gentleman speaking to the amendment or retire quietly from the Chamber.

Mr. Brown: Conservative Members, whose consciences must already be pricking them, should stay and listen to my exposition of what is intended to be a relieving measure —*[Interruption.]* They shout and jeer, suggesting that they are not sympathetic to the cruel and unfair position in which charities find themselves.

Those Tory Members who served on the Committee considering the Finance Bill will be aware that we have received a substantial number of written representations about the point. It would probably do Tory Members some good—at least it would inform them—if I read each and every one of those representations into the record. It would take some time. However, they might prefer it if I broadly outlined the Opposition's case, and if I were heard in silence it would be easier for me to do so. *[Interruption.]* I see that the hon. Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) is already seized by my remarks and wishes to make a contribution. Would she like me to give way to her?

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Brown: No. I am sure that it is shame that keeps her seated.

When the former Chancellor addressed the issue of advanced corporation tax in his Budget speech, he promised us a measure which would, on the one hand, help all dividend-paying companies. That sounds like good news. He said that he would provide help in a way that would also raise considerable revenue. That should have set the alarm bells ringing, as of course it did, among two interest groups: pensions and charities, especially charities that rely on income from equity investments.

10.45 pm

To some extent, at least, the Government realise that the impost is shameful because they have provided for transitional arrangements to ease in the tax. The arrangements grant temporary relief to charities, so the Government clearly realise the harm that they are doing.

The impact on charities is bound to be severe and bizarre because the extra tax will come directly from the money that charities use for charitable purposes—in effect, a shift of money from those purposes to the Exchequer, for the Chancellor's purposes. And these purposes, according to Conservative Members, are to do with reducing the deficit.

The irony lies in the fact that the work that the charities which have written to us are doing is often financially assisted by the Government. Charities make a part payment towards certain projects, and the Government make another payment towards them. Some of the projects jeopardised by the extra tax are the very ones on which the Government have looked favourably—in some cases, they have even helped them by way of partnership.

Certainly, the charitable purposes of the organisations that have sent in representations are approved by the Government. The work that they do often substitutes for public provision. The organisations say that the Government are transferring responsibilities from the public sector to the charitable organisations at the same time as withdrawing funding from them through the tax system. They are also withdrawing funding through local government sources, inner city partnerships and other schemes.

Charitable organisations tell us that they expect to lose about £100 million eventually under these changes. They expect to lose £130 million from the VAT impost; and to offset all that, they expect an extra £31 million in gift aid and payroll giving—nothing like enough to make up for their losses.

This has been a bad year and a bad Finance Bill for charities. That is not just my view; it is also the view held by the Charities Tax Reform Group. Ministers are attempting to breach an important principle here—that charities should be exempt from taxation on their incomes. We seek to remedy that state of affairs by means of our amendments.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The proposed tax change to advance corporation tax in the Budget has not hit the headlines, but it represents the most important change for charities.

The way in which the change will affect four charities illustrates the seriousness of the damage that will be caused to charitable income. Once the new system is fully operational, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution will lose £250,000 a year as a result of the reduction in tax relief on dividend income. The gravity of that loss should be measured in comparison with the £80,000 that that charity will have to pay as a result of the imposition of 17·5 per cent. VAT on fuel and power. Barnardos will lose £200,000 as a result of the loss of tax relief on dividend income, while it will have to pay out £122,500 as a result of the VAT imposition.

The Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation will have to pay an additional £460,473 in tax on dividends compared with £15,556 on VAT on fuel and power. The most spectacular figure, if I may use that adjective, is the amount of the burden on the Wellcome trust, which will have to pay no less than £10 million additional tax on dividend income compared with £70,000 in VAT on fuel and power. Those figures illustrate the importance of the issue.

The cost to charities of the reduction in the value of tax credits on dividends by the end of the transition period will be, on the Government's admission, not less than £50 million and the Charities Tax Reform Group calculates that the sum cannot be less than £100 million.

I tabled amendments Nos. 8 and 9 to protect charities from this proposed change. I did so after careful discussions with the Charities Tax Reform Group, which itself took advice from a parliamentary draftsman. I was therefore rather surprised when the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) lifted my amendment No. 8 and retabled it some three lines further forward in the Bill. Some people would call that pilfering; I would call it plagiarism. Plagiarism is a weakness displayed by people who want the world to be impressed by what they do, but who do not produce their own ideas, and lack candour, courtesy and shame. It is a pity that the hon. Lady could not support my amendment. Policy towards charities should not become another arena for party political opportunism.

Mr. Nicholas Brown *rose*—

Mr. Howarth: I would be happy to give way to the hon. Member for Peckham if she cares to defend her conduct. Does the hon. Lady wish me to give way to her or would she prefer a knight errant in the person of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) to champion her cause?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman should not be too chirpy about all of this. He spent the first part of his speech whingeing about his right hon. Friends on the Front Bench and now he is whingeing at my colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench. He should be grateful for our support. If he refers to the Committee proceedings, he will discover that our position is entirely consistent.

Mr. Howarth: It is just a shame that once again the Opposition have been unable to produce their own ideas about how to deal with the problem.

I appreciate the Government's need for increased revenue. I also appreciate why my right hon. Friend the then Chancellor considered the possibility of improving the Government's revenue from taxation of investment income, and I am grateful for the transition period that the Government propose to allow to charities.

The Government say that the transition period will allow charities time to rearrange their portfolios, as if to suggest that charities might, by and large, escape the impost. I fear that matters will not be so simple. Responsible trustees will need to keep a balance in their investment portfolios and I am far from optimistic that charities will be able to escape from more than a limited proportion of the new tax burden. My amendments therefore call on the Government to convert the transitional relief into permanent relief. Technically, there would be no difficulty about doing that and I believe that my amendments would achieve that purpose.

Why is it so important that charities should be given permanent relief from the new taxation? The Government need a clear and consistent strategy in relation to charities. They are asking charities to do more and more. With care in the community, they are inviting charities into a new, more formalised and more extensive partnership with the state. It is right that they should do so. State agencies can only do so much. We are bumping up against the limits to which the Government can tax and borrow. State bureaucracies are relatively clumsy; indispensable though they are in social provision, they lack sensitivity to the infinite variety of personal human need.

Charities have entrepreneurial qualities; they are innovative, with a capacity to respond flexibly to new needs as they are identified. They are also highly cost effective as they lever voluntary energies. We need what Beveridge described as a comprehensive policy of social progress, which means harnessing all the resources of society. The Government should develop a new partnership with charities so that we can mobilise society's generosity. Charitable activity benefits not only the recipients but the givers, and strengthens our society's bonds.

For those reasons, the Government need a fully considered, clear view of the role of charities and the nature of the partnership that they want with charities and voluntary organisations. That implies that they should consider the range of their policies systematically to ensure that they are consistently supportive of charities. It means, for instance, that a national lottery intended to raise additional money for good causes should not be so designed as to generate a net financial loss to charity. I am sorry that my amendments on that subject were not selected, but I will say no more on the matter as I would be straying out of order if I did.

Cumulatively, the tax concessions for charities introduced by the Government during their period in office had, before the Budget, reached the impressive total of between £900 million and £1 billion. Sadly, the Budget will

[Mr. Howarth]

reduce that total by not less than £100 million once all the measures in it are fully operational. Of those, the ACT change is particularly important.

Mr. Dorrell: I am listening to my hon. Friend carefully. Will he enlarge on the calculations leading to the estimate that when the ACT changes have run their full courses they will cost the charities world £100 million? Charities currently receive tax credits to the value of approximately £200 million. I do not understand, in simple arithmetic, how reducing the tax credit rate from 25 to 20 per cent. —a reduction of a fifth—can lead to a reduction of a half in the value of tax credits received by charity.

Mr. Howarth: I do not have all the figures to hand to assist my hon. Friend with the details of the computation. However, I am sure that he will respect the Wellcome trust as a source. The Wellcome trust considers that the measure will cost it an extra £10 million. If my hon. Friend considers the other large charitable foundations which we are fortunate to have in this country, and the totality of registered charities with investment income of widely varying levels throughout the country, he should not be surprised. The Charities' Tax Reform Group, which has a reputation for integrity and a high level of competence in policy analysis and how it develops its recommendations, has suggested that figure, so I hope that my hon. Friend will be willing to accept it as a serious estimate.

At a time when the Government are asking charities to do more, when private donations to charities have been depressed as a consequence of the recession, and when central Government and local government grants to charities have been under pressure, the Government have chosen to present a Finance Bill reducing the overall value of the tax concessions that they provide to charities. The Government should be more systematic and consistent in their relationship with charities and their policy towards them.

Let us consider the case of the Wellcome trust. The Government are looking to medical charities to support a larger proportion of the cost of medical research in this country. As it is, medical charities contribute more to those costs than the Government's directly funded Medical Research Council does. I make no complaint about that. But it seems to be an instance of where the left hand in Whitehall is not very clear about what the right hand is doing. The Government want medical research charities to do more to support medical research, but then reduce their capacity to do so.

11 pm

It is time that the Government reconsidered the balance of reliefs between giving and expenditure. Given the background of the large public sector borrowing requirement, the 20p basic rate which my right hon. Friends have held out to us for some time past still seems a good way off in the distance. The treatment of ACT can, however, be seen as a straw in the wind and a prelude to the 20p basic rate. As the Government are successful over the years in reducing levels of income tax, the value of income tax concessions and of relief on giving falls. Charities receive less money back as the rates of tax become lower, and as it becomes less tax efficient for donors to give to charities it becomes less attractive to them to do so, so income to charities on that side will tend to fall. At the same time, for good economic reasons, the Government have chosen to switch the burden of taxation to indirect tax so that the rates have increased. The extent of the application of indirect taxation is also increasing. It is timely that my right hon. and hon. Friends should reconsider at a fundamental level their strategy for fiscal support for charities.

I hope that the Government will be able to reconsider their policy on ACT in relation to charities.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Is there not another important argument? If the Government demand more and more from charities and the income to charities from donors falls, there will inevitably be a demand for the shortfall to be made up by direct grant from public sources? The danger of that process is that more and more charities will be pushed into becoming service providers to a monopoly purchaser. Charities would then lose much of their principal value—the fact that they have considerable freedom to choose whom they will help and how they will help them.

Mr. Howarth: With his deep knowledge of the charitable world, my hon. Friend has made an extremely important point. The Government must be wary that their tax policies do not result in their cutting off their nose to spite their face, to use a rather inelegant phrase.

Will my right hon. Friends rethink the ACT measure as it bears on charities? Will they give careful thought to the scope for a VAT refund scheme? It is extremely important that before we reach the autumn Budget some searching and radical thought should be given by my right hon. Friends across the range of Departments on what they expect of charities and how they are to support them.

Mr. Dorrell: In introducing the debate, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) drew attention to the language that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) used in introducing the change in the Budget speech. He made it clear that the purpose of the advance corporation tax change in the round was, first, to help dividend-paying companies and, secondly, to raise revenue. There has never been any doubt that that has been the effect of the slightly complex changes in ACT and tax credit rates.

The policy injects £1 billion this year and £1 billion next year into British company balance sheets. In the third and subsequent years, it delivers £1 billion into the Exchequer as a revenue-raising measure. Therefore, it both helps dividend-paying companies and raises revenues, as the Chancellor made clear that it would when he introduced the change.

The effect of the amendment would be to maintain a 25 per cent. rate of ACT and associated tax credits where the shares of company are held by a charity. That proposal was also supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). It is not difficult to see why that course does not commend itself to the Government, bearing in mind the practical effect of that tax change. It would discriminate between shareholders when determining the tax consequence of paying a dividend. The amendment requires that when a company pays a dividend it would first have to find out whether a share on its shareholders' register was held by a charity. If it was, the company would be required to pay 25 per cent. ACT rather than 20 per cent. to allow the charity to reclaim a 25 per cent. rate of tax credit on the dividend.

The proposal is extremely complex. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon said that it would be possible to implement it. I cannot argue that it would be impossible, but it would certainly be complicated. Companies would be denied the benefit of the change, at least those with charities on their shareholders' register, and in the worst case it might make the charity undesirable and unwelcome as a shareholder. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East seems to be learning the lesson of his hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor because he is building for himself a lectern on the Opposition Dispatch Box. *[Interruption.]* I hope that he will not read it all.

I have illustrated why I do not find the proposal by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon attractive. That should not be taken to undermine in any way the Government's commitment to charitable enterprise and to providing the broadest possible support to charitable activity.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon about the importance of encouraging charitable activity and its value to the person receiving it and those who are engaged in providing it. My hon. Friend was right when he said that charitable activity is part of the bond that binds society. It is precisely for that reason that we have proposed for the various organisations that will be affected by the change in ACT a long transitional arrangement. That will shield charities from the immediate consequences of the reduction in the rate of income tax on dividend payments from 25 to 20 per cent.

However, they cannot be shielded from that change indefinitely, nor is it right that they should be, especially when we remember, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon acknowledged, that charities have already felt the effect of the reduction in the standard rate of income tax and therefore of tax credits and ACT from 33 to 25 per cent. The Government are committed to a further reduction to 20 per cent. We have given notice of the effect of the reduction in the value of tax credits. We are committed to it and when the transition provided for in the Bill has run its course, charities will face the new situation. As I have said, that does not reduce the value that the Government attach to charitable activity. However, we recognise that the inevitable consequence of a reduction in the standard rate is that the associated tax credits will also reduce in value. I cannot commend the amendment.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 107

INDEXATION OF ALLOWANCES ETC. FOR 1994-95 ONWARDS

Mr. Dorrell: I beg to move amendment No. 14, in page 76, line 36, at end insert

'and accordingly, in subsection (4) of that section for "subsection (5)" there shall be substituted "subsections (5) and (5A)".'

This is a minor drafting amendment to insert a missing cross reference in the amendment made by clause 107 to section 509C of the Taxes Act 1988.

Amendment agreed to.

Further consideration adjourned.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

To be further considered tomorrow.

Bill, not amended (in the Committee) and as amended (in the Standing Committee) to be further considered tomorrow.

International Development Association

11.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): I beg to move,

That the draft International Development Association (Tenth Replenishment) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 21 June, be approved.

The International Development Association—IDA—is part of the World bank. Its aim is to help improve living standards for the world's poorest people. It provides loans on highly concessional terms to the poorest countries. IDA's central objectives are poverty reduction, economic reform and sustainable development. Those aims complement, and are mutually supportive of, the priority objectives of the United Kingdom aid programme. The World bank has an important leadership role in policy dialogue with developing countries and in promoting sound economic management. It also plays an important role in co-ordinating the efforts of other donors, especially in Africa under the umbrella of the special programme of assistance for sub-Saharan Africa.

The United Kingdom, therefore, has always been a strong supporter of IDA from its inception in 1960. In concert with other donors, we have played an influential part in shaping IDA's evolving role in response to the changing needs and priorities in the poorest countries. IDA's resources are replenished periodically, and the negotiations provide an opportunity for donors to agree the policy priorities which should guide IDA's operations, to supplement the day-to-day policy guidance offered by the bank's board of directors.

The purpose of today's order is to authorise a contribution of £620 million to the tenth replenishment of IDA. Negotiations were concluded last December and donors pledged a total of 13 billion special drawing rights —about $18 billion. That maintains the value of IDA-9 in real terms and will cover commitments over the three years beginning this July. Taking account of the recycling of loans repaid by IDA's borrowers, the total amount available over that period will be about $22 billion.

IDA has received a mandate to continue and to increase its efforts in the key areas of poverty reduction, economic adjustment and environmental protection and improvement. I welcome the attention being paid to those important areas. Development will not happen if people are uneducated and unhealthy and have insufficient access to resources. Development will not be sustainable if we do not take steps to protect our environment. I am particularly pleased that more attention is to be devoted to bringing down the rate of population growth—a better life for all is not possible if economic growth is outstripped by population growth. Nor can prospects for sustainable development be enhanced when over-population leads, as it so often does, to environmental degradation.

The central objective of the World bank is to reduce poverty in developing countries. The bank is following a two-prong strategy, combining economic growth with the development of human resources through expanded social services. IDA is currently undertaking poverty assessments for all active borrowers. The assessments provide the basis for IDA's lending operations and help to determine a country's commitment to poverty reduction. An increasing feature of IDA's country assistance programmes is that a Government commitment to poverty reduction warrants increased lending, while the absence of such a commitment leads to a lower level of activity. We have given strong support to IDA's bias in favour of support for those countries that are genuinely attempting to raise the standard of living of their poorest citizens.

In recent years, there has been an increased awareness among the donor community of the need to promote environmentally sustainable development. IDA has promoted and will continue to promote environmental protection and improvement throughout its operations. A key component of its strategy is the production of national environmental action plans for borrowers. The plans provide the basis for IDA's dialogue with borrowers on the means of securing sustainable development based on actions that have no adverse effects on the environment.

In addition, IDA produces environmental assessments for all projects when there might be cause for concern. The assessments made available to affected groups locally contain a full analysis of any significant social and environmental impacts. There are many examples of the increasing attention being given by the bank to environmental issues, not least the work being undertaken in such important areas as energy efficiency, water resources management and involuntary resettlement.

We have pressed successfully for good government—including respect for human rights—to be an important part of the development agenda in both bilateral and multilateral discussions. By good government, I mean competence in pursuing sound development and economic policies, legitimacy and accountability of public institutions and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

We have welcomed the attention to be given under IDA-10 to the economic aspects of good government—essentially, features that have long-term implications for a country's capacity to initiate and sustain programmes for effective poverty relief and environmental sustainability.

Another important area covered in the deputies' report is the need to strengthen the bank's project performance. Last year, the president of the World bank set up an internal task force to examine why the proportion of successful projects—although still high—was decreasing. The bank has prepared an action plan based on its recommendations: the plan was endorsed by the bank's board of directors last week. The bank will also publish a booklet outlining the steps that it is taking to improve performance.

I am confident that, with the active support of its members and borrowers, the bank's performance will improve in the areas under its control. It will be especially important for borrowers to commit themselves to the ownership of the projects in their portfolios.

In IDA-9, it was agreed that up to 50 per cent. of lending should go to Africa. This allocation will be maintained under IDA-10. We welcome that, as well as the recognition given to the needs of Asia, where more than half of the world's poor live; but it is in Africa that some of the greatest challenges in tackling poverty lie. IDA has played a leading role in supporting the efforts of countries in the region to put in place measures that will lead to a resumption in growth.

We have been strong supporters of the structural adjustment programmes, and have provided funds from bilateral aid programmes to supplement the efforts of the World bank. The special programme for Africa, to which we have committed £550 million, is intended to ensure that

reform programmes in low-income African countries do not fail for lack of finance. The programme has also increasingly devoted attention to protecting expenditure on the social services, and more generally to addressing the needs of the poorest. However, donors have recognised that more needs to be done to protect the poor during the implementation of adjustment programmes. Increasingly, IDA-supported adjustment programmes incorporate measures to protect public expenditure in such areas as primary health care and education.

IDA faces many new challenges. The association will need to address the requirements of new members, particularly countries that have emerged from the former Soviet Union and other countries that have rejoined the association. It will need to give increased attention to such areas as poverty reduction and environmentally sustainable development and it will need to implement measures that will improve its performance. IDA will therefore need the full support of its donors. In commending this order to the House, I can give an assurance that we shall be monitoring the activities of the World bank closely to ensure that the objectives set out in the deputies' report are met.

In summary, we are glad to support IDA's central aim of alleviating poverty and its concentration of resources in key areas, including environmentally sustainable development. We welcome its action to tackle the problems of the poorest, and particularly the poorer indebted countries in Africa. We support its attempts to help those countries improve their co-ordination of aid from all sources. We play a vigorous part in such co-ordination.

The World bank and IDA are the world's leading development institutions. They constitute the cutting edge for change and for improvement in the social and economic conditions in developing countries. Successive British Governments have supported the World bank and our commitment is as firm as ever. I commend the order to the House.

11.20 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): We have just listened to a typically anodyne canter round the course from the Minister, who did not seem even to notice that all his worthy and wordy platitudes, such as environmentally sound projects, the international rule of law and priority for poverty alleviation, are all belied by events and by the evidence that is before us. He did not appear even to notice that all these issues have been the subject of profound criticism, none of which he answered—not least, I might add, the British Government's monitoring, if one can use that word, of World bank activities. As I shall go on to show, that is ostentatious by its absence.

When an ODA resolution seeking support for several hundred million pounds for development projects comes before this House, one normally gives it a strong welcome. In this case, however, the tenth IDA replenishment, the criticism of IDA procedures runs so deep that, contrary to the whole tenor and content of the Minister's speech, with breaches of World bank policy so flagrant and results so often counterproductive, it is doubtful whether this order should be approved at all. On balance, I believe that the order should be approved, but only on the basis of far stricter accountability than the lax and complicit record of ODA Ministers in handling World bank projects would suggest so far.

At the heart of this debate, which the Minister did not even mention, is accountability, according to financial, environmental and developmental criteria, for the huge sums devoted to IDA and the World bank by donor countries, including Britain which will be contributing £620 million under the order. A significant proportion of IDA funds is directed towards big top-down projects that forcibly displace local populations, forestry projects that contribute to deforestation, large-scale energy projects that are highly pollutant and do not improve conservation, and structural adjustment programmes that worsen poverty and degrade the environment. They favour export promotion and unregulated business activity.

As I listened to the Minister, I wondered whether he existed on the same planet where all these things are taking place. There is no record of resistance by British Ministers or British representatives to these anti-social and anti-development policies of the World bank—not in every case, but in so many cases. On several occasions, the voting record shows that the Government colluded in and actively encouraged such policies.

As everyone knows, the Government have gone on and on about value for money in the case of the health service, ambulance workers, teachers, local authorities and, most recently, the police. However, in the face of overwhelming evidence that IDA lending can have damaging social and environmental effects, that project quality is deteriorating and that World bank policy and loan agreement conditions are ignored, Ministers have made no public protest. If I am wrong, let the Minister correct me.

Why did the Government not make known, for example, their intense dissatisfaction when the recent Wapenhans report revealed that 37 per cent. of World bank funded projects failed to meet the bank's own criteria? That compares with only 15 per cent. in 1981, and deterioration has accelerated in the past three years. The Wapenhans report states that pressure inside the bank to lend money and promote projects overwhelms all other considerations. As a result, poor project design, poor appraisal practices and a failure to enforce loan agreements are widespread in the bank's operations. If that is so, why do the Government continue to lend hundreds of millions of pounds without insisting and without checking that such major defects are rooted out? The Minister's speech was a travesty; some serious questions, involving large sums of taxpayers' money, need an answer, but we have not remotely begun to hear one. I should be glad to give way if the Minister could tear himself away from writing or reading his latest brief and perhaps deal with some of the problems.

How does the Minister justify the huge programmes of forced resettlement which World bank projects have often caused? In the 1980s, about 95 World bank supported projects caused the forcible displacement of more than 2 million people. The World bank policy objective is that those people are afterwards

"afforded opportunities to become established and economically self-sustaining in the shortest possible period, at living standards that at least match and if possible improve on those before resettlement".

That is a quotation from page 19 of World bank technical paper No. 80. However, the bank has not documented one single case anywhere in the world where a large number of people displaced by one of its projects have improved, let alone regained, their standard of living.

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

These projects have often resulted in hundreds of thousands of poor people being made homeless and destitute.

Perhaps the most notorious case is that of the Narmada dam. I hope that the Minister has heard of it—it is in India. The World bank approved $450 million for that power and irrigation project in northern India at the expense of forcibly displacing more than 200,000 of the rural poor. After years of controversy, the World bank was obliged to set up an independent review team, whose conclusion is highly relevant to the debate. Its conclusion was that the the projects were

"flawed, that resettlement and rehabilitation of all those displaced . . . is not possible under prevailing circumstances and that environmental impacts . . . have not been properly considered or properly addressed."

That is a pretty damning indictment. The team argued that the bank should consider the projects "afresh".

In fact, the World bank's management decided to ignore the independent review's advice. However, at the crucial meeting of the bank's executive directors in October 1992, an unprecedentedly high 44 per cent. of directors, including representatives of the United States, Japan, Canada, Scandinavia, Germany and Australia, voted to suspend funding, despite the management's advice.

Britain held a decisive vote at the meeting, which it used to support the project and to recommend the loan of more money. I submit to the House that that was a shameful decision by the British representative, who must have been acting on instructions from the British Government.

Perhaps the Minister will now tell the House how he justifies that decision. I would be glad if the Minister would take time from my speech to answer that point. I would prefer that to the glib platitudes that a civil servant has written for the Minister. I would like the Minister to answer a few relevant points about accountability—*[Interruption.]* May I have the Minister's attention? I am very concerned to have an answer to this point. I hope that we shall not hear the same kind of ridiculous travesties that we heard in the Minister's opening speech.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I understood that the hon. Gentleman was making a speech. With the leave of the House, I shall have an opportunity to respond in the usual way to any points that the hon. Gentleman or any other hon. Members wish to make. I think that the hon. Gentleman should leave the matter there.

Mr. Meacher: I am certainly not going to leave the matter there as I am sure that in the last five minutes of this extremely short debate we shall hear a few more platitudes which make no attempt to answer any detailed questions.

The point that I have raised is probably the most serious event in the past year in terms of World bank policies in so far as they affect Britain. How does the Minister justify the decision that was taken in respect of the Narmada dam when all the other major countries voted to suspend funding and Britain alone tipped the balance? That project produces the forcible displacement of 200,000 people. How can the British Government possibly justify that?

Will the Minister confirm that he will answer that specific point when he replies to the debate? I am prepared to continue if I am assured that I will receive an answer later. I am not prepared to leave the point so that it is just swept aside in the last minute of this debate. Will the Minister assure me that he will answer the point about the British Government's culpable responsibility for the continuation of the Narmada dam project?

It is a particularly disreputable episode when the Overseas Development Agency's press release, which was issued at the same time, admitted:

"there has been no effective consultation with those affected by the project, and there is insufficient baseline data to measure the impact of the project."

The press release continued:

"The World Bank's own guidelines on resettlement have been repeatedly ignored."

In that case, the House will want to know why ODA Ministers gave their support to continuing that project. We want an answer to that tonight.

Nor is that saga an isolated case. The independent review team report states:

"Problems besetting the Narmada project are more the rule than the exception to resettlement operations supported by the bank."

Similar results in fact happened elsewhere in India, Rwanda, Brazil, Indonesia, Argentina and Malawi.

Because forced resettlement on a mass scale is resisted on the ground, the policies that the Government are supporting have led to human rights violations and widespread disregard of international law. It is astonishing that the Minister can stand before the House and parrot words about respect for the international rule of law. Has he looked at any evidence of what is actually happening with the money that we provide to the World bank?

Since 1990 in the Narmada valley, for example, there has been a dramatic increase in beatings, arbitrary arrests and illegal detentions of the people to be displaced and their supporters. Does it not give the Minister just a little cause for thought that that is supposed to be in the cause of development? To take another example of human rights, in June 1992, when other donors world wide were refusing funding to Malawi because of recent human rights violations, why did the British Government support a highly questionable $55 million IDA loan for Malawi's power sector? Will the Minister, in his five minutes at the end of the debate, explain that?

How can the ODA piously say, as it does, that it is cutting off aid to Malawi because of human rights violations when at the same time it instructs its representative in Washington to support a major capital project for Malawi? How do the Government justify increasing IDA forestry lending when so much of the expenditure leads to deforestation? Again, the Minister uses the simple words "environmentally sound projects". I should like to know the evidence. A $23 million forestry and fisheries management IDA project in Guinea, for example, was supposed to protect the country's remaining primary forests, but by supporting the construction of 45 miles of road around two rainforest reserves it opens up 100,000 hectares in that area to logging. Why did the British Government support that? There are many examples, especially in India, but IDA's social forestry programmes in Peru, west Africa, Colombia and the Philippines have all benefited commercial interests rather than the poor.

I come to the point of the debate. As the World bank is now asking donor Governments for $18 billion replenishment and $5 billion for the so-called earth increment, which the bank would use for increased

environmental lending, how can the British Government trust the bank to use that much more taxpayers' money for environmental projects when the bank's current portfolio is so highly destructive to the environment?

My final main charge against the Government's lax and, to put it very politely, over-ready support for World bank policies, even when they are patently damaging in some cases, is that although one of the principal objectives of IDA is stated as poverty alleviation—I give full credit to the bank and to IDA that they have made that their primary objective—nevertheless a substantial proportion of IDA credits underwrite products that actually harm the poor. In particular, IDA-funded structural adjustment programmes, which absorb 30 per cent. of IDA lending, have worsened conditions for women, children, poor workers and small producers, have increased environmental degradation, and have led to austerity programmes that cut public expenditure on health and education. Why do the Government—again, I should like an answer and I do not see why I cannot have one now, although no doubt it will not be forthcoming from the Minister—continue to ram Thatcherite economics down the throats of developing countries when they have abandoned the medicine here because it is too painful and too damaging and because it leads to spectacular failure?

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): I have been listening to the debate on the Floor of the House and in the Strangers Gallery. If the hon. Gentleman is so opposed to the order, because he considers it to be flawed, why did he say at the outset that he supports it?

Mr. Meacher: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have heard me say that I supported it on balance and with great reluctance. I still think it right that £600 million should be given to the World bank—but I made it clear that it was only on condition of tighter and more rigorous accountability than anything seen so far. If nothing has changed by next year and we hear the same travesty of an opening speech from the Minister, the result on this side of the House will be very different.

Why do the Government insist that a condition for debt relief and for aid is the fulfilment of structural adjustment programmes even to their destructive limit, yet when countries fulfil such programmes even with the destructive consequences that I mentioned they are still not offered a crumb of debt relief—as the G7 summit in Tokyo last week revealed only too clearly?

The expansion of cocoa production and the revival of the timber industry in Ghana are both conditions for structural adjustment loans to that country, yet they cause massive destruction of Ghana's last remaining forests. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) disagrees, I shall be glad to hear his detailed comments.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I do become exasperated by the hon. Gentleman. He said that if I come to the House next year and make a speech of the kind that I made tonight he will not be able to approve the order. The hon. Gentleman does not know what he is talking about. This replenishment is for a three-year period.

Mr. Meacher: I am perfectly aware that it will last a long time, but if the Minister will only wait to hear the end of my speech he will hear me say that we should have annual debates on this issue, and not confine discussion to one and a half hours after 10 o'clock.

What is the point of the Government boasting of any particular increase in bilateral aid programmes—when that occasionally happens—if the conditions of the multilateral aid programme have such devastating consequences for the same recipients? There is no consistency between the bilateral and multilateral aid programmes.

For all those reasons, we are deeply sceptical about the Government's willingness, let alone determination, to ensure full accountability for the £600 million replenishment. A new framework is needed that will allow much greater public scrutiny of both the World bank and the regional multilateral development bank, so that taxpayers' money is spent and is seen to be spent in ways that genuinely benefit developing countries.

I make three specific proposals to achieve that, and I pay warm tribute to the excellent pioneering work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) in this regard.

First, a report should be submitted by the World bank to Parliament each year and the Government should offer a day's debate on it so that issues of overriding importance involving billions of pounds can be properly debated. It is not acceptable that discussion of issues of such magnitude, affecting one-third of the world's population, should be confined to a debate such as this, attended by a handful of hon. Members on either side—most of them giggling and talking at the side.

Secondly, we want mandatory publication—and I hope that the Minister will respond to this point, too, and that he will make a long winding-up speech because he has so many comments to make—of the United Kingdom's voting position at the level of board decisions within the bank. That is important if another Narmada is to be avoided. At present, shameful decisions such as that taken by the British Government over the Narmada dam are taken in a complete vacuum without any reference to Parliament before or after. That is a major loophole in what is supposed to be a democratic system of government and one that must be remedied.

Thirdly, we believe that technical documents which have a bearing on board decisions, such as the environmental impact statements, should be released in advance of board meetings that take the decisions. Again, one would have thought that that was an obvious matter. NGOs have sometimes had some success in winkling out specific details on particular projects and exposing them to the public and to the media, but that is an arbitrary hit-and-miss affair. Surely such technical documents are the kind of material for which there is a public entitlement to know on a systematic basis.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I have been following the hon. Gentleman's criticism. Does he accept that the bank seems to have responded to such criticisms? In April, it made a number of procedural changes, including the one to which he has just referred. The bank will make the environmental assessments more widely available to member states and on the bank's premises.

Mr. Meacher: I accept that point. I also accept that there were references in the papers today, especially in the

[Mr. Meacher]

Financial Times, to various improved procedures. I strongly welcome them. I do not think that they take us very far, but I believe that they are in the right direction. I should like the whole critique of the Wapenhans report to be addressed.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It is being addressed.

Mr. Meacher: The Minister says that it is being addressed. Where is the hard evidence? Where is the beef?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It would be better to respond to the hon. Gentleman at the end of the debate, which is what I am anxious to do.

Mr. Meacher: Why not do that?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman provoked me on at least six occasions. I am jolly well going to intervene now. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the board considered the recommendations of the Wapenhans report last week. I said that in my opening speech, of which he took not a blind bit of notice. A booklet has been published about the Wapenhans report and about the recommendations to address those matters. The hon. Gentleman will be able to read it if he bothers to look at any of the sensible facts.

Mr. Meacher: I am glad to know that the Wapenhans report will be addressed. There is a great deal of difference —[HON. MEMBERS: "Why not listen?"] I listened carefully to platitude on cliché on boring phrase from the Minister at the beginning. He appeared not to be aware of any of my criticisms tonight. He did not address a single one.

I am pleased that we shall have a response to the Wapenhans report. What I want to know is how far it addresses those comments. There is a 37 per cent. failure by the bank to meet its own criteria. What changes in management will bring that figure below 5 per cent. or 10 per cent.? Perhaps there should be no failure at all. Until we have seen the response, I shall suspend my judgment. However, I am glad to know that there is at least some readiness to address these issues.

I attach great importance to the three demands that I have made to improve the bank's acountability. We are still deeply sceptical about the accountability of IDA and of the World bank. I give the Minister notice that we shall campaign to put all three proposals into effect. Without them, the role of Parliament in sanctioning £620 million of extra expenditure is wholly unsatisfactory. The Opposition will certainly not accept such an unsatisfactory basis again for any future debates on IDA replenishments.

11.47 pm

Mr. John Denham: (Southampton, Itchen): As has already been mentioned, last week the World bank discussed the document on increasing openness and access to information. As a Member of Parliament who tries to follow World bank affairs, I thought that it would be interesting before last week's board meeting to obtain a copy of that document. I approached the Washington office of the United Kingdom's executive director of the World bank by letter and said that I understood that the document was to be discussed at the board meeting, and that it was about freedom of information and access to World bank information. I received a reply from the United Kingdom's executive director saying that I could not be shown a copy of the document because it was confidential. That travesty of openness and accountability surrounds the Government's approach to the World bank. Even when openness and accountability are being discussed, hon. Members cannot get a sight of the documents through official Government sources.

I did the obvious thing, which was to ring up an American non-governmental organisation, and I was sent a copy, by immediate courier, from the US. Not all Governments work on the basis of such secrecy and lack of accountability.

It is interesting to learn from the press that discussions are taking place in the World bank about the response to the Wapenhans report, and the next steps document produced by the World bank management. The House knows from the press that the first version of the next steps report was informally rejected by board members, and a board meeting set up to discuss it was cancelled and turned into a seminar. To my knowledge, no Back-Bench Member has any idea of what input the United Kingdom Government made in the discussions about the Wapenhans report.

The issues are not simply that the report shows than an ever-increasing number of World bank projects are failing to make an economic rate of return. Those who wrote the Wapenhans report decided to assess World bank projects, and projects alone, on the basis of the economic return on the investment in those projects. As the development and environmental organisations have repeatedly said, and not just in this country, that is a narrow set of criteria by which to judge the effectiveness of World bank projects. My belief, and that of many of those organisations, is that if World bank projects and loans were assessed not purely on an economic rate of return, but by their effectiveness in poverty eradication and in promoting sustainable development, a much larger proportion of the World bank portfolio of loans would be shown to have failed.

I do not believe that any hon. Member knows whether the United Kingdom Government have pressed, in the discussions on the Wapenhans report, for a broadening of the criteria by which the success of World bank loans is to be judged, or what specific management measures in the World bank our Government has pressed for. I cannot see any reason why hon. Members, and the much wider development and environmental community, should not have access to that information. Why is the conduct of our executive director, who will be responsible for spending the £620 million that we are debating tonight, shrouded in such secrecy?

The problem is that the secrecy and lack of accountability that have surrounded the World bank go to the heart of its many failures as a development institution. We should be aware that many NGOs in the north, and far more in the south, would like us to vote against the replenishment of the IDA. That would be an enormous step, and not one that I am prepared to contemplate, but we must all be aware of the power and significance of the money under discussion.

Bank lending determines the economic and social policies of recipient countries. For example, for the more than 20 African countries covered by the special programme of assistance for Africa, access not only to the IDA but to bilateral funding is effectively dependent on the implementation of bank-designed structural adjustment policy. Those policies—not the policies of the recipient Governments—determine the relative priority of

social spending and environmental protection, trade and fiscal policy, agricultural and industrial policy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said, they set the context that determines the success or failure of every bilateral trade programme, every NGO project, every indigenous development initiative and every local business venture. By replenishing the IDA, we are strengthening the awesome power of the World bank to determine the policy of Government after Government and country after country.

There is not time to detail the many failures of World bank policy—many have already been referred to. The Wapenhans report, the task force on portfolio management, has recognised the unacceptable and rising rate of project failure. It looked only at projects, but many were failing because the structural adjustment loans promoted by the World bank were also failing, and creating an economic situation in which individual development projects were bound to fail. We should bear in mind that every failure of World bank lending rebounds not on the bank, as it would with a commerical bank, but on the borrowing country in the form of an increasingly unserviceable debt burden. By and large, these projects were conceived outside the countries concerned, and designed and implemented outside those countries too.

The criticisms levelled at the World bank are not new. The bank's belated response owes much to the growing threat to the bank from northern taxpayers, who ask why they should continually fork out for an organisation with such a poor record——

Mr. Fabricant: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the World bank lends to third-world countries and undertakes risky ventures? If they were not risky ventures, commercial banks would make the loans. Surely, by definition, the failure rate of loans by the World bank will be higher than that of the commercial banks.

Mr. Denham: It is true that some development lending is bound to fail. The problem with the World bank is that it conceives the loans in the first place; it designs the projects, makes the loans—and then offloads the failures on to developing countries and their peoples. That problem has yet to be overcome.

The bank is a strange organisation. It is a creation of Governments, particularly the powerful Governments of the industrialised countries. Yet in almost every industrialised country there is weak scrutiny of the bank by Governments and elected Parliaments, or similar institutions. The bank has a high degree of autonomy. Although it is staffed by intelligent people from all over the world, almost all of them share a narrow set of economic ideas, were trained in a small number of the same northern universities, and share almost identical ideological outlooks. The bureaucracy of the bank is not accountable enough to those whose lives it touches.

This is why the bank's recent commitment to poverty reduction, the promotion of education for women, environmental assessment and sustainable development has been greeted all around the world with scepticism. Although we all applaud the intention, we have yet to see significant improvements on the ground. We have yet to see a willingness to examine whether structural adjustment policies work, or just meet a politically correct test of free market ideology.

The Washington office of the United Kingdom Government does not have enough staff independently to assess the bank's work; nor does the ODA. One critical new policy has been consultation with local non-Governmental organisations on implementation of the bank's policies, but the ODA is incapable of answering parliamentary questions about which NGOs have been consulted, and in which countries. We just have to trust the bank to get it right.

The World bank's first report on environmental impact assessments reveals that local consultation with NGOs is at best patchy, so the Government cannot even monitor our role in the bank, or learn whether it is fulfilling its objectives.

Apart from debates such as this, every three years, the House has scarcely any opportunities to discuss how the bank is performing. Given the large sums under discussion, that is not adequate. The House should be given an annual report on the World bank's activities, and a debate on them. The ODA should produce its own independent assessment of the impact of the bank's policies in countries where we have bilateral aid programmes, and assess the impact of those policies according to the objectives set by the ODA for development.

There is no reason why the House should not be given a report, at least after the event, on the voting record of and policy stances adopted by the United Kingdom executive director.

I believe that the House should ensure that the relevant Select Committees regularly scrutinise this country's policies towards the bank. The National Audit Office should also, on occasion, examine whether we get value for money, judged by sustainable development criteria, for the large sums of money at stake.

New and increased transfers of money to the poorest developing countries are needed. By agreeing the proposed increase, however, the House will pass new powers to the bank's staff in Washington to determine the lives of hundreds of millions of people. If we do that, we should make it clear that, in future, sharp questions are asked continually about how that money is used and the real impact it has on people's lives and the environment.

12 midnight

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): We have heard two good contributions from my colleagues on the Opposition Benches.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) has said, the World bank and the International Monetary Fund of Washington are the governments, in an economic sense, of innumerable countries. How do we scrutinise what is done by the World bank? We have this kind of debate, late at night, once every three years. That simply is not good enough as a means of holding accountable some of the most powerful people in the world. It is through the World bank and the IMF that the private sector decides whether to invest in certain countries. Access to the resources of the world depends on the imprimatur of the World bank.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was perhaps a little harsh on the Minister for being complacent. He is not the only Minister to display

[Mr. Tony Worthington]

such an attitude. The Minister for Overseas Development, Baroness Chalker, said about the additions to IDA resources:

"I have a high regard for the effectiveness of IDA in promoting development in the poorest countries."

It is incredible that the British Government are less critical of the IDA than the IDA itself. Following the Wapenhans report, I find that very depressing. That report found that a declining proportion of good projects was being undertaken. It revealed alarming problems with the bank's follow-through on loans and found that most of the bank's expertise was devoted to coming up with projects of which it approved and spending large amounts of money. Hardly any of its expertise was devoted to determining whether a project was doing any good. It found that, on average, projects took two and a half years longer to complete than estimated.

One would never know from the Minister's opening speech that more than 40 non-governmental organisations had asked that the replenishment should not go ahead. They were speaking on behalf of the poor of the world because of the damage done by the IDA. Of course I demand that resources should be given to the poor, but I want them to be used properly and appropriately. That expenditure should be subject to critical scrutiny. It should not be applied simply in a manner that is more in the interests of the donors than of the poor.

It is worth considering what the IDA has said about itself in its 32-page document. It contains just one sentence about debt being a matter of concern for the developing world. The World bank displays absurd complacency about the debt crisis being over when everyone in the poorest parts of the world would say that it is easily the most important problem to be faced.

The entire document contains no mention of the mega-projects, the energy projects for which the IDA has been famous. It gives the impression that all the IDA does is to promote women's health, family planning and the like, but the IDA and the World bank are bywords for building large dams that displace many people. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West said, those centralised, top-down, ill-conceived projects are more to the benefit of the donors, their construction companies and the elite of poor countries than to poor people. In the 1980s, the World bank sponsored some 90 energy projects involving 90 dams and the displacement of some 2 million people. It has not come back with a single report showing that those people's lives were improved.

The IDA's document mentions new concern for women's education, reproductive health and general welfare. The IDA and World bank projects show new concern for the need for safety nets, but they do not mention that those safety nets are needed because of the activities of the World bank and the IDA. A huge part of the loans is for structural adjustments that put the needs of the first world first and damage the third world's capacity to feed itself.

The IDA and the World bank do not act first on behalf of the developing world as they claim. The inside front cover of the IDA document says:

"The central challenge for IDA is . . . to mobilise the will and the resources of the affluent and afflicted alike in the global battle against poverty."

One would never gather from that statement that, during the 1980s, the external debt of sub-Saharan Africa rose from 28·2 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1980 to 109 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1990. No mention was made of the fact that, in 1991, the World bank's transfers to developing countries were minus $1·7 billion. The World bank took out of Africa $1·7 billion more than it put in, and the Government say that it is an effective way to invest in the developing world! The IDA document does not mention the lack of representation of the interests of the poor in the GATT talks. It does not criticise protectionism, such as the common agricultural policy and its devastating impact on the third world.

The Minister must deal with those issues in his response. What will he do—not just say that he will do—to increase the accountability and transparency of the World bank and the IDA? Why should not we know how we vote, as the Americans do? We are being asked to approve the expenditure of £620 million, which an unknown civil servant spends in an unknown way. How did we vote last week—according to the *Financial Times*, it was today—on public information policy at the bank? How did we vote on the issue that the world should know what happens on the board of the World bank? What was our director instructed to do? Did he say, "Open the doors" or "Keep the doors shut"?

How did we vote on the right of appeal on complaints against the bank's activities, which was before the board today? Is there to be a right of appeal for poor people affected by the decisions of the bank which parachute projects on people? How is our policy at the World bank decided? Does the ODA, the Foreign Office, the DTI or the Treasury decide how we vote? What ministerial meetings take place? What is our policy? When will the Government reveal their policy on the huge amount of money that we vote to be spent there? Will the Minister give us an honest evaluation of the World bank and the IDA? What side does he take on the Wapenhans report? What is he going to do about the World bank culture that puts lending first and the consequences and planning second?

It is well known that Africa is our special area of influence and concern at the bank and the International Monetary Fund. It is well known that nobody goes ahead with projects at the World bank without the say-so of the British director. It is recognised that Africa is our special sphere of expertise. The Americans might have special expertise in Latin America, but our specialist area is Africa. Other directors look to the British director for advice on projects in Africa. Where is the world's biggest disaster area? It is Africa—the place where the Minister, his colleagues and the Departments of State have most influence. When will we receive a re-evaluation of the world's Africa policy?

What are we going to do about forestry policies which exploit, rather than safeguard, the world's resources? My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West said that we praise Ghana for its structural adjustment policies; but there is not simply increasing poverty but the pillage of the rain forests in Ghana.

The World bank and the IMF are peddled as the wealthy helping the poor, but the poor are becoming more numerous all the time, and the gap between rich and poor is widening. We are approaching the 50th anniversary of the Bretton Woods institutions and there could not be a

better time for re-evaluating. When the Minister says that he now backs the World bank, and the IDA, which does he mean—the old World bank or the new one?

The World bank vice-president for Africa spoke of how the capacity in Africa has been undermined. Earlier, the Minister gave his approval to the old World bank but now the vice-president for Africa, Mr Edward Jaycox, whose speech I have, says:

"In sum the donors have done a disservice to Africa. After 30 years of technical assistance and so much money spent, Africa's weak institutions, lack of expertise and current need for more and not less assistance tell us that we have failed badly in our efforts."

That is what the World bank is saying now, but that is not the World bank that the Minister was backing earlier. Jaycox talks of 100,000 foreign experts working in sub-Saharan Africa and consuming a major chunk of all foreign aid moneys to the continent. Does the Minister agree with the World bank's assessment or does he agree with the earlier assessment of Baroness Chalker that the IDA's contribution was effective in developing countries? The Minister must tell us what changes he proposes because even the World bank and the IDA are more critical of themselves now than the Government.

12.12 am

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have had a great debate with the most characteristic exaggeration from the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), supported by his hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington). We heard a much more balanced criticism from the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham). The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) also made a much more balanced and composed contribution, and placed the World bank's problems in a far more sensible context than that described by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. The hon. Gentleman did not even seem to know that we were discussing a three-year funding mechanism. He hid his confusion by saying that he was speaking about a debate next year, not that there should be another funding mechanism next year but that there should be such a debate every year. That covering of tracks was not lost on me.

If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my speech he would have heard me remind the House of the three-year funding mechanism. If he pulled his finger out and asked for a few more Opposition Supply days, one of which is to be held on Wednesday, he could have any number of debates on the subject. We should be delighted to debate these matters because we are confident of our assertions.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the Wapenhans report. He did not listen to a word of my speech because I said that an action plan by the bank based on the recommendations of that report had been cleared last week. There is a booklet describing the steps that the World bank intends to take to improve performance. The hon. Gentleman was not interested in such significant facts but, for reasons that are best known to himself, he contented himself with a sustained attack on the World bank. I shall deal with some of the criticisms of the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends, but I shall first deal with some of the other contributions in the debate.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie said that the document before the House did not contain a report on the world's debt problems. I hope that he is aware that, following a comprehensive study, the World bank issued a separate report on the important subject of debt repayments. Everybody realises that that subject is at the heart of the world's development problems.

The hon. Gentleman made another point with which I am familiar about the fact that some countries in sub-Saharan Africa are repaying the IMF more than they are currently receiving by way of loans. I shall deal with what the World bank is seeking to do to address that problem, but I shall first put the matter in context. It must be remembered that IMF flows are only a part of total assistance provided to Africa. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa have consistently received more than they have paid out when aid, foreign direct investment and other sources are included. The amount received in 1991 was about £7 billion.

As I have said, the World bank is aware of the problem that the hon. Gentleman mentioned and it is anxious to help those countries to meet their technical and financial needs with a 0·5 per cent. interest rate and a 10-year repayment period. The IMF's ESAF provides concessional support for medium-term reform and it seeks to address the problem.

The hon. Member for Itchen spoke about access to information about the World bank. The United Kingdom director's reply is correct: there is a need to preserve a balance between openness and confidentiality about the board's proceedings and its relationship of trust with borrowers. One of the reasons for that balance is to enable our representative to make clear and firm criticisms when the occasion demands it. We must be able to say what we think without our remarks being the subject of press comment which gets back to the country whose conduct is being criticised. There is a need for confidentiality, and any sensible person would realise that a proper balance must be struck in that area.

I have mentioned the Wapenhans report. Action has been taken on that report, which was instituted by the bank to address some of the problems.

The World bank lends money for complex and difficult projects. Over recent years, some of the projects have been made even more difficult by the complicated economic background, the world recession and the fact that those projects have not always materialised in the way that over-optimism suggested they would.

Mr. Lewis Preston, during his relatively short time as president of the bank, has made it his priority to deal with the problems of environmental degradation. That is the reason for the Wapenhans report, which was initiated by the World bank. The bank's directors have made decisions in response to criticisms, as was explained to the House last week.

Mr. Worthington: Does the Minister agree that the Wapenhans report is a major step forward? If so, why did we hear about it only because it was leaked?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I cannot believe that that is the case. I cannot comment on the allegation of a leak as I have not heard it previously. The fact is that we received the resolution of the directors only last week. It is not appropriate to discuss the Wapenhans report before the bank's directors have had the opportunity to say what action they are taking on the report and what they intend to do to deal with the matters that it identifies.

Mr. Denham: The Minister referred to some problems with World bank openness and decision making in relation to developing countries. Can he explain why we should not know what policy position the UK executive director took in the discussions on the Wapenhans report, which is about the management of World bank projects, not about specific policies in a particular developing country?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We support the bank's intention to make publicly available more information about its projects and programmes. That is the British position. As the hon. Gentleman knows, other members of the board have differing perceptions about the degree to which the bank's operations should be open to further public scrutiny. No decision has been reached on the bank's proposals, but it will be preparing revised proposals for further consideration by the board.

Sir David Steel: Does the Minister accept that there is a difference between public scrutiny and public accountability? I think that the House is more concerned about public accountability. Is not there a case for persuading our colleagues on the Treasury Select Committee to take a closer interest in the affairs of the IDA and the World bank?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have no objection to that suggestion, but it is also a matter for this Chamber. Every opportunity is afforded to Opposition parties to have Supply day debates on these important issues. Indeed, some of the subjects that the Opposition choose for debate are so uninteresting that I should have thought that occasionally they would want to choose the subject of aid, which is so close to the heart of the Labour party.

I want to make a few comments about environmental protection and sustainability. The hon. Member for Oldham, West——*[Interruption.]* He is not listening to me again. I do not care if he does not listen to me, but if he does not listen he should not criticise me. He should give credit to the fact that over recent years environmental concerns and the whole question of environmental impact assessments have increasingly played an enormous part in the World bank's activities. The implementation of IDA-10 will help developing countries to meet the priorities of Agenda 21 that were agreed at the earth summit a year ago.

The World bank's performance on environmental issues has been mixed in the past, but it has improved in recent years as lessons have been learned. Understanding the complex economic and social pressures over the past few years has been of benefit to the bank, and there has been significant progress in the way in which the bank has approached such problems. For example, it has set up a new vice-presidency for environmentally sustainable development. The decision to establish the vice-presidency constituted an explicit recognition of the significant shift in development thinking which has taken place in the bank and elsewhere, and which recognises the enormous importance of environmentally sustainable development —in particular, in regard to the bank's responsibilities.

The bank and the new vice-presidency are assisting the bank's operational departments in the delivery of quality assistance to member countries. The bank has also been reviewing its policies in sensitive environmental areas; recent studies, for example, have concerned the electric power sector—to which the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie referred—and energy efficiency, conservation and water resources. Currently under review is the bank's policy on resettlement; the executive board will consider a report on that at the end of the year.

Mr. Meacher: If the Minister is so concerned about increasing sensitivity in regard to environmental projects, how does he explain the fact that, a year ago, the World bank's management wanted to continue with the Narmada valley project? How does he explain that it went through the executive board only because the British vote permitted that decision to be made?

Does the Minister accept World bank-funded projects that lead to the forcible resettlement of 2 million people? If not, what are the British Government doing to stop it?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I was about to turn to the Narmada valley project; I anticipated the hon. Gentleman's remarks. As he knows, at the end of March the Indian Government announced that they had asked the bank to cancel the undisbursed portion—some $170 million—of World bank loans, and had decided to complete the dam themselves.

Throughout the difficulties that the World bank had over the Narmada valley project, the Government—and our representative, on instructions from the Government —were extremely critical of the bank's performance in this regard, and whatever assertions the hon. Gentleman has made otherwise are simply untrue. As for the voting arrangements and the allegations that the hon. Gentleman has made, no vote was taken in October 1992, when the board considered the way ahead on the project. As I have said to the hon. Gentleman before, the board often works by consensus. A majority of directors supported the continuation of World bank funding, subject to the meeting of certain benchmarks by the Indians over a six-month period.

We were concerned with the welfare of those affected by the project to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, but we judged that the best chances of a successful resolution of the resettlement and environmental projects associated with the programme depended on the World bank's continuing involvement with the project. That has not happened. That is why we decided to give the project one last chance—but there was no vote.

I have touched upon some of the important points that have been made by Opposition Members. I welcome these debates. I should be happy to have further debates about World bank projects that are causing concern. The World bank has had difficulties over many large projects for a number of years. Those difficulties are due to the world recession and concern about their impact on the environment. The concern has grown in recent years. It was not so great when these projects were put in hand.

The World bank is aware of the criticism. It is taking action and has set up inquiries to examine it. The World bank is also responding to the criticism, a point that was made by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale.

I ask the House to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft International Development Association (Tenth Replenishment) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 21st June, be approved.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

PARALYTIC SHELLFISH POISONING

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (No. 5) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 1515), dated 15th June 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (No. 6) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 1523), dated 18th June 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st June, be approved.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (No. 7) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 1606), dated 23rd June 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 25th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees).

AIR TRANSPORT

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4146/93, relating to air transport relations with third countries; supports the Government's aim of developing satisfactory procedural arrangements on the basis of which negotiations between the Member States and third countries could be conducted; and also agrees with the Government that any such negotiations should require separate Council authorisation, which should be given only where action would be plainly better taken at Community rather than Member State level.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees).

FRONTIER CONTROLS

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 4077/92, 4527/92, 6497/92, 7632/92 + COR1 and 8679/92, relating to the abolition of frontier controls and the completion of the internal market; welcomes the benefits to business and consumers of the freer flow of goods across the internal frontiers with other Member States of the European Community from 1st January 1993; and endorses the need for immigration controls to be maintained on non-EC nationals at United Kingdom frontiers together with such checks as are necessary to combat terrorism, drug trafficking or other serious crime.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Question agreed to.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Ordered,

That Mr. Patrick Nicholls be discharged from the Social Security Committee and Mr. Peter Thurnham be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Flint Bypass

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

12.32 am

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): The subject of this debate is of great interest and importance to my constituents, especially to those people who live, as I do, in the town of Flint or who travel through Flint, for work or leisure reasons. Especially at this time of the year, holidaymakers travel through Flint in their thousands.

As with all Adjournment debates, I wish that the issue had not reached this stage. Unfortunately, it has done so, due to a variety of factors that have conspired to ensure that Flint's travel problem remains unsolved. The need for a bypass in Flint has long been recognised. When I was first selected as the Labour parliamentary candidate for Delyn about seven years ago, many people believed that the issue was about to be resolved by the implementation of a coastal route. It may help if I outline how we have arrived at this position and the need for the debate.

Although this is not directly a Welsh Office scheme, the Welsh Office has had a major influence on events so far. Flint, in the south of my constituency, is a pivotal town on the coastal road into north Wales. The A548 which passes through the town carries, according to current estimates for a 12-hour day, 10,000 vehicles between 7 am and 7 pm. A large amount of industrial and commercial traffic enters the town, bound for industrial areas to the north of Flint, the recently abolished enterprise zone area and towns along the coastal road in the far north of my constituency. Local traffic is also heavy. At the peak of the tourist season, as now, there is a great deal of additional traffic, which causes chaos for local people at weekends.

The need for a bypass is accepted by all who have been involved with the town and its welfare. In response to demands for a bypass in 1985, a public consultation exercise was undertaken by the county council to obtain views on two possible routes for a bypass—an inland route and a coastal route. Local opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of the coastal route, but the opposite view was expressed by environmental groups, including Cadw—Welsh Historic Monuments—and the then Nature Conservancy Council. Following consultation, however, the coastal route for Flint was adopted by the county council as its preferred route and the scheme was prepared to the stage where planning permission could be applied for by the county council.

In June 1989, the then county surveyor and bridgemaster applied to the county council for deemed planning permission for the coastal route. The application included an environmental statement because of the effect that the scheme could have had on Flint castle and the Dee estuary, a site of special scientific interest and a special protection area under European legislation. Copies of the application and all representations were forwarded to the Welsh Office in accordance with the procedures.

The Secretary of State informed Clwyd county council that, because the issues raised in the objections were of more than a local nature, the county council should not determine the application and that it should be passed to him for determination. He subsequently decided to hold a public inquiry into the coastal route, which was held in March 1990. After consideration of the inspector's report, the Secretary of State informed the county council that he

[Mr. David Hanson]

was refusing planning permission for the scheme on the ground of its environmental effect on Flint castle and the Dee estuary. In my view, the Flint castle objection by the Secretary of State was sadly misguided.

Flint castle is the hidden monument of north Wales. The town is very proud of it but, passing through the town on the A548, it is very difficult to see it. The coastal route would have opened the castle to a new travelling public who would have seen it in all its glory. It would not have damaged the castle. The environmental objections made at the time were valid, but they could be overcome especially when viewed with the alternative with which I shall deal in a moment.

The inspector's conclusion on the county council's coastal route option was that there was no reason to suppose that an alternative way of bypassing Flint could not be found. Clwyd county council then decided to look afresh at solutions to find a bypass for Flint and appointed consulting engineers to carry out a new feasibility study. The findings were that there was only one effective, feasible route remaining—the inland route, which was not dissimilar to that taken to consultation in 1985.

The new inland route was the subject of a further consultation exercise held in June last year to obtain the views of the general public and a wide range of other consultees. Due to strong local opinion against the route, and a demand to resurrect the coastal route, the council did not in the end adopt the new proposal of the inland route as its preferred route.

Shortly after my election to the House last year, feelings were running very high. The inland route proposed by the county council was met wih horror in most of Flint and in the neighbouring village of Bagillt. A genuine upsurge of public feeling against the inland route ensued, not orchestrated by any political party but reflected by all politicians at a local level.

The inland route would have passed near to many properties in encircling the town, cut through agricultural and residential land, sliced the local golf course in half, bordered a children's play area in the process and removed much of Flint's remaining open spaces, including the town's major recreation area and green space, Cornist park and hall which is owned by the borough council. In doing so, it would have failed in the key objective of reducing industrial traffic to the industrial areas of Flint and, in particular, Castle park industrial estate. Environmentally, the inland route would have devastated Flint.

I was besieged by letters 10:1 against the inland route and by petitions; concern was expressed at my surgeries and an action group was formed called FAIR, Flint Against the Inland Route. The Member of the European Parliament, Joe Wilson, Flint town council, Flint borough council members and two county councillors, Alf Jones and Alec Aldridge, made their opposition very clear to the town and the public at large. I am pleased to see that councillor John Hughes, a member of Flint town council, has travelled to London to witness this debate.

The county council's consultation exercise was clear: an inland route was unacceptable to Flint and its people and a public meeting organised by the town council highlighted the opposition which I fully share. Clwyd county council wrote to the Minister of State, Welsh Office asking for a meeting to discuss the issues involved because both the coastal route and the inland route were unacceptable and traffic was still building up.

That request for a meeting was refused on the valid ground that the Minister might in future be required to make a decision on subsequent planning application and he could not prejudice his position. Subsequent requests to the Minister from me for a meeting with the county council were refused in similar terms. I understand that the Minister's split role in Wales, as the Minister responsible for roads and for planning, creates difficulties, but that has not helped matters to progress. However, I fully understand and accept the Minister's difficult position in those circumstances.

Since the consultation exercise took place, further developments have occurred. The Welsh Office and Clwyd county council have given the go-ahead for a third Dee crossing that will bring more traffic to Flint. The proposed crossing will reach Wales some two miles south of Flint, with the resulting predicted traffic flow in Flint rising from 14,000 vehicles a day to 24,000, according to local county council estimates. It is estimated that 12 per cent. of that traffic will be new traffic as opposed to diverted traffic.

The construction of the third Dee crossing will also result in some redistribution of traffic within Flint town centre and in respect of its routing either via the A5119 to Northop and on to the A55 or the A548 towards Oakenholt. My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and I fully support the idea of the Dee crossing, but it must be accepted that it will cause additional traffic to come into Flint in my constituency. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside welcomes the proposal which will relieve traffic in his constituency, it will cause problems for my constituency. However, we are at one on the issue.

The problem in a nutshell is that there are two possible routes for a bypass through Flint. One of those routes is wanted by the people of Flint, but that route has been refused following a decision by the Secretary of State. The other route is very much opposed by the people of Flint while traffic continues to build up and there is likely to be more traffic in future.

From the 1990 public inquiry and the 1992 public consultation exercise, it is known that local opinion is strongly against an inland route and in favour of a coastal route while Cadw and all national and local environmental groups are strongly against a coastal route and have no objection to the inland route. As you will appreciate from that brief history, Madam Deputy Speaker, the solution to the problem will not be straightforward.

In essence, the dilemma is that, although almost everyone agrees that a bypass is needed, the public have forcefully rejected an inland route and a coastal route has been rejected by the Secretary of State on the powerful grounds of adverse environmental impact on an area of international importance in conservation terms. Faced with that, what are the solutions? In the wider context, we can all agree that it would be desirable to reduce the traffic entering Flint.

I should like to see less reliance on the car and the internal combustion engine. Major investment in British Rail to take passenger transport and freight on to the railways would be welcome. Similarly, more tourists should be carried by rail and it would be perfectly adequate for north Wales if that could be achieved. In

addition, improvements in public transport to service Flint and the coastal towns would be welcome, as would other measures.

In the short term, despite all those issues that could and should be addressed by all involved in transport in Clwyd, there will still be a need for a bypass. I hope that the Minister will tonight address two key areas in particular that will help to break the current impasse.

I would welcome an honest opinion from the Minister, as the strategic Minister for roads in Wales, about his view of traffic in Flint, the implications of the Dee crossing for traffic in Flint and for the coast road and the merits of the routes that have been proposed to date. I hope that the Minister will agree that a bypass is needed. It would be a great help to my community if he would recognise that this evening.

Also, and more important, I hope that the Minister will address another issue. Does he agree that it would be helpful at highways and planning levels to have informal discussions about traffic on the A548 between officers of the Welsh Office and members and officers of Clwyd county council? We currently have an impasse—no coastal bypass, no inland bypass, and more traffic. I recognise the difficulties for the Minister with his split responsibilities, but I still hope that he will agree that open discussions with the county council on how to resolve an issue that everybody agrees exists would be in the best interests of all.

Is there a modification—for example, to the coastal route—that would be better received by the Welsh Office? Is there assistance that the Welsh Office could give to examine positive options for the bypass in other areas? After all, in his own constituency of Conwy, the Minister has seen miracles worked in respect of a bypass. The need for dialogue is vital. No one in the county council wants to follow the path of resubmission of a revised coastal route, only to face planning bog-down, further inquiries, further costs and a negative result—a costly path at public expense.

No one in the county council wants to proceed with an inland route that remains unacceptable to the people of Flint—the very people whom it is designed to assist—yet, without dialogue, impasse will continue to reign and the misery of traffic in Flint will worsen. I do not believe that the discussions that could take place would be prejudicial. In the light of the impasse, the Welsh Office surely has a duty to examine and assist in the strategic view of the bypass issue.

My firm view remains that a revised coastal route is achievable, that the environmental concerns of that route remain far less damaging than the inland option and that of no action. All that I ask is that, at the very least, the two parties that can most influence the situation, the Welsh Office and the county council, meet, talk and examine the options on a non-committal basis. As the Member of Parliament for Flint and a resident of Flint, I have called for this debate because it remains an issue that is for the well-being of my community. People in Flint need traffic peace. Industry in Flint needs sound infrastructure. Tourists visiting north Wales and travelling through Flint need trouble-free travel. Above all, the environment in Flint needs to be protected in a modern age.

It is not acceptable to my community to face the prospect of an increase in traffic in Flint to 24,000 cars a day in coming years. That is the worst of all options, and I would be failing in my duty as the Member of Parliament for the town if I did not bring it to the attention of the House this evening.

12.47 am

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): As the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) is clearly aware, responsibility for the local road network within Delyn rests with Clwyd county council. The A548, which passes through Flint, is such a local road, and improvements are the responsibility of the county council. A number of improvements to the A548 have been undertaken, and others are planned to help to meet the needs of the area.

The statutory planning procedures, which involve wide consultation with the public, ensure that the impact of significant new road proposals are fully and publicly appraised where necessary. Those procedures apply as much to the proposed Flint bypass as to other major proposals.

Clwyd county council, as local highway authority, undertook a feasibility study in 1983 to assess possible routes to bypass Flint. Of the six routes originally chosen, four were rejected and two remained—an inland route and a coastal route.

In 1985, as the hon. Gentleman described, the county council carried out a public participation exercise on those two routes. Almost 800 people responded, and 79 per cent. of local residents wanted a bypass and 82 per cent. of the respondents wanted the coastal route. There was, however, strong opposition to both routes on environmental grounds.

The authority subsequently decided on the coastal route, and in 1989-90 the scheme was conditionally accepted by the Welsh Office for transport grant support to meet the preparation costs involved in developing the proposal.

The design of the scheme and the resolution of statutory requirements were always matters for Clwyd county council. In keeping with normal procedures, it sought to obtain planning permission for the road, using powers under regulation 4 of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1976—under which the county council was empowered, subject to certain conditions, to grant, by making two resolutions, planning permission for developments that it proposed to undertake itself.

The proposed development attracted significant objections. Organisations such as the Countryside Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Cambrian Archaeological Association, the Clwyd-Powys Archeological Trust and the Deeside Naturalists Society were concerned about the potential environmental impact.

There were requests for the Secretary of State to call in the planning application for his own determination, and they were given the most careful consideration. The Secretary of State's long-established approach is that applications should be called in for him to determine only when they raise planning matters of more than local importance. That approach recognises that matters of day-to-day importance should properly be resolved by elected local authority members accountable to the communities that they serve.

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

Only in particular circumstances, when matters of more than local significance are raised, will there be justification for taking matters out of local hands. In the case of Flint bypass, the then Secretary of State concluded that there were sufficient grounds for intervention. As a consequence, the county council was required in effect to make application to the Secretary of State for planning permission to construct the bypass on the coastal route.

Two main areas of concern underlay that decision. One related to the possible effect on Flint castle. The castle and town was the first to be planted in north Wales by Edward I, and there was concern that the bypass might have an adverse effect on both the castle and its environs —particularly in terms of the area's appearance, in forming a physical barrier between the town, the castle and the sea.

The other concern was that the route proposed by Clwyd county council encroached on a site of special scientific interest and bird habitats of international and national importance. There was concern that the road would destroy part of those protected areas and could disturb bird life over a wider area because of the noise and movement likely to be generated.

In the light of those wider concerns, the proposed development was called in by the then Secretary of State on 16 August 1989 and arrangements were made for a public local inquiry, which began on 6 March 1990. It considered the likely effect of the coastal bypass route on Flint castle and on conservation, and in relation to national and local planning policies, and the likely environmental impact on the immediate and surrounding areas.

Following a full inquiry and receipt of the inspector's report, the then Secretary of State gave careful consideration to the proposal and issued his decision letter on 17 September 1990. He accepted the inspector's conclusion that there was need for a bypass for Flint on traffic and economic grounds, and that the proposed coastal route would be an extremely intrusive and incongruous element in the landscape of the Dee estuary which no ameliorating measures could render visually acceptable. Further, it was acknowledged that the proposed bypass would cause unacceptable harm to the Dee estuary's natural habitat which would not be rendered acceptable by the proposed measures.

During the inquiry, evidence was presented on the planning merits of the alternative inland route. The Secretary of State concluded that examination of that alternative route was a material consideration in the application. He did not consider that his role was to make a choice between the routes, but confined his consideration to whether the need for the development could be met elsewhere.

The detailed appraisal of the two routes, and of any other alternatives that may become available, is a matter for the county council following appropriate consultation. However the Secretary of State was not satisfied that it had been clearly demonstrated that there was no alternative route. He agreed with the inspector that, on the basis of the evidence provided to the inquiry, there was no reason to suppose that the coastal route was the only way to provide a bypass for Flint. Therefore, the requirement to build it on this route was not demonstrated. In the absence of convincing evidence ruling out alternative routes, the Secretary of State concluded that the proposed route was unacceptable because of its effects on Flint castle and its setting, the landscape quality of the Dee estuary and the unacceptable harm to the natural habitats of the estuary. Having issued his decision, the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State in the matter ended. The provision of the bypass and consideration of the route it must take remain the responsibility of Clwyd county council as the local highway authority.

I fully understand and appreciate the arguments already put forward by the hon. Gentleman and others for a bypass for Flint. Indeed, the Welsh Office accepted those arguments when it conditionally accepted the proposed bypass for transport grant as long ago as 1989-90. That said, the responsibility for taking forward plans to provide the road must rest with Clwyd county council as the local highway authority. The county council must reconsider how best to proceed using the established procedures.

The county council may decide to proceed to seek planning permission for the inland route on which it consulted the local community in 1992. It may also, of course, decide to re-examine possibilities for providing a route along the coast. Clearly, whichever option is chosen, the county council will need to consider local opinion fully and to consult bodies with particular environmental interests. Whether it decides to proceed with one or two route options, the resulting planning applications will be referred to the Secretary of State so that consideration can be given to whether call-in would be appropriate. I must again stress that any consideration of call-in would be made on the basis of whether the proposed development raised planning matters of more than local significance. I cannot prejudge whether an application will be called in.

The hon. Gentleman asked for a meeting between officials of Clwyd county council and the Welsh Office to consider the way forward. The Secretary of State has well-defined responsibilities, which have already been used, to call in and determine the county council's earlier planning application for a bypass following a coastal route. The Department would, of course, be ready to advise on procedural matters. Should the council be unsure about how it might proceed, I suggest that it writes to me setting out the procedural issues on which it requires guidance.

But I must emphasise that the Department's involvement is inevitably restricted by the need to avoid prejudicing my right hon. Friend's statutory position. It will not be possible for Welsh Office Ministers or officials to advise on the merits of individual schemes.

There is continued strong support for the need to bypass Flint so as to improve the living conditions of its residents, to ease congestion on the A548 and to contribute to the environmental and economic improvements taking place in north-east Wales. Given this, it should be possible for the county council to work with Delyn borough council, the local community, agencies and interested groups to agree a way forward which would result in the early implementation of the scheme. The hon. Member rightly raised the issue of increased traffic problems in Flint that might arise following completion of the third Dee crossing. The county council is aware of the potential problems and while it sees a bypass of Flint as the long-term solution, it does, I understand, believe that any

increase in traffic through Flint, following the opening of the crossing, can be dealt with by traffic management measures.

The Dee crossing and Flint bypass can each be justified in its own right. The previous Secretary of State was pleased to announce last year that resources will be made available to start the crossing in 1994-95; delaying that until a solution has been found to the Flint bypass would prolong unnecessarily congestion in Shotton and Connah's Quay, and the problems of access to the Deeside industrial park.

The hon. Member has raised an important issue, relevant both to his constituents and to the wider public. An efficient road network is vital to our economic welfare. It contributes to prosperity at both national and local levels. The hon. Member is fortunate to represent a constituency in a part of Wales that has seen substantial improvements in the road network. The A55, a trunk road for which the Welsh Office is responsible, provides a high quality link to the British and European motorway networks, a link to markets and to prosperity. I am sure we shall see further developments in future years.

I must stress once again to the hon. Gentleman that the planning for the Flint bypass is a matter, in the first instance, for the county authority. If there are procedural difficulties, I am only too anxious to help. However, I cannot assist the council in the choice of route to put forward.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 13 July 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREATER NOTTINGHAM LIGHT RAPID TRANSPORT BILL

Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

University Places

1. **Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he plans to meet the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to discuss the places available in universities for students leaving school in the current year with appropriate A-level qualifications.

4. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what discussions he has had with principals and vice-chancellors about the funding of universities.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education is unable to be on the Front Bench for oral questions this afternoon.

We meet the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals from time to time to discuss a range of matters affecting universities. My right hon. Friend and I intend to meet members of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals later this month.

Mr. Wicks: Has the Minister noted the concern of the universities and university authorities that, this year, some well-qualified young people with good A-level grades will not be able to go to university? If that assumption is true —I ask him to confirm or reject it—what message does that give to young people who have worked hard but cannot get into university? What message does it give to young people when we need well-trained and well-educated youngsters?

Mr. Boswell: The first message that I would give young people is to remind them that student numbers, on a full-time equivalent basis, have expanded by 46 per cent. during the past four years. We have more students and a higher proportion of our young people in higher education than ever before. There is some consolidation at present, which is an opportunity for universities to catch breath after rapid expansion and to assert the importance of the full quality of entry standards, to which we attach considerable importance.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Will the Minister confirm that the Higher Education Funding Council is encouraging universities not to take arts students this year, and that it is spending up to £3·5 million encouraging them not to do so, as a kind of academic set-aside? What does that say for the Government's policy towards broad education across a range of subjects?

Is this not the first time in the United Kingdom that a Government have decided to restrict the number of students taking courses, and to channel students away from a broad range of courses—including arts, which are very valuable—into more technical subjects?

Mr. Boswell: It is difficult to please everyone on such subjects, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that the changes in tuition fees earlier this year referred to expansion at the margin beyond the funded number of places. There is no question of prohibiting people from going for arts or humanities subjects—far from it. There is a higher level of participation in those subjects than ever before. If the funding council, which has discretion in the matter, decides to set aside a proportion of money to meet the particular problems of institutions that have expanded so quickly, that is its decision, but I think that it is a prudent one.

Mr. John Marshall: When my hon. Friend meets the principals and vice-chancellors, will he pay a particular tribute to the work of the former polytechnics, such as Middlesex university in my constituency? Will he also draw attention to the fact that, three years ago, those people who are complaining about a shortage of places said that the introduction of student loans would result in a reduction in the numbers of people going to university?

Mr. Boswell: I shall, as ever, do both those things.

Mr. James Hill: When my hon. Friend visits Southampton, he will be able to recall some of the whingeing words of Opposition Members when he sees the college of higher education, La Sainte Unione and the university of Southampton moving ahead with increased numbers of students, and expanding on other sites.

Mr. Boswell: I cannot wait to receive an invitation from my hon. Friend, and I will do my best to respond to it positively as soon as possible.

Mr. Beggs: When the Minister meets the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, will he discuss the dramatic increase in student numbers but the absence of corresponding increases in the numbers of lecturers, and lecturers' concern that there could be a slump in standards?

Mr. Boswell: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. It is certainly the case that numbers of students have expanded faster than the number of lecturers. It varies from place to place and situation to situation and, in some respect, it can be interpreted as productivity.

Mr. Devlin: Will my hon. Friend telephone the Secretary of State this afternoon and wish him a speedy return to good health, and remind him that it is a source of great pride among Conservative Members that this country spends a higher proportion of its gross domestic product on higher education than either Germany or Japan, righting a long-term situation that has needed correction for some time?

Mr. Boswell: I am sure that the wise remarks of my hon. Friend will help speed up the return to good health of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Rooker: Will the Minister make an early response to the letter that he has received from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals asking for an extension to the consultation process about the funding of student unions to 1 November following the statement made on 1 July?

The Minister was careful to talk about full-time equivalent places when he answered my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks). Is it right to fund some universities for not filling full-time places and, at the same time, refuse to assist the University of Central England in Birmingham, which is undergoing a vast expansion of part-time places for which there are no taxpayers' contribution to fees or mandatory grants and is funding them free for students who happen to be unemployed? Will he do something about the unfair mismatch of the funding regulations between full-time and part-time university students?

Mr. Boswell: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I can assure him that the letter we received this morning will be carefully considered, and we will respond to it as soon as possible.

The hon. Gentleman has made clear in the past the views expressed in his second point. We have no proposals for the complete restructuring of the system of academic support at present. We recognise that we have greatly expanded the numbers in higher education, significantly in the new universities, including the ones to which the hon. Gentleman referred, as well as the older universities.

We have also quickly expanded, and are continuing to expand, further education. It is always possible to make suggestions, and they will be considered. We believe that we are delivering the goods in the structure that we have in place.

Teacher Testing

2. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to test teachers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Eric Forth): Under the appraisals regulations 1991, all teachers in maintained schools must be subject to an appraisal of their performance by 1995.

Mr. Evans: Does the Minister agree that teachers should be given a simple test to tell us the difference between the Labour party conference, the Trades Union Congress and the National Union of Teachers conference? They are all a lot of hooligans who jump up and down and sulk when they are asked to do any work. Is the Minister aware that a certain hon. Member who has driven us mad over the years has been learning to drive this morning? Would not it be a good idea if that whole lot over there, and some of the teachers had L plates round their necks?

Mr. Forth: I welcome my hon. Friend's sound endorsement of the principle of teacher appraisal. It must be right that teachers undergo a form of appraisal in a properly structured and agreed form, but I am not sure whether that includes the questions that my hon. Friend suggested. Appraisals should be carried out to assure the highest quality of teaching, by identifying the full potential of teachers and meeting their training, retraining and support needs. That is the objective.

Mr. Steinberg: In response to that predictably silly outburst from the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), does the Minister agree that the hon. Gentleman would have great difficulty in passing the present standard assessment tasks, and does he also agree that the vast majority of today's teachers are far better skilled than they were in the days when the hon. Gentleman went to school?

Now that the opinions of teachers on testing have been vindicated, would the Minister please listen to the teachers during consultation over the new arrangements for primary school teachers?

Mr. Forth: It is certainly the case that properly structured and developed appraisal of teachers must be a major contribution to the quality of our education. It is a matter of some regret that a union that is not totally unconnected with the hon. Gentleman is persisting in opposing the principle of teacher appraisal. I know not why it is doing so—it is for the union to explain—but the rest of us are entitled to be a little suspicious.

Dr. Twinn: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments about teacher appraisal. To enable teachers to pass his appraisal system, will he place further emphasis during teacher training on more practical classroom skills and more subject-based knowledge?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has unerringly put his finger on one of the main thrusts of the Secretary of State's proposals. Of course it must be right that all training of teachers must lay the maximum emphasis on practical classroom skills, so that we do not rely entirely on paper qualifications, important though they may be, but identify the ability of teachers to educate in the classroom. That would emanate from my hon. Friend's sensible suggestions.

Mr. Don Foster: Following the recent revelations about masonic lodges linked to schools in Conservative-controlled Buckinghamshire, does the Minister think that teachers and governors should be tested on their membership of secret societies?

Mr. Forth: Given that we are sitting in a Chamber which probably contains more secret and semi-secret societies than any other, I should be careful before embarking on throwing stones from this glass house.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: In connection with teacher training and assessment, does my hon. Friend agree that schools should be given more time and a greater role in planning and assessing such courses? Does he agree that, in that connection, there should be less stress on educational and sociological theory and more stress, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) said, on subject knowledge, classroom skills and, in particular, classroom discipline?

Mr. Forth: Indeed. My hon. Friend shows yet again his enormous experience in this area, to which I defer. It must be right that the balance between theoretical and academic training, which must always have its place, and practical hands-on experience in the classroom is constantly reassessed. I am sure that my hon. Friend will fully support the recommendations and proposals that my right hon.

Friend the Secretary of State has made recently, which we are now developing very much in the direction suggested by my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: As the Minister has acknowledged that the quality of teachers is important, why are the Government proposing to dilute the professionalism of teachers by the introduction of a semi-trained mums' army? Although we all want mature entrants into teaching, surely it is important that those who are entrusted with our children's education are highly educated and well trained. Why are Ministers gambling with our children's future by more crackpot experiments?

Mr. Forth: I approach this in sorrow rather than anger. It is sad that the hon. Lady should assume that the possession of a paper qualification automatically gives someone skills in classroom teaching and, worse, that she should suggest that people who do not possess academic qualifications, such as graduate skills, are in some way less than good in the classroom.

The reality is that 50 per cent. of teachers are graduates. Is the hon. Lady suggesting that half of all teachers are incompetent and unable to operate successfully in the classroom? Our proposals are that intelligent and mature people with two A-levels and considerable experience with children should surely be the sort of people that we want to encourage to come into our classrooms and deal with our young people—rather than relying entirely on, let us say, a 21-year-old with a narrow degree subject, who the hon. Lady seems to suggest would be better qualified.

National Curriculum and Testing

3. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received about his review of the national curriculum and testing.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr. Robin Squire): Sir Ron Dearing, who is conducting the review, has held a series of regional conferences for head teachers and has consulted widely among teachers' organisations and other interested bodies. The Government expect his first report later this month, which will take into account all views expressed.

Mr. Lidington: Does my hon. Friend accept that many responsible and moderate members of the teaching profession, while welcoming the principle of the national curriculum and testing, have expressed legitimate concern about the bureaucracy associated with their implementation? Will he assure the House that not only Sir Ron Dearing but Ministers will listen to constructive criticism and comments from the profession, with a view to improving that state of affairs?

Mr. Squire: I hope that hon. Members of all parties will endorse the wise words of my hon. Friend. Sir Ron Dearing is setting out to tackle the major criticisms that have been expressed by teachers and their unions. I am confident that he will produce a report around which the majority of our teachers can unite to restore order and proper teaching in our schools.

Mr. Hardy: The Minister's noble Friend Baroness Blatch wrote to me the other day in reply to a letter from an able and respected headmaster in my constituency who had submitted a detailed assessment of the Government's approach to testing. The noble Lady said that "some" of my constituent's comments were unfounded. Would the Minister ask his noble Friend to publish her comments about those criticisms that she accepted?

Mr. Squire: The House will recognise that I have a small problem in trying to answer a question that refers to a letter which I have not seen. The Government will publish their response to the Dearing review as soon as possible after that review, and I would expect that that response will cover the type of issue to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my hon. Friend accept that the overwhelming majority of the nation's parents believe that the national curriculum and testing are essential for good education? Does he further accept that the majority of Conservative Members welcome the setting up of the Dearing review, look forward to its findings, and hope that those findings will be accepted by the teaching profession and implemented without any further problems?

Mr. Squire: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments, and I echo them. Testing and the national curriculum have raised standards in schools—*[Laughter.]* I hear laughter from Opposition Members. That is strange and sad. Testing and the national curriculum have raised standards, and the majority of teachers share the Government's wish that standards continue to be improved.

EC Students

5. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether he will make a statement on arrangements for EC students pursuing third level courses in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Boswell: United Kingdolm higher education institutions have a strong tradition of internationalism and openness. Their popularity with students from other countries is a welcome indicator of the quality of the education they offer. EC action programmes have provided an added impetus. We fully meet our EC obligations to provide equal rights of access to higher education. Eligible students from other member states studying here may receive an award to cover the cost of their course fees to a specified maximum. Reciprocal rights apply to United Kingdom students studying elsewhere in the EC.

Mr. Trimble: Have the number of students involved, and the expense, increased substantially in the past few years? I understand that the cost of the awards that the Minister mentioned was over £41 million last year, and the cost to the education system may have been somewhat higher. Does the Minister agree that the burden does not fall equally throughout the country but on certain regions? Will steps be taken to compensate those regions for the burden that they have to bear, and will he make other provisions for students from those regions who consequently find it more difficult to get a place?

Mr. Boswell: There is undoubtedly a cost in grants of the order the hon. Gentleman suggests, although it is a gross cost. Against that must be set the large income

received from overseas countries as a result of overseas students coming here. That amount has been estimated at £1·5 billion.

The regional implications depend on the admissions policies of the institutions in question and on the policies of the various funding councils and their equivalent in Northern Ireland. I will draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to their attention.

Further Education Funding

6. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will review the distinction between local education authority budgets and further education funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The Government will keep under review the spending needs of local education authorities and of the Further Education Funding Council in the light of their respective statutory responsibilities.

Mr. Tyler: Does the Minister accept that, since 1979, funding per student has been reduced by 22 per cent., according to Library figures? In those circumstances, does he accept that community colleges that are caught between the two stools of further education funding and local authorities' restricted budgets face a budgetary crisis?

Mr. Boswell: I should prefer to study the hon. Gentleman's figures at leisure—and I will do so. I am surprised that he did not acknowledge the huge expansion that we are carrying out in further education, to increase the number of students participating by 25 per cent. over the next three years, and to provide in the coming year £750 per full-time student place in further education.

The hon. Gentleman's point about the interface between further education and local authority provision is made from time to time. This is the first year and, broadly speaking, it has gone well. There have been one or two problems, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no black hole of funding and no reduction in the responsibilities of the parties involved.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Given the huge planned increase in the numbers in further education during the next few years, is my hon. Friend aware of the great welcome that the principals of further education colleges have given to their greater freedom, from April of this year, to manage their own affairs? Will he ensure that the Educational Assets Board gives further education insitutions enough control over their assets, especially when there are disputes between further education colleges and district councils —there was such a case in Kidderminster in my constituency—to ensure that they can fulfil their responsibilities?

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend is right: there has been a positive response in general to the changes that we have made in the structure of the further education sector and to the indpendence that we have given to the various corporations. My hon. Friend will not expect me to comment on cases involving the Educational Assets Board, which is responsible for dividing assets, but I will draw his remarks to its attention.

Discretionary Student Grants

7. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he has any plans to alter arrangements for the award of discretionary student grants.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend keeps the administration of student awards under periodic review. Any plans for changes in this field would be announced at the appropriate time.

Mr. Hain: Will the Minister agree to ring-fence funding for discretionary student awards? I and other hon. Members know of many students who cannot study medicine, law, music or other courses that they want to follow. It is crazy for society to deny them the opportunity to acquire those extra skills. I warn the Minister "Don't dare blame local education authorities, after the Government have savaged their budgets in recent year."

Mr. Boswell: I cannot accept what the hon. Gentleman says for a moment—but, then, I usually cannot. The fact is that we continue to fund local education authorities for their responsibilities to schools and to all other aspects of education. We will continue so to do.

At the moment, we are looking at a pattern of anecdote, rumour and innuendo about the withdrawal of certain services. For the short term, there is no point in giving local authorities discretion and then trying to take it away from them by fettering that discretion. In the slightly more medium term, and in view of the concern that has been expressed, we have joined with the Gulbenkian and Sir John Cass Foundations, asking them independently and throughly to review the current state of provision. If they have any messages for us, we will consider them carefully and quickly.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my hon. Friend aware that some Labour authorities, such as Kirklees, are refusing to give discretionary grants, so young students who have taken law degrees cannot then go on to law school or to the Council for Legal Education? They have degrees, but they cannot practise. What action can he take to help resolve that?

Mr. Boswell: The nature of discretionary grants is such that LEAs must use their discretion when choosing whether to award them. We continue to fund them—*[Interruption.]*—whatever the Opposition may bray. If they want the figures, I can give them to them. If a local authority decides that it is not going to give any awards at all, that would be tantamount to a withdrawal of discretion, and would indeed be a serious matter. If my hon. Friend has evidence to that effect, I shall be pleased to consider it.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Is not it staggering that the Minister claims that he has the figures, yet he accuses my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) of anecdotes, rumour and innuendo, while his colleagues tell him that discretionary awards have, in effect, been abolished by local authorities? We are talking not simply about Labour authorities but about authorities up and down the country, and the Minister should know that that is the case. He should not come to the House and claim ignorance.

Let me ask the Minister a specific question. What will he do about those authorities? They tell me that cuts in Government money mean that they have to cut

discretionary grants. No discretionary grants means no opportunity. The responsibility lies with the Minister. What will he do about it?

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman can start by being a bit less arrogant about the Gulbenkian report unless or until he has seen it. What on earth is the point of commissioning the report or paying part of its costs if we are not prepared to consider what it says and take a view in the light of its findings? The hon. Gentleman said that authorities are cutting back. I happen to know—this reflects the change of political control, although the decision was taken before—that my local authority has expanded its provision in discretionary awards. That is an anecdote.

As the hon. Gentleman would like to have the figures, I can tell him that we have increased total expenditure to local authorities by 2·6 per cent. this year for education. That is above the increase in pupil numbers. Taking into account the level of pay settlements, which is required under current policy, that should be sufficient to continue to fund discretionary awards. If local authorities choose not to do that, it is their choice. It is not a decision which we have either imposed on them or encouraged them to take.

Examinations

8. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what research has been undertaken by his Department into the relationship between examinations and scholarly attainment.

Mr. Robin Squire: None, but I share the widespread view that performance in examinations provides both a measure of current achievement and an indicator of future potential.

Mr. French: Does my hon. Friend find it surprising that the loudest complaints about exams often come from those people who do not have to take them but who profess their interest in educational standards? Does he accept that examinations are not only a measurement, as he just indicated, but provide a useful spur to performance at all ages and are an essential component of any good education system?

Mr. Squire: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his contribution. It is a little strange that all the evidence that we have shows that, far from complaining, school children have enjoyed taking the standard assessment tasks and that school attendance has risen on the days when tests are set. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the spur that tests and examinations provide. They give children a sense of purpose and achievement, which undoubtedly helps to raise standards in our schools.

Mr. Bryan Davies: The Minister has access to voluminous research that establishes that A-levels are a terrible predictor of subsequent degree performance. Why are they used to ration entry to higher education?

Mr. Squire: A study by Smithers and Robinson in 1989 showed a correlation between success in A-levels and degree performance. I am pleased that it also showed that mature students who lack A-level qualifications can perform as well as A-level entrants.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that the conduct and marking of SATs should now be passed to examination boards, which perform professionally in that area? That would take the SATs away from being a burden on teachers to mark and take the setting of those important tests away from the bureaucracy which has been dealing with them so far.

Mr. Squire: I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend's suggestion. He will know that Sir Ron Dearing is addressing that issue within his overall review. It would be wrong for me to anticipate that. I look forward, as I am sure my hon. Friend does, to seeing Sir Ron's comments on that aspect.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Can the Minister tell the House who in the Government will be responsible for this year's response to the GCSE examination results? Does the Minister recall last year's fiasco when the junior Minister praised the GCSE results and, a few days later, the Secretary of State rubbished them and the efforts of those who had taken the exams? Will the Minister assure the House that Ministers will not undermine the achievement of those who have taken GCSEs this year and that credit will be given where it is due—to the teachers and children who have worked so hard? Will he guarantee that Ministers will not rubbish those results this year?

Mr. Squire: I am advised by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools that the hon. Lady has entirely misunderstood what he said. Of course we welcome the improvement in GCSE results which has been seen recently. We look forward very much to those upward trends continuing and we will, of course, expect teachers to have carried out their responsibilities in that respect. I look forward to the hon. Lady joining the Government in seeing ever-higher standards achieved in those examinations as well.

Sir Anthony Grant: If such research is carried out, will my hon. Friend look into a complaint that I have received from certain dons in Cambridge—that the award of first-class degrees is made far too easily these days? They tell me that many of the people at other universities who receive firsts are the sort of people who would not have obtained their matriculation in the old days.

Mr. Squire: Despite the fairly wide-ranging responsibilities that I carry, I must tell my hon. Friend that I do not carry that responsibility. However, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education has heard my hon. Friend's interesting comments and I have a strange feeling that he will reflect on them in the immediate future.

English and Technical Studies Testing

9. **Ms Gordon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the cost of external examiners for the current year's English and technical studies tests.

Mr. Robin Squire: External marking is not a requirement for the 1993 tests in English, technology or other subjects. My right hon. Friend has asked Sir Ron Dearing to consider the merits of this option for the tests for 11 and 14-year-olds in 1994 and subsequently.

Ms Gordon: My question was what has been the cost of the external examiners for this year's tests. Is the Minister

aware that I have received letters from head teachers in Tower Hamlets saying that they did not have the equipment in place to cover the areas required for testing in technological studies and that they received the details so late that their money had already been committed for the financial year? Instead of wasting money on publicity campaigns and external examiners to force English tests down the throats of unwilling teachers, would not it have been better to spend that money providing the tools for teaching our children? Will the Minister and the Secretary of State now admit that they were wrong about the tests and stop attacking the teachers? Education Ministers come and go, but it is the teachers who are the mainstay of our education system.

Mr. Squire: The hon. Lady has justified her reputation as being part of the jurassic tendency in educational terms. In taking but one element of the hon. Lady's comments, the adult literacy and basic skills unit recently reported that one third of students entering further education colleges did not have an adequate command of English to take advantage of their courses. I hope that the hon. Lady will join me in regretting and deploring that fact and in looking forward to supporting the tests which will enable us to improve the standards of pupils of all ages.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend agree that external examination has shown itself to be an excellent way of ensuring that British universities maintain objective testing and standards throughout Europe? Does not he think it quite extraordinary that the Labour party consistently opposes everything that will improve testing, objectivity and a raising of standards in secondary schools?

Mr. Squire: I can only say to my hon. Friend, who is of course absolutely right, that I am not surprised. Time and again, when faced with a choice, the Labour party sides not with the consumer—in this case, the parents or pupils—but always with the producers. In this particular case, the Labour party is on a losing wicket and it will come to see that that is not helping to improve standards in our schools.

Standard Spending Assessment (Merseyside)

10. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the standard spending assessment for education for each of the Merseyside metropolitan authorities for each of the last two years.

Mr. Forth: The figures for 1992-93 were as follows: Knowsley, £79 million; Liverpool, £215 million; St. Helens, £73 million; Sefton, £110 million; and Wirral, £136 million. For 1993-94 the figures will be: Knowsley, £71 million; Liverpool, £199 million; St. Helens, £62 million; Sefton, £96 million; and Wirral, £122 million.

Mr. Evans: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he acknowledge that the figures he has just given show that school children in St. Helens get a very raw deal from the Government's SSAs? Will he explain to the parents of St. Helens—preferably in plain and simple English—why Liverpool and Knowsley are allocated £500,000 more to run a 1,000 pupil secondary school than the neighbouring borough of St. Helens?

Mr. Forth: Yes. Education SSAs are based mainly on pupil numbers. Recently, pupil numbers in St. Helens have been falling. That is one of the reasons. The other is that St. Helens comes out rather badly from the additional educational needs—AEN—index, which is part of the educational SSA mechanism. The good news for the hon. Gentleman and his constituents is that we are conducting a wide-ranging review of the methodology and mechanisms of SSAs and the AEN index. We will seek to update them and make them more relevant, fairer and more reflective of needs than in the past. I cannot predict what the outcome will be for St. Helens, or any other authority, but the hon. Gentleman and his constituents can be sure that, at the end of that process, all will be seen to be fair and even-handed.

Trainee Teachers

11. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to give trainee teachers more time in the classroom learning practical skills.

Mr. Forth: The tougher standards that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced last year for the training of secondary teachers will ensure that post-graduate students spend two thirds of their time in schools. Our recent proposals for reform of primary teacher training also involve a significant increase in the time to be spent in schools.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that good teacher training should be a balance between education theory and practical skills? Does he further agree that, in the past, too much attention has been paid to education theory and that, in the future, more attention should be paid to practical skills, which are best learnt in the classroom?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has put succinctly the philosophy underlying the proposals that my right hon. Friend made recently. Although they are out to consultation at the moment, I believe that, on mature reflection, most people will agree with my hon. Friend that the balance between academic training and classroom experience has probably not been correct in the past. That is something which we will seek to correct. I hope that all hon. Members and people outside the House who are interested will take the opportunity to reply during the consultations that we have recently initiated on this important subject.

Mr. Win Griffiths: In accepting that there must be a correct balance between the theory of learning processes and the actual practice of teaching, does the Minister agree that his Department's idea for a one-year course for adults who will teach children at the most critical stage of the learning process is totally inadequate? If the majority view of the consultation that he is undertaking is that one year is not enough, will he accept that professional opinion?

Mr. Forth: Of course we will look carefully, as ever, at the responses to the consultation paper. The reality is that, at the moment, many graduates enter teaching, following a one-year degree postgraduate certificate of education course, with a degree that may have no relevance to the primary curriculum. It is odd that the hon. Gentleman has leapt to that conclusion without properly considering the strength of the suggestions made by my right hon. Friend in the consultation paper. When the hysteria shown by Opposition Members has settled down, it will be shown,

on reflection and consideration, that our proposals are sensible and practical and in the interests of teaching and education.

Standard Spending Assessments

12. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether he will give consideration to increasing the sparsity factor in future calculations of standard spending assessments.

Mr. Forth: The education elements of SSAs are currently under review. The review will extend to the sparsity allowance, but, at this stage, it is too soon to say what the outcome will be.

Mr. Gill: Will my hon. Friend acknowledge the importance of giving sufficient weight to the sparsity factor, adequately to reflect the fact that the economies of scale available in urban areas are simply not available to sparsely populated rural areas?

Mr. Forth: We have long recognised the sparsity allowance's relevance. My hon. Friend has been assiduous in ensuring that his county's interests have been fully represented in our consideration of that factor. As I said earlier, we are looking comprehensively at SSAs and the additional educational needs factors, including the sparsity allowance, to satisfy ourselves, education authorities, parents and pupils throughout the country that we fairly reflect the needs and balances of schools and authorities in the mechanisms for paying moneys and providing resources to them. Everybody in this Chamber will be happy with the result of our consideration, which we hope will be finalised and available in the autumn.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 13 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Evans: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Conservative Members are delighted to welcome him back from Tokyo and congratulate him on his success? Is not that in stark contrast to the lot opposite, who are horrified that their leader has just come back from Bournemouth? Did my right hon. Friend's father, at the height of his career as a trapeze artist, do as many somersaults as the Leader of the Opposition, the wriggler from Monklands, East?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome home. We did have a successful meeting in Tokyo and, from what I hear, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) had a rather less successful meeting in Bournemouth.

Mr. John Smith: Following the vote in the House last night in which the Prime Minister and his colleagues voted to impose value added tax on the heating bills of millions of pensioners and families, does not he think that he should now apologise to the British people for betraying the election pledges that he made during the last election?

The Prime Minister: I am surprised that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should raise that matter today. This week's edition of "Labour Party News" contains an article with the heading

"Sending your comments to Chris Smith MP".

It asks:

"In what ways can economic policy be developed to encourage environmental protection?

You might consider: Taxation Policy (eg energy tax . . .)".

Mr. Smith: The Prime Minister clearly does not want to hear a reference to his VAT commitment. Let me remind him what he said in the "Conservative Campaign Guide" —*[Interruption.]* I know that Conservative Members do not want to hear it. The last thing that they want to hear about is the "Conservative Campaign Guide". It attacked the Labour party for what it called irresponsible scares about VAT and said:

"The Prime Minister has confirmed that the Government has no intention of raising VAT."

Why was that said in the election?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman clearly does not know his own policy and I offer him my copy of "Labour Party News". My comment was in response to Labour's charges that we intended to raise the standard rate to 22 per cent., which we were not intending.

Mr. Battle: You lied to them.

Madam Speaker: Order. I clearly heard the hon. Gentleman's unparliamentary language. Will he now withdraw it?

Mr. Battle: I understand that the expression is "economical with the truth", Madam Speaker.

The Prime Minister: That was a typically cheap withdrawal. Frankly, the Leader of the Opposition is not being remotely open about his position. Quite apart from this week's admission that the Labour party was considering VAT on fuel—and still is—in its policy review document, "Looking to the Future", the Labour party stated:

"Zero-rating should remain on fares, books, food and children's clothing."

It specifically excluded fuel. That fact, allied to the document from which I quoted earlier, constitutes the clearest illustration that that is Labour party policy.

Before the Liberal leader looks too smug, may I say that in his document "Costing the Earth" the Liberal Democrats advocated a tax on energy and, failing that, said:

"We would . . . press forward . . . by ending the anomalous zero rate of VAT on fuel."

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will go back to Christchurch and tell them that.

Mr. John Smith: If the Prime Minister wants to wriggle out of the "Conservative Campaign Guide" commitment, let me remind him of what he said to the House on 28 January 1992. He said:

"There will be no VAT increase."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 808]

Did the Prime Minister say that? Does he deny that he said it? Does he also deny that he has cynically betrayed an election pledge?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is embarrassed because he walked into an open hole. That quote of mine is clearly related to the 17 per cent. rate of VAT, which we have not changed. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is well aware of that. He may wriggle and wriggle, but this week's edition of "Labour Party News' shows clearly what the Labour party policy was and is.

Q2. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 13 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that racial tolerance and compassion underlie the British character and that that is reflected in the natural desire of many childless couples to want to offer a good and loving home to children, regardless of race, colour or creed? Is not it time to end the shameful political correctness of some officials who seek to discourage that?

The Prime Minister: The Government's adoption policy will be guided by common sense and the interests of the child. There will be no house room for political correctness.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Prime Minister aware of the strong feeling in Wales about the need to give the Welsh language official status alongside the English language in Wales—a policy which is supported across party political boundaries? Is he aware that a monolingual French label on a wine bottle or similar product in Wales is official in Wales? A label in Greek only is valid in Wales, but a label in the Welsh language is not valid because the British Government do not recognise the Welsh language as an official language. Will the right hon. Gentleman try to change that policy at the Report stage of the Welsh Language Bill this week?

The Prime Minister: The Government's Welsh Language Bill represents an important addition to support and encouragement for the Welsh language in Wales. I know that the hon. Gentleman has canvassed and fought hard for the Bill and I know that he appreciated the fact that it was produced. We believe that Welsh already enjoys official status in Wales. A general declaration in the Bill would have no practical effect and would probably only increase legal uncertainty.

Mr. Milligan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reason that there is one member, one vote in the trade union movement was that the Government gave financial encouragement for postal ballots and actively helped democracy in the trade unions? Given that the campaign of the Leader of the Opposition to introduce one member, one vote in the Labour party will clearly either be fudged or abandoned, what measures will the Government—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat for a moment. The Prime Minister is not responsible for Opposition policies. The hon. Gentleman must rephrase his question.

Mr. Milligan: I am grateful for your correction. I am asking what action the Government will take, similar to that taken to encourage democracy in the trade unions, to encourage democracy in the Labour party.

The Prime Minister: Democracy in the Labour party would be a welcome addition to our public life. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) appears to be prepared to fight the battle for one man, one vote. He also appears to be retreating from it.

Q3. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 13 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Roche: Will the Prime Minister break his reputation for stubbornness and listen to the Social Security Advisory Committee when it says that the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel will have a disproportionate effect on the incomes of the poor?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Lady will know—we have stated it often enough in the House—we have made it clear that extra help will be provided in advance for people who are vulnerable, to meet the costs of VAT on fuel. That help will be in addition to the automatic increase in pensions and other benefits to reflect the impact of any increase in the retail prices index. I have made that clear repeatedly and so has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. Perhaps the hon. Lady would either care to listen to that statement now or read the innumerable occasions on which it has been made clear.

Mr. Day: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating British manufacturing industry on the figures published today on manufacturing output? Does he agree that that is a sign that Britain is moving into recovery and that, under his strong leadership, not only will Britain's economy improve but our party will emerge victorious at the end of this Parliament?

The Prime Minister: They were extremely good figures this morning. The increase in manufacturing output reported this morning is the largest monthly increase for four years. Clearly, that is good news and it bodes well for British manufacturing. But it is only one of a large number of signs that the economy is recovering—retail sales are up, car registrations are up, confidence is up and unemployment is down.

Q4. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 13 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Has the Prime Minister seen today's leader article in *The Times* which refers to the instability in Northern Ireland since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the unease among Unionists? Does he accept that that instability has been increased by the Labour party's so-called discussion document, Dick Spring's revelations and the talks between emissaries of the British Government and the Provisional IRA? Will we now move from parrot calls for round table talks to restoring accountable democracy in Northern Ireland at all levels by direct action, rather than diplomatic dithering?

The Prime Minister: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I share the views that he expressed about the Labour party's proposals for Northern Ireland. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland wrote to the Leader of the Opposition about this matter some time ago, but, so far as I am aware, he has not yet received a reply.

As for talks in the future, I hope that we shall be able to reach the outcome that the hon. Gentleman has in mind as a result of the resumption of talks. We hope that they will be able to resume speadily and, once they resume, we hope that they will be successful.

Bromsgrove

Q5. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will visit Bromsgrove.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Thomason: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Rover cars, parts of which are made in the Bromsgrove constituency, which announced yesterday that it had increased sales world wide? Does he agree that its achievement bodes well and is a good advertisement for British quality, British workers and an expanding British economy?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating Rover, which has increased its sales in Europe significantly. To have done that in the difficult trading conditions of Europe speaks volumes for its pricing and the quality of its products. Total car production has risen by about 11 per cent. and production of computers and related equipment is up by 8 per cent. There is no doubt that British industry is becoming more competitive and that British manufacturing industry in particular is beginning to penetrate new markets in quite a substantial way.

Dr. Lynne Jones: What would the Prime Minister say to the residents of Bromsgrove and nearby Birmingham who are sceptical about his claim that the imposition of VAT on fuel is an energy tax when that tax is also to be imposed on standing charges and there is no proposal to reinvest the revenue gained in energy conservation measures?

The Prime Minister: I would say what I said moments ago to the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) about the reimbursement that would be available.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received a request for a statement to be made today about the funding of the west coast main line, a subject of enormous importance to many hon. Members?

Through the device of a written reply, a statement has been put out by the Government which fundamentally changes the nature of funding for major infrastructure projects in this country. It seems that the Government are no longer to have direct responsibility for such projects and that they are to become a sideline for Hambros bank. Such information should not be given in a written reply but should be the subject of a statement made to the House.

Madam Speaker: I have not been told that any Minister wishes to make a statement today.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you will be aware, the foundation treaty of this Parliament is the Act of Union 1707. That Act contains a number of provisions, including article 21, which protects the rights and privileges of Scottish local government.

While it is true that local government in Scotland has changed a number of times since 1707, such change has always come about by way of consensus or royal commission. Indeed, on the last occasion, in 1972-73, there was no division on either Second Reading or Third Reading of the relevant measure and the vast majority of Scottish hon. Members supported the generality of the proposals. It is unprecedented for Scottish local government to be gerrymandered, using the backing of English votes in the House of Commons.

My point of order for you, Madam Speaker—perhaps you will wish to take time to consider it—is whether the process on which, it seems, we are about to engage is consistent with the Act of Union. It is true that some of us have less confidence than have others in that Act, but only last year the Prime Minister considered the matter important enough to describe it as an issue which transcended the general election campaign.

Perhaps you will consider the matter, Madam Speaker, and give your opinion before tomorrow, when we embark on what I suspect will be the first of many debates and votes in the House on the issue of Scottish local government and the attempt of the Secretary of State for Scotland to gerrymander it for his own purposes.

Madam Speaker: I have listened carefully to the hon. Member's remarks on what seems to be a complex matter. I shall give a considered response in the most appropriate way in due course.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Madam Speaker; I seek your help. Perhaps you will disclose whether the Home Secretary has asked for permission to make a statement about Sunday trading.

I appreciate from information that I have received that a paper will be published today and that it will be available to hon. Members at 3.30. As the subject is so emotive, and in view of the fact that we have debated it in the House continually since 1986—I took a long time preparing a private Member's Bill which was debated this year—I should have thought that the Home Secretary, in view of all the promises that were made by his predecessors, would at least have afforded the House an opportunity to debate the subject by way of questions following a statement before issuing four options, the details of which he has never disclosed to the House in any way, shape or form in the past 12 months.

Madam Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Member and the House that it is not for me to allow Ministers to make statements. Ministers tell me when they wish to make statements, and no Minister has told me of his or her desire to make a statement today.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Before the time of Mr. Speaker Weatherill—certainly in the days of Sir Harry Hylton-Foster, and probably before that—your predecessors were doubtless irritated by requests under what was then Standing Order No. 9. However irritated they became, however, they did not refuse to hear applications relating to serious subjects.

I do not wish to be impertinent, Madam Speaker, but some of the most experienced of us were wondering on what authority in "Erskine May" a Speaker can refuse to hear an application under what is now Standing Order No. 20. I think that it is probably a habit introduced by Mr. Speaker Weatherill.

It can hardly be denied that what Mr. Rolf Ekens is doing in Baghdad is a matter of importance; it is certainly urgent; and it is now definite. It would be indelicate to challenge the ruling preventing my colleagues and me from being heard, but we wonder what the precedent is.

Madam Speaker: The matter in question must be urgent, and it must relate to new developments, such as a change of policy. I do not wish to discuss applications made to me in the House; the hon. Gentleman is a long-standing Member of Parliament, and he knows that we do not do that.

The hon. Gentleman has submitted a Standing Order No. 20 application relating to the United Nations representative in Baghdad. The United Nations representative has not even reached Baghdad yet, and I therefore cannot consider an application under Standing Order No. 20.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Further to the point of order put my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), Madam Speaker. I wish to raise the embargo on White Papers that operates in the House until 3.30 pm. This morning, the Home Office briefed the press about the contents of a White Paper, setting out the options. It strikes me as extremely unfair that elected Members of Parliament should be denied information until 3.30 pm, while the press can obtain it in the morning. Surely, if there is to be an embargo, it should apply to everyone, but especially to the press. The information should be released to Members of Parliament at the same time as it is released to the press, at the very least. The Home Office should not give the press a privileged position to the disadvantage of Members of Parliament.

You represent the interests of the House, Madam Speaker. Will you make hon. Members' feelings clear to the Home Office and the Home Secretary, and support those feelings yourself?

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is not for the Speaker but for the appropriate Minister to determine when official papers should be made available. As the House is aware, I deprecate the making of statements to the press outside the House, and I shall continue to make my views known.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I know that you have the interests of Back Benchers at heart. I hope that you will not mind my raising the matter mentioned earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). You have said that, for an application under Standing Order No. 20 to be granted, the issue involved must be urgent; but is there not a distinction to be drawn between an application that is made and one that is granted?

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I understand that he has written me a long letter about the matter, which I have not had an opportunity to read. I hope that he will do me the courtesy of allowing me to read it so that I can respond appropriately.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Evidence will show that, before 1989, applications under Standing Order No. 9—now Standing Order No. 20—were fairly frequent. Everyone knows what happened then: as a result of the televising of our proceedings, the powers-that-be got together and decided that applications under Standing Order No. 20 should take place in television prime time. Pressures were brought to bear, and as a result Mr. Speaker Weatherill changed the system.

Today and yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) wanted to raise a matter of prime importance. Five years ago, his application would undoubtedly have been granted. Anyone who has been around here long enough to know is aware that television changed the system. Hon. Members should understand why their applications are now being denied.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is it a similar point of order?

Mr. Faulds: Absolutely. Some of us who have been here even longer remember that in the old days there was absolutely no way in which a Standing Order No. 9—now a Standing Order No. 20—having been refused, could even have been raised within the House. I suggest, Madam Speaker, that you go back to the old practice.

Madam Speaker: I tend to be rather old-fashioned, and I would like to do that. I look at Standing Order No. 20 applications on their merits. I cannot allow the proceedings of the House to be changed because a Member makes to me a Standing Order No. 20 application which is not particularly important, on which there is no new development, and which is not urgent. I look at Standing Order No. 20 applications in those three lights, and I will continue to deal with them in that way.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

SEA FISHERIES

That the Third Country Fishing (Enforcement) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 1197) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

DISEASES OF ANIMALS

That the Diseases of Animals (Therapeutic Substances) (Revocation) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 1331) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.
—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

Pensioners' Equality

3.40 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to harmonise the retirement age at 60 for both women and men; to provide for the state retirement pension to be linked to average earnings and to be universally available; and for connected purposes.

It is my pleasure to seek leave to bring in the Pensioners' Equality Bill, which is a very short and simple Bill. It is very timely because there is a great debate raging about the future of the state old-age pension and, indeed, of the welfare state itself. My concern is that this debate is increasingly being conducted on late night television shows and in the pages of the newspaper broadsheets between experts of varying degree, all of whom fundamentally agree that there should be a reduction in the level of state expenditure on the old-age pension and an increase in private provision.

My Bill moves in exactly the opposite direction. It is not about privatisation or reduction; it is fundamentally about decency in a civilised society. To my mind, that means looking at the very serious degree of poverty in which many elderly people in this country have to live at the present time. There is something deeply humiliating about people who have spent a lifetime at work, in an office, in a factory, on a farm or at home having to wait around in a supermarket to get the cheap bread at five o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, or to queue at the greengrocers for the mouldy vegetables that are sold off at the end of the working day. There is something fundamentally immoral about that.

The Secretary of State for Social Security and the Chancellor of the Exchequer are both dealing with the problem of the £50 billion Government borrowing requirement. That borrowing requirement, I hasten to add, has been brought about by a Conservative Government since 1979. It has been brought about by the deindustrialisation of the economy, by the enormous tax handout of over £20 billion to those earning more than £40,000 a year, and, in my view, also by the horrendous level of arms expenditure, including expenditure on nuclear weapons.

These issues have to be faced, but we are expected, as a country, to face them by cutting the welfare benefits of the poorest in our society. My Bill deals exclusively with the problems of pensioners, but I am sure that other hon. Members will want to bring forward similar Bills in relation to child benefit and other universal benefits.

The Secretary of State for Social Security, in his Mais lecture in the City of London, waxed long and lyrical about the problem of the aging population and the growing burden on those at work of the elderly population. He does not seem to understand that the word "burden" and the way in which he describes the growing problem of the elderly cause fear among many pensioners in this country who are forced to try to live on the state pension, plus housing benefits and any other odd benefits that they may be able to get.

The fact that there is a demographic argument is surely something that we should be pleased about. It shows the success of the welfare state and, in particular, of the national health service in increasing the longevity of so many people.

The Government's policy is a culmination of their 1985 White Paper, introduced by the present chairman of the Conservative party and piloted through the House by the current Prime Minister. The Bill which followed the White Paper reduced the value of the state earnings-related pension scheme and encouraged people to put money into private pension schemes. That has cost the national insurance fund £2 billion. In the Government's view, it has increased flexibility. Above all, however, it has compounded the breaking of the rise in the state old-age pension each year in line with earnings and put in its place a rise that is in line with the retail prices index, which has cost every pensioner at least £19 a week.

Those who believe that the solution to all the so-called problems that we face is to encourage private pension funds ought to look at the investigations carried out by the Select Committee on Social Security and the large-scale fraud that has hit a large number of pension funds. The Maxwell pension fund is the greatest of those frauds, but there are many others. I am concerned about the lack of democracy in running pension funds. I am also concerned about the promotion of private portable pension schemes. There is no democracy whatsoever when it comes to the running of such funds.

What is needed is an understanding that in a civilised society it is the duty of the state to provide a decent standard of living for those who have reached retirement age, which I believe should be reduced to 60. The Government claim that there has been a 34 per cent. rise in the real income levels of those over 65. They have calculated that figure by taking the income of all people over the age of 65, including the super-rich who made huge gains because of the way that the stock market performed, and adding it to occupational pension schemes. Therefore, the Government say that everyone over the age of 65 is better off.

The pensioners I meet at meetings of pensioners' organisations all over this country, as well as in Wales and Scotland, do not share that view. It also masks the fact that women tend not to be members of occupational pension schemes and that older women pensioners are by far the worst off, particularly those over the age of 75 who are living in real poverty.

Hypothermia is a totally preventable and avoidable condition, yet many pensioners die of it each winter. All the codes of practice that have been introduced to protect the elderly from cut-offs have been completely eliminated by the introduction of rechargeable meter keys by the electricity companies. There is now self-disconnection by many elderly people who cannot afford to get the key recharged so that the supply of electricity to their homes can continue.

In addition, cuts in health care and local authority services hit the elderly particularly hard. Two weeks ago there was an enormous rally in Central hall, Westminster, followed by an enormous lobby in this building. More than 5,000 supporters of the National Federation of Retirement Pensions Associations attended Central hall, Westminster, and heard inspirational speeches from Jack Jones and many others. Jack Jones was condemned by the Chancellor of the Exchequer as being politically motivated—I am not quite sure what the Chancellor of the Exchequer is. At that rally there was a demand for decency in retirement. There was also a call for parity with the European average for the state old-age pension and for an end to the indignities that so many people have to suffer in retirement.

It is a condemnation of the television and radio channels and of most newspapers that not one of them saw fit to report anything whatsoever to do with that very important rally and lobby by people who, at great expense, had travelled to London to take part in it.

My proposals would cost a great deal of money. I do not flinch from that. I do not deny it. I am not ashamed to say it. I am also not ashamed to say where I think that money should come from. It should come from restoring the levels of taxation on the very rich which have been done away with by the Government since 1979. It should also come from cutting European Community payments, fraudulently obtained, and from reductions in the enormous level of arms expenditure. My Bill would do a lot to make life a bit more bearable for many people.

Why is that this country and a number of other countries throughout Europe are discussing raising the age at which the state retirement pension should be paid to 67, and in some cases to 70? There is a conspiracy to do that all across Europe. The retired population of Europe and of this country do not want to take part in that conspiracy. We want the retirement age to be harmonised downwards to 60. It is often very unfair that one of a couple living together should have to retire five years earlier than the other. It can be quite a miserable existence for the first waiting for the second—the male partner—to retire at 65. It is only sensible and logical that we should lower the retirement age to 60 and, thereby, bring a great deal of happiness and not a little civilisation to society.

Restoration of the link with earnings, so brutally and crudely broken in 1980, would make every pensioner £19 per week better off. I consider that money to have been stolen from the pensioners.

Finally, I am concerned that, at the moment, the Government are putting forward ideas to target the old-age pension. The word "target" sends a frisson down my spine—a feeling shared by millions of people whose experience of targeting is the indignity of the means test and a reduction in the real standards of living of many poor people. The state pension is a contributory benefit, paid for through taxation and national insurance contributions during a working life, and should be for all time and for ever—and guaranteed so to be—available universally. At the height of the 1970s, when a Labour Government were in office, the state pension was 25 per cent. of average male earnings for a couple. It is now considerably less—just over 15 per cent. That is an indictment of the way in which the Conservative Government have treated the elderly.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Who will prepare and bring in the Bill?

Mr. Corbyn: There were many who wanted to bring in the Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Alan Simpson, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Ken Livingstone, Mr. Bob Cryer, Ms Mildred Gordon, Mr. Malcolm Chisholm, Mr. Max Madden, Mr. Dennis Canavan and Mr. Bernie Grant.

PENSIONERS' EQUALITY

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn accordingly presented a Bill to harmonise the retirement age at 60 for both women and men; to provide for the state retirement pension to be linked to average earnings and to be universally available; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 23 July, and to be printed. [Bill 235.]

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Despite the controversy created by Ministers and other hon. Members, no one has objected to the Bill. That being the case, cannot we now make progress with the Bill for the good reasons advanced by my hon. Friend?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that that is not a matter for the Chair.

Orders of the Day

Finance (No. 2) Bill

Not amended (in the Committee) and as amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

[MR. GEOFFREY LOFTHOUSE *in the Chair*]

Clause 204

STAMP DUTY

3.53 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I beg to move amendment No. 27, in page 158, leave out lines 18 to 41.

This clause brings forward by three months—from 5 August to 5 May—the date by which the Finance Bill must be enacted. It also extends from 25 days to 30 days the allowable period between the Budget statement and publication of the Finance Bill. It is not contentious to say that the purpose of the first change is to ensure—not in statute but at least in effect, given the changes being made—that the Finance Bill will almost certainly have had to complete its Committee stage before the Easter recess. The purpose of the second change is to ensure that the Government will never have to publish the Finance Bill until after the Christmas recess.

I should make it absolutely clear, for the avoidance of any doubt whatever, that the unified Budget process is a shared objective of the Government and the Opposition. The Armstrong committee recommended the process back in 1980, and the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee made similar recommendations in 1982. Both Committees highlighted two principal arguments in favour of the unified budget. The first is that if tax decisions and spending decisions are made together, the relationship between the two is thrown into sharper focus.

I had the pleasure of hearing the Financial Secretary to the Treasury speak at a seminar organised by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. He said that decisions would be better informed. That may or may not be so, but I am absolutely certain that the Financial Secretary and the rest of the Treasury team do not intend to allow us to change any of those decisions under the new unified Budget process. Better informed or not, I suspect that it is the Government's intention that the decisions contained in the Finance Bill remain in the Bill as, indeed, they almost always do from Second Reading right up to Third Reading. However, we shall certainly be better informed.

The second point made by the Armstrong committee and the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee way back in 1982 was that tax proposals are currently presented and considered in a way that makes revision and even expert consideration difficult. In our evidence to the Select Committee on Procedure we said that the unified Budget process is an important opportunity for reform and that there is a strong case for technical consideration of the Finance Bill, followed by political debate on broader issues of principle. As I understand it, those issues are currently being considered by the Procedure Committee.

As making the new procedure work is a shared objective, the Opposition are willing to co-operate in the usual way through the usual channels to move cautiously and with consent towards an improved way of dealing with such important issues. It is important that the House should get it right. As I have said many times, the Committee stage of the Finance Bill, with all its imperfections, is the only forum for detailed scrutiny of the Government's financial legislation. We have agreed in principle that we want to make the new unified Budget procedure work. Our method of doing that on issues of detail is to wait for the advice from the Procedure Committee as to how best to make progress. We believe that the whole House should have an opportunity to consider and debate the views of the Procedure Committee and then to reach a consensus around its recommendations.

The Government, however, are not responding reasonably to a wholly reasonable approach. I went to see the Financial Secretary in his very pleasant office, and I should have been warned when I went in because over the fireplace in his office hangs a large portrait of the hon. Member for Huntingdon—nothing so wimpish as the present right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), but a portrait of the famous hon. Member for Huntingdon, Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell did not muck about with a Committee stage of the Finance Bill: when the House refused to take the public spending decisions that he wanted—relating to defence expenditure, I believe—he shouted, "Colonel Harrison, fetch them in", and the dragoons marched in and brought the parliamentary Opposition debate to a close.

The Financial Secretary has clearly been inspired by that portrait and the strong leadership that it represents. I understand the Conservative party's current desire for strong leadership, and I understand how the Financial Secretary could be seduced into behaving in an authoritarian way, although it is not characteristic.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): Is the hon. Gentleman espousing the cause of the Rump Parliament as a representative body capable of analysing the details of a Finance Bill?

Mr. Brown: I remind the Financial Secretary that the mid-17th century episode ended in tears for many of the principal characters. I think that the appropriate analogy for him is the fate of Sir Thomas Wentworth, who tried to impose his master's wishes on a truculent House and came to a very sticky end, disappointed that in his final hours he did not have even the support of the master whom he sought to serve—an awful warning for others who seek to behave like him. His nickname was Black Tom Tyrant. I should hate to think of the Financial Secretary going down in history as Black Stephen Tyrant—it does not even have a ring to it. However, he is behaving heavy-handedly by insisting that we pre-empt the decisions of the Procedure Committee and legislate now for matters that should more properly be discussed, in the normal way, when we have the views of that Committee in front of us.

4 pm

I understand that the Financial Secretary has a vested interest in curtailing debate, but he is pre-empting a decision of the Procedure Committee, obstructing further reforms which may be necessitated by the unified Budget

process which he says he supports, and generally voting himself a quiet life, uninterrupted by vigorous parliamentary scrutiny.

In Committee, the Financial Secretary had a good whinge about the difficulties of doing his job. He told us that

"No wodge of spare time"

existed for parliamentary scrutiny, and that

"Time for parliamentary scrutiny is used at the expense not simply of discussions between officials but of the time available for preparing draft clauses, and undertaking public consultations on tax proposals, which could be extremely detailed.—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 24 June 1993; c. 577.]

That was his defence of his behaviour.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): On certain occasions in Committee it was clear that the hon. Gentleman had not waited for the publication of the Finance Bill before drafting his new clauses in any event. So why the worry, given that the Opposition obviously wish to table certain amendments and new clauses?

Mr. Brown: There are well over 200 clauses in the Finance Bill, which we are also charged with scrutinising. I am sure that the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) will do me the courtesy of admitting that we thoroughly and systematically scrutinised those clauses. Some of them, such as the clause on value added tax, are about controversial issues. Some of them are about matters of detail and are perhaps of specialist interest only. Nevertheless, in a democracy it is right that all those matters receive not just parliamentary scrutiny but informed parliamentary scrutiny. The Opposition, with limited resources, take seriously the duty of ensuring that the Bill gets such scrutiny.

When discussing the use of parliamentary time in Committee, the Financial Secretary made it clear that he regarded the time spent with civil servants, professional advisers and those who wanted to make representations about the Bill as quality time. He seemed to suggest that the time that he spent with us—the other elected representatives of the people—was at a discount and could not be extended. I almost got the impression that he did not enjoy the time he spent with us, which I am sure could not be right.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to correct that impression. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than spending time with the hon. Gentleman, his colleagues and my hon. Friends who joined us in Committee.

I did not seek to argue in Committee that time spent with officials was high value time, or to draw a distinction between that and time spent with Parliament. I sought to argue that my responsibility to Parliament is to prepare and present proposals that have been properly worked through and assessed and on which, in many cases, outside interests have been consulted. The purpose of so doing is to ensure that Parliament does not spend its time on the minute detail of the technical aspects which, as we agreed in Committee, with one or two exceptions are not the principal interests of hon. Members. Instead, Parliament can consider the wider political and strategic implications of tax proposals which have been properly worked through and presented to the House for it to decide upon.

Mr. Brown: I am glad that that matter has been cleared up. In that case, however, I do not understand why the Financial Secretary wants to curtail the amount of time available to the House to consider the Bill. He wants the right to ensure that the Bill does not have to be published until after Christmas. As I understand it, the present structure would not guarantee that in all circumstances, which is why we have to legislate for the extra five parliamentary days.

At the same time, the Financial Secretary is putting into place a timetable that is too tight. It is not too tight in itself, but too tight because of the way in which it interfaces with the Easter recess. The pressures that will be on the Committee to finish that stage before the House rises for the Easter recess will be overwhelming. It will mean that we shall be required not, as we could do now, to sit an extra week without clashing with the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968, but either to carry our deliberations into the Easter recess—which would not be popular—or to curtail discussion. I am certain that the Government would not be willing to allow the Committee stage to hang over the Easter recess and reconvene after Easter, with Report and Third Reading still to be completed before the new date of 5 May. That closing down of parliamentary time by the interface of the new timetable and the Easter recess is one of the principal concerns of the Opposition.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman has been generous in giving way. I have listened to this comments. For the reasons that I gave in Committee—I shall go through them again later if I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I do not accept that the effect of the Government's proposals is to reduce the amount of time available for parliamentary scrutiny.

Will the hon. Gentleman turn his mind to the effect of his proposed amendment on the amount of time available for parliamentary scrutiny? His amendment suggests that we should, in effect, omit the whole clause. I should make it clear that the effect of omitting the clause would not be to leave the PCTA date that would apply to a Budget delivered in November or December as 5 August, but to revert to the generality of law, which is that under the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, unless a Budget is delivered in March or April, the authority runs out after four months. Therefore, the effect of accepting the hon. Gentleman's amendment would be that the PCTA date of a Budget on 25 November would not be 5 May, as the Government propose, but 25 March.

Mr. Brown: The Financial Secretary has moved from what I thought was the undue exercise of tyranny to crude blackmail. It is not clear from his intervention that the Financial Secretary knows perfectly well that Opposition Members offered a whole series of compromise proposals in Committee. Our view is not that the whole procedure should be completed by April, but the absolute opposite of that. We would have been more than willing to facilitate a legislative change at the time of the Budget or before it if agreement could have been reached that met our legitimate objections about the time given for scrutinising the Finance Bill before the Committee stage and about the amount of time available for consideration of the Bill.

In case there is any doubt, the compromise that we offered in Committee was the date of 5 June rather than 5 May. That would give us an extra month after the recess —a month that we might not take, but at least we would have the option of taking it if issues arose requiring further

[Mr. Brown]

discussion or further parliamentary scrutiny. It is not a question of parliamentary tactics. We have always tried to agree with the Government on the way in which we work through the Finance Bill. It is not a vehicle for re-fighting, in parliamentary terms, the battle of the Somme. We accept our responsibility thoroughly to scrutinise all the measures in the Bill because there is nobody else to do it. If we did not undertake that responsibility and took it seriously, Parliament would be much criticised. With the clause, the Financial Secretary is saying, in effect, that Opposition Members may discharge that duty, but only in a timetable set by him and not one that is agreeable to us. I do not want to overstate the quarrel.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Although I am a member of the Procedure Committee, I have no desire to refer to the Committee's deliberations on this subject, and it would be wrong to do so. Does my hon. Friend agree that, since there is general agreement in the House about the unified Budget and there is no disagreement between the two Front Benches about the desirability of change, it is unfortunate that this reform should bring with it some controversy because the Government are refusing to compromise? Since there is no disagreement about the unified Budget, why have a sticking point between the two sides? The Opposition consider this to be important and it is unfortunate that the Government are adopting this attitude.

Mr. Brown: I agree wholeheartedly with everything that my hon. Friend has said. We are not just in favour of the unified Budget process—we are enthusiastically in favour of it. Our concerns and resentments stem from the fact that the amount of time that will be available for the Opposition and for dissident Members on the Government side to consider these issues will be curtailed. It may be felt that dissident Conservative Members are at a discount in as much as they rarely—not never—vote against the Government. However, within the relative safety of the Committee, they often seek to explore in considerable detail with Ministers matters of specialist interest to themselves or their close friends. Although the detail with which they explore those matters rarely results in a rebel yell, let alone a rebel vote, time is taken to explore matters vigorously with the Treasury Front Bench. That is a right and, I would argue, a duty—so long as it is performed altruistically—which pertains not just to the Opposition but to Government Back Benchers as well. Therefore, I am seeking to protect their interests rather than just those of the Opposition with this amendment.

My view on this matter would be the same if the Labour party were in office and the Conservative party in opposition. It is a test of altruism that those proposing the change can say that this is the way we would like it regardless of whether we are in government. That is the test that we apply to this. As the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) made clear, I am saddened that something that should be dealt with by consensus between the two sides has been a matter of deep controversy. It is not an issue that we will let go.

Our preferred way of proceeding is to wait until the Procedure Committee has put its recommendations before the House, for the House to have a debate and then, through the usual channels, to agree on an acceptable timetable. That timetable may be on the basis of just one year, since this is the first time we shall have the unified Budget procedure. We would then wish to proceed by consensus. We are debating not the contents of the Government's legislation, but the way in which the House should deal with it.

It is not necessary to legislate in the way we are being asked to do and it is certainly not necessary to do it now. It is a gross discourtesy to the Procedure Committee. The Financial Secretary's spurious argument that if we do not agree with his construction there will be nothing available to the House except to resort to the general law of the land can be dealt with easily: we would facilitate any legislation introduced by the Government which reflected the compromise that we wish to reach with them on these matters.

4.15 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor: One of the disadvantages that you have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that, when the debate moves from the close confines of the Committee to the wide open expanses of the green Benches of the House, you have not participated in the excitement of the debate in which Committee members were privileged to take part. If you had been there, you might have noticed the concern of the excellent hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). The hon. Gentleman was concerned that more all-night sittings might be needed if his greatest fears were realised and the Committee was truncated.

The hon. Gentleman seemed principally to be worried about spending more nights with his hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), who regaled the Committee more than once at great length—and with occasional wisdom—about his exploits. The hon. Member for Hartlepool included the holiday he was about to take in Majorca in those remarks. Unfortunately, he got lost at that point and forgot to give Committee members the full details. I hope that he will remedy that this afternoon. Most members of the Committee felt that the details of the hon. Member's holiday in Majorca were more interesting than the rest of the speech that he made on that occasion.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): My recollection is that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East was more concerned that he would have to spend the night with the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) rather than the hon. Member for Hartlepool.

Mr. Taylor: It is true that the Committee members were enthralled and privileged to have large extracts of a book that had been recently published by the hon. Member for Peckham read into the record. I said at the time that that was inevitably a ploy by Labour members of the Committee to ensure that the book would have a wider circulation through *Hansard* than it would have in its original book form, because the minutes of the Finance Bill Committee are read avidly by a large number of people. I hope that the modest expectations of Labour members of the Committee for that publication were realised.

The debate on whether Parliament will be short-changed in parliamentary scrutiny has arisen out of the principle of the unified Budget. I give full credit to the hon.

Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East. He clearly stated that he and his Labour Front-Bench colleagues welcome the unified Budget. The House should ponder on that.

In essence, the changes that are created by bringing together the expenditure Budget, or the autumn statement, and the fund-raising Budget—which has normally been in March, except under Labour Governments, when there were several a year—make a significant impact on other procedural matters. The Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968 applies in this context.

The amendments are about whether, in terms of that Act, one tries to change the Finance Bill in a way that alters the ability of Parliament to inspect and examine it, and whether the different recesses that will fall when the Bill is introduced impede Parliament's ability to look at the Finance Bill. The Minister clearly stated that the technical day count and the practical reality did not justify the Opposition's worries.

The benefit of a unified Budget is something that many hon. Members have been urging for some time. I join those on the Labour Front Bench in welcoming that. One of the problems that a member of a Finance Bill Committee faces is that he knows that the Red Book that has been previously issued in association with the autumn statement is almost out of date and certainly needs revising. It is therefore difficult to get a complete grip of the Government's expenditure plans in detail, against the taxes that we are examining in that Committee.

The Committee's discussions depend on whether the taxes are to cover last year's estimates of the Government's financial expenditure or whether they relate to the future. This unification is important. We do not usually mention the fact that there are Cabinet Committees, but it is widely known that one such committee is looking even now at the Government's expenditure plans. In a fit of openness, which I welcome, the Government have let it be known that there is a control total for expenditure of £253·5 billion—the Financial Secretary will correct me if the number after the decimal point is wrong. Nevertheless, that is the target for Government expenditure in the forthcoming year.

We do not yet know how it will be divided up. That will be revealed in the autumn statement, when, for the first time, we will simultaneously be given the Government's plans for raising taxation—before the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East jumps to his feet, I should add that I use the word "raising" in its most neutral sense; I am not recommending a policy decision—which are always part of the traditional Budget procedure, and their plans for expenditure. That will make for a much more enlightened, and hence a more effective, debate.

I wonder whether Labour Members have taken this into account when giving their rather grudging acceptance of the timetable. When we have the unified Budget—probably in November—much more information will be before the House, so the debate on it will be better.

This will benefit hon. Members on both sides of the House. When we are dealing with Government expenditure of about £253·5 billion and a Government-projected deficit of £50 billion, it is vital to understand what the Government are attempting to cover with basic taxation, what growth patterns they project in the Red Book, and what will be the likely breakdown of expenditure between structural spending and automatic stabilisers related to the recession. It will help the House when it comes to look at the expenditure side of the fiscal equation to know what the taxation side will look like.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The hon. Gentleman has obviously given the matter a great deal of thought. What does he understand will happen to the two Industry Act forecasts?

Mr. Taylor: The excitement is in the waiting. There will be a great many forecasts for the hon. Gentleman to get his teeth into. We are all on tenterhooks to find out whether he enjoys the accuracy of the forecasts or whether he wants to be the eighth wise man. I am sure that he will draw his own conclusions in his own time.

The unified Budget will give the House a much broader basis for assessing the way forward, and a much better backdrop to the eventual consideration of the Finance Bill in Committee.

Then there is the problem of the Christmas recess. My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) almost over-excited himself with the prospect of getting the Finance Bill before Christmas. Doubtless he reads so quickly that he will already have finished all the novels that he had put aside for the Christmas period, and will eagerly start reading the Finance Bill for his post-turkey Christmas afternoon enjoyment. We all have our foibles; obviously, that is his.

But it is not the critical point to bear in mind when asking whether we properly scrutinise the Finance Bill—it does not matter much whether it is published before Christmas or immediately afterwards. Conservative Back Benchers are well aware that it takes a certain amount of time to go through all the small print of certain Government measures—for instance, to read all the Inland Revenue press releases that go out with the Budget forecasts. They are voluminous enough in themselves.

I suffer occasionally from paper indigestion, and it takes me longer to go through all the press releases and guidance notes that the Inland Revenue put out than perhaps it does the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I understand perfectly what the hon. Gentleman is saying in his capacity as a loyal Back-Bench supporter of the Government, but has it occurred to him that, when he is in opposition, he might welcome slightly more time to scrutinise the Government's proposed legislation?

Mr. Taylor: That is a double hypothetical question: first, whether it is possible for me to be in opposition; secondly, if I were in opposition, whether the then Government would have any legislation. There are double hypotheses there, and I would rather not be tempted down that avenue.

The Christmas recess is a factor, and I look forward to the Financial Secretary's comments on it when he makes his speech, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The simple reality is that the most effective job that a Back Bencher can perform in terms of the Finance Bill is to look at the issues.

The exact drafting of the amendments is less important. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East, who speaks on such matters, has often said that the amendments that he has tabled are probing amendments, in which case one does not need the detailed text. One

[Mr. Taylor]

needs to know the various subjects that are likely to be covered, and they are clearly covered in the general debates on Second Reading and the debates on the Floor of the House before the Bill goes to Committee.

At those stages, various points of principle must be made. If probing amendments are tabled, it gives the House a good opportunity for debate, without necessarily assuming that the Government will accept the amendment. That is happening on the Government Benches. Quite often, if we are concerned about an aspect of Government policy on which we seek clarification and there is no question but that our amendment may be faulty in its preparational drafting, we look to the Government to satisfy us that they are considering the amendment carefully, or will table their own on Report.

I am glad to say that I have sometimes been successful in persuading the Government to do just that. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East has often supported me, particularly on employee share ownership. The system works, and I give him credit for that.

I am less sure of my ground about the work of the officials. If I can sit up all night with the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), officials can stay up all night drafting the Finance Bill. I am not too sure that I wish to give them much comfort. They will have to work even harder under the unified scheme than perhaps they have done before. So be it.

Performance-related pay would be even better, and I know that the Financial Secretary is keen on that. Perhaps brownie points will be awarded in the margin of annotated versions of the Finance Bill in subsequent years.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): We need to be sure that we look after officials, make their work easier and ensure that they work reasonable hours and are not over-straining themselves. If their work is being concertinaed into a shorter period, as will happen as a result of the change in timing, it also means that their work in other periods of the year will be that much less, so there may well be a problem of spreading their burden evenly over the year. Taken overall, their work should be no more and no less.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I must disclose an interest in this matter. I am the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who is also the Minister with responsibility for public service and science, and who is an excellent contributor to the thinking on how our civil service should develop. If he were in the Chamber, I would pay him a tribute—*[Interruption.]* Oh: as he is in the Chamber, I am able to pay him the compliments that he deserves, and that he would expect me, as his PPS, to give him.

The important point about the civil service, and particularly the Inland Revenue, is that those on the Committee respect and value enormously the work they do. This year, there will undoubtedly be a much greater work load to try to get the unified Budget before the House by the due date, which will be some time in November.

The only difficulty that I can foresee is that, given that all Back Benchers had to make sure that their Budget representations were in to Ministers by the Chevening weekend—if memory serves me right, that was the first weekend in January; I have not calculated it backwards, so if an hon. Member in a sedentary position can do it better than I can on my feet, perhaps he would tell me when the equivalent time might be two and a bit months before the November Budget—the new date may well bite heavily into the holidays of officials.

Will the Financial Secretary tell us what the equivalent of the Chevening weekend might be so that Back Benchers can get their acts together and start to gear up to lobby some time in September?

Mr. Carrington: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. On the timing that he has just given the House, the Chevening weekend will coincide with the party conference. Does that not represent a great opportunity for consulting the whole party on Budget measures at the conference?

4.30 pm

Mr. Taylor: The Conservative party, with its democratic conference, could do that. The problem for the Labour party would be that, until it gets its voting structure sorted out, it would find it embarrassing. I am sure that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East would not like me to stray into his private grief about the voting system in the Labour party. I have a suspicion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you are not so keen yourself that I stray into the topic of democracy in the Labour party.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I am keen that we debate the amendment.

Mr. Taylor: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for bringing me back to the core of the subject, which is amendment No. 27.

This debate is as serious as the amendment that has been tabled—the amendment having been tabled, the debate follows in character. The Financial Secretary was helpful to the Committee by pointing out some of the timing details. It is interesting, for example, that 5 August is the date in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968. It is true that, decades ago, the House sat into August, rising just before the Glorious Twelfth. Now, it is normal for the House to rise by the end of July.

Therefore, it is inconceivable that Parliament would be able to scrutinise the Finance Bill until as late as 5 August. There is bound to be some truncation. I hope that the Financial Secretary will take us back through the argument that he gave us in Committee, looking at the effective dates of the Budget as it was in March and the likely number of days that elapsed under the old arrangements in comparison with the new arrangements.

If the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968 is amended as the Government have said it will be to incorporate the new date of 5 May, that gives ample time for proper parliamentary scrutiny without the absolute necessity of all-night sittings. Yet all-night sittings are one of the excitements of the Finance Bill Committee. Serving on that Committe is an honour for hon. Members on both sides of the House. On most other Committees, hon. Members are told to keep quiet, but on that Committee we have ample opportunity to air our views.

The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) regaled the Committee with his detailed legal and economic knowledge, to the great pleasure of most of us. Those of us who found it difficult to follow him were in a minority, but he was constructive on many of the issues before us.

In those circumstances, it was a pleasure to listen to the hon. Gentleman at 4 in the morning rather than 6 in the evening. It was much more entertaining at that stage, because the debate was mature. Those are the excitements of being on the Finance Bill Committee when it sits all night. All-night sittings enable us to dilate much more on some of the issues than we would be able to do on the truncated time scale of a Committee that felt bound to rise by 10 o'clock in the evening.

I hope that I have enlightened the House about some of the issues at stake. I know that Labour Front-Bench Members feel aggrieved. The skill that they normally show in Committee and the forensic ability of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East are almost undervalued by the amendment. The hon. Gentleman need not be embarrassed.

I have been a member of the Finance Bill Committee since 1987, when I first had the honour to enter this place. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East has also been a member of that Committee since 1987. We have become fixtures: the Finance Bill would not be the Finance Bill without us. If I continue to speak as I am doing, I am sure that I will be a member of the Finance Bill Committee for many years to come. I am sure that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East will be on the Opposition Benches for very many years to come.

The hon. Member and I will be members of the Committee when it sits early in the next new year. However, he underestimates his skills. There is no doubt that there was quality in our debates in Committee this year. There was an eagerness to examine in detail and for rapid dispatch. The Committee rose after not too many late sittings, but a sufficient number to give us the feeling that we had properly scrutinised what the Government were doing.

There was some controversy, but the Committee showed that we do not need length of time to have a quality debate. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East has almost undermined our confidence in his skills by moving the amendment. Therefore, I do not feel that I can urge my colleagues to accept it.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) has made an entertaining contribution which reflected on those who were members of the Committee. His comments suggested that the Committee was a rather cosy club. I feel slightly diffident about intruding into these private exchanges, which have obviously been repeated on more than one occasion.

However, I believe that there is a serious point behind the amendment. Looking at it from the point of view, as I do, of entering the debate for the first time and not the 10th time, it seems to me slightly strange that the Government should introduce a reform which was welcomed by Members in all parts of the House and which seemed to be a constructive way forward and a better way to present the facts of the debate and then follow that immediately with a procedural mechanism for curtailing the very debate that they appear to want to stimulate. That is certainly what it looks like from where I am standing.

The hon. Member for Esher gave a somewhat esoteric, introspective view of how the Committee conducts itself. He rather underplayed the importance of the debate for people outside the House who are seriously affected by the consequences of the Finance Act. Whether or not the Finance Bill Committee carries out its deliberations in a series of extended sittings is, to some extent for those outside this place, a matter of little concern, although one hears the passing comment that it is a strange way to run business efficiently.

People outside this place are concerned not about the number of hours that the Committee sits, but about the time available to marshal the arguments, to analyse the implications and to present a case if—and this is after all the purpose of having a legislative Committee—we are genuinely to consider the implications and be prepared to review and vary them: in other words, if the debate is genuine.

I have taken the trouble to read the interesting and constructive report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on the Government's proposals. It seems to me that we are being asked to support a move that is primarily for the convenience of the Treasury rather than for those who are affected by the changes.

I have not been a member of the Finance Bill Committee, but I have been exercised by some of the proposals in this year's Finance Bill. No matter what side of the argument one is on, the VAT proposals have been extremely controversial. As time has passed, the implications of those proposals have been more widely discussed.

I am concerned about the changes in oil taxation. Even within the present timetable, it is instructive to note that yesterday, according to my local daily newspaper, *The Press and Journal* in Aberdeen, Shell announced that it would be laying off workers as a direct result of the tax changes in this Bill.

That has happened in respect of the present time scale. It will not be of much value if such proposals come after the completion of the process. The shorter the process, the more likely it is that people will not have collected their arguments together in time, I am concerned that these things are likely to be rushed through.

In many cases, the matters we are talking about are extremely technical and their implications are not always easy to understand, even by the companies or individuals that are affected by them, or by the Treasury officials implementing them.

One of the reasons why Finance Bills are so long is that a significant number of their clauses correct the errors and unexpected side effects contained in previous Finance Acts. While it is inevitable that that will happen, it should be an ambition of Treasury Ministers and officials to limit the number of clauses that fall into that category. The shorter the time in which deliberations must be concluded, the more likely it is that we will get things wrong and, as was said in Committee, the longer each Finance Bill is likely to become year by year.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) said that he might end up needing a trailer on the back of his car to take his reading home for Christmas. He is the only Member to think that he will receive the relevant documents before Christmas.

Apart from the question of tidiness and convenience to the Treasury, what is the purpose of bringing the income and expenditure proposals together? It seems to me that it is to ensure that there is a better informed debate about the relationship between the two. In at least the first year or two of the change, it would be better to have a longer rather than shorter period of debate to see how it is conducted. If it becomes apparent, after a year or two, that the timetable can be met, it might be appropriate to adopt

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

it permanently. But to adopt a new procedure and then insist that the period of debate is shortened, before we have seen how it operates in practice, is wrong and undermines the change.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman has said several times that the Government are seeking to shorten the time available for debate by this clause. I sought to explain that that is not the effect of the clause. Its intention, broadly speaking, is to replicate the present arrangements. As far as it changes the length of time available for debate, it errs on the side of lengthening, not shortening, the time available.

Mr. Bruce: I understand that point, but I believe that the Minister has acknowledged that the practicalities behind the way in which the parliamentary year falls mean that there will be less time available for debate. The Financial Secretary may disagree. When a radical and welcome change is being introduced for the purposes of informing the debate, there is a case for extending rather than containing the time for debate, at least for the first year or two.

The hon. Member for Esher has said that the fact that we are bringing the two parts of the Budget debate together should make it clearer and speedier. That is one point of view. It is equally likely that we will set more hares running which will have to be considered. We should allow time for that.

The current debate is of some interest and should be taking place in the Conservative party, as well as in the Opposition parties, because it is directly affected by the political consequences. Ministers may want to say to the House, "These are the facts. This is the state of the deficit and it must be addressed." In that case we need honesty and openness so that all hon. Members and people outside can face up to the fact that we must cut expenditure and raise more revenue. In those circumstances, we need a climate of genuine and honest debate. I welcome that.

The current debate is whether there should be more hypothecation of taxes. I do not think anybody in the House would or could suggest that all taxes should be hypothecated—that would be wholly unrestrictive and overly populist. The Government must recognise that Governments who say that they will cut taxes and then increase them, and say that the reason for doing so is that they misread the calculations and that the situation is a lot worse than they thought, are pursuing the debate abstrusely.

The objective of the reforms that have been introduced is to make the debate more open, to make it clear to all sides why there is a deficit and what the shortfall is and to enable people to explore at the same time where we can cut expenditure and raise revenue. That is a welcome and constructive change, but it does stimulate more debate and not less.

Mr. Willetts: Will the hon. Gentleman reveal how his party would propose to cut expenditure and raise revenue? I am sure that the electors of Christchurch would be interested in his ideas on that subject.

Mr. Bruce: I would be happy to do that, but Mr. Deputy Speaker would tell me that the purpose of the timetable motion is not to make a campaign speech for the electors of Christchurch. I have been there, however, and I know that the electors I have met are more enthusiastic about our policies than about those of the Conservative party.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is now doing something that he said he should not do.

Mr. Bruce: I accept your constraint entirely, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

4.45 pm

If the Financial Secretary is unable to accept the amendment, and if he insists that it is not the Government's intention to shorten the period of debate but to replicate it, that is the minimum that should happen. At the risk of repeating myself, with a new reform such as this, it would be better to extend the debate. All the evidence that I have seen before the Treasury Select Committee shows that there is no problem about extending the debate. The only people concerned about the time scale appear to be the Treasury. The argument that the reform would create a greater period of uncertainty is one that people have lived with for a hundred years.

The argument that the tax year needs to be tidy and that all the relevant matters need to be sewn up in advance has not been a serious factor in previous practical considerations. It is a matter of absolute astonishment to me that the tax year starts on 5 April. To most people that is peculiar and it should be addressed. It has been suggested that we should at some time make the tax year begin at the start of the calendar year, as in most other countries.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): That would ruin Christmas.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman may say that that would ruin his Christmas, but the longer the time for debate, the more chance he has to leave it to one side and come to it in the new year just as happily.

The Government have introduced a welcome reform, but they should recognise that the provision of a little more time in the first two years would not go amiss.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): As I did at the beginning of the Committee stage, I will start by declaring an interest. I am an adviser to National Westminster Securities, which is the investment banking arm of the NatWest group. I am a director of Dewe Rogerson consultants and I am also the parliamentary consultant to the Institute of Taxation. None of those bodies knew that I would speak in the debate this afternoon, nor had any idea of what I would say.

As has already been said, we had a very full discussion of this matter in Committee. The House should be grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing us to discuss the matter again on Report. Some very serious issues are raised by the Opposition amendment.

I am very glad that in the fascinating interchange at the beginning of the debate between my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) quite a lot was said about the great constitutional debates of the 17th century. Those debates are pertinent to the matter that we are discussing.

The House will know that, between the 1620s and the 1640s, the great constitutional debates turned on the extent to which taxation should be by the consent of the

Government—or at least by the consent of the taxpayer, if not the Government. Of course, in those days, Parliament considered itself to be the representative of the taxpaying public rather than the whole public. If Pym and Hampden were in our midst this afternoon, they might have added to that principle the need to ensure that taxation legislation, like all other forms of legislation, was comprehensible to those to whom it would apply. In the 17th century, proposed taxation legislation would always have been comprehensible. There might have been a proposal for ship money or exercise duty, but everyone understood what that was about. The provisions bringing those taxes into effect could have been interpreted by any court in accordance with their apparent meaning as debated in this Chamber.

We have moved onwards since the 17th century, but I cannot say that we have moved forwards. It is now a great challenge for this House, the general public and even those in the legal and accounting professions who spend all their time on tax matters to understand the meaning of a Finance Bill. On Second Reading and throughout our discussions in Committee, I protested about the fact that Finance Bills have become steadily longer and more convoluted, and I make no apology for protesting now because it is a serious issue. Unless Members of Parliament call parliamentary draftsmen to account and react on behalf of the public to the increasing complexity and opacity of taxation legislation, no discipline will be placed on parliamentary draftsmen and no restraint will be placed on the length and complexity of Finance Bills.

The result of that will be extremely undesirable. It will mean a loss to justice because people will not understand the law. They will not claim the allowances properly due to them and will be penalised for making inadequate declarations because they did not understand the law. There will also be considerable economic costs because we will have to pay talented people to spend hours and hours interpreting the legislation. That expense will have to be borne by industry, businesses, individuals and the economy.

How does that relate to the time to be made available for parliamentary scrutiny of Finance Bills? Clearly, if taxes are to be collected for the following year, the more time that we and the outside world have to consider a Finance Bill when it is first drafted and published and before it becomes law, the greater the possibility of our doing our job in this place and scrutinising legislation carefully. That will allow the Government to expound the legislation and justify the measures and a general consensus will develop outside the House that the new taxation proposals are sound and reasonable. That is important for the integrity and reputation of this place, the law and our tax system.

I accept my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary's argument that the Government's proposal on timing will, if anything, increase the parliamentary time available for scrutiny of Finance Bills. With the great mental agility for which he is famous, he succeeded in convincing us in Committee that another five days of parliamentary time would be made available. Although I could not follow his calculations as they seemed extremely complicated, I accept his conclusion.

However, I greatly regret that we did not take this opportunity to provide for a significant qualitative increase in the time available in this place to discuss Finance Bills in future. I say "in this place" because there are two sides to the public consent that is being given to Finance Bills: first, there is the reaction of the public, the experts who analyse Finance Bills and those who want to make representations to the Government and Parliament before irrevocable decisions are taken; and, secondly, there is the debate in this place.

We are all grateful for the detailed representations that we receive from all sorts of outside bodies on the Government's fiscal proposals in the Budget speech and subsequently in the Finance Bill. I accept that many of those representations are interested but that is perfectly right. We want to hear how individual categories of people or businesses feel that they will be impacted by those measures so that we can take account of their representations. We can discount them to the extent necessary because they are clearly self-interested and we can try to reconcile them with the Government's need for additional revenue or their need to conserve revenue at any time. That is what discussion of the Finance Bill is about.

However, we must give people the time to read the Finance Bill and to lobby their Members of Parliament, and we must leave ourselves enough time to consider those representations and do our homework. It is important that Back Benchers do their homework—the Government do theirs well—but, if we are to play our role, we must have time to do that. Debates must not be foreshortened by the Government's threat that, if we do not make progress, they will be unable to raise revenue. All sorts of obvious disastrous consequences would flow from that. We do not want to become the victims of such moral blackmail if we can avoid it.

In Committee I backed an amendment that sought to set the date by which the Finance Bill should enter law. It suggested 5 July rather than 5 August, which would have given two more months for consideration of the Bill. The Financial Secretary explained—he always makes a convincing argument—that that would cause all sorts of administrative difficulties for the Government. He said that the bureaucracy—the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Treasury—must spend a lot of time preparing for Finance Bills. However, I greatly regret that the conflict between bureaucratic convenience and open government and parliamentary scrutiny has been resolved in favour of bureaucratic convenience. If hon. Members do not argue against that, nobody ever will and we shall be less able to make a meaningful contribution to the evolution of our tax law. That would be bad for parliamentary sovereignty, the legitimacy of the tax system and the tax system itself.

However complicated and technical the proposed measures are, and however high-minded and conscientious officials may be, unless they are exposed to scrutiny there will inevitably be no counterweight or countervailing discipline to proposals that officialdom decides to put forward, and we shall have worse and worse taxation law.

May I take up a remark made by the Financial Secretary in an intervention in the remarks of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown)? The Financial Secretary said that Parliament wanted to be involved in the broad strategic thrust of tax law rather than with its technical details. I wish to challenge that view, which I hope does not reflect the considered opinion of the Financial Secretary.

5 pm

Of course, hon. Members are concerned with the strategic thrust of tax law and with the broad economic consequences of the Government's fiscal policy, and whether that policy is expansionary or restrictive. They are concerned about whether we should reduce our present deficit by reducing expenditure or increasing revenues. They consider where increases or reductions in revenues in the tax system and in general public spending should fall. That is the stuff of our debates in the House on Treasury matters, and there are a number of opportunities to discuss such matters in the course of the year. *[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East is laughing —no doubt I take advantage of those opportunities, but he never fails to do so either. I always appreciate the hon. Gentleman's interventions, which are invariably well thought through and interesting—*[Interruption.]* I did not hear the intervention of the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), but if he wants to intervene I shall be delighted to give way to him. I find it difficult to hear what he says when he comments from a sedentary position.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have a soft spot for the hon. Gentleman, so I shall rescue him. He is chattering on as if he is taking part in a television quiz show where the aim is to keep talking about the Finance Bill without ever stopping. Why does he not confirm that many of his colleagues are at a royal garden party and he has been instructed to keep talking so that we do not have to vote before 6 pm?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman is being more than a little unfair. He suggests that what I am saying cannot stand on its merits. That is wrong. I contributed to the debates in Committee when, as far as I know, there were no competing social attractions in the west end of London and I said very much the same. The hon. Gentleman cannot accuse me of speaking with a lack of sincerity or lack of consistency today. If I had a less good memory, his intervention might have saved my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary from some remarks that I was about to make in response to his observations this afternoon. It seems a little perverse of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East to intervene and deflect my comments of a mildly and respectfully sceptical nature about a Minister, and a very distinguished one at that.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): From what the hon. Member is saying, I take it that it is not true that he continues to speak because his hon. Friends are all at the palace. Perhaps he is doing so because he does not want to discuss VAT.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am not aware of any activities outside the House, but I would welcome it if the debate were to relate to the amendment.

Mr. Davies: I can say with the greatest sincerity that I do not know the movements of my colleagues nor those of Opposition Members, either this afternoon or during any other afternoon. One is not the keeper of one's colleagues in this place, thank heaven, unless one happens to be a Whip, and I have never had that particular honour. I have no idea who may be doing what this afternoon. I know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will not want me to go into the issue of VAT on domestic fuel, which has already had a generous airing, but I should like to state that I have never avoided an opportunity to stand up in public and defend the Government's decision on VAT, which I believe to be fundamentally correct, though it may be costly in the short term. Correct and courageous Government decisions often are politically costly in a party political sense in the short term.

The Government are to be more, not less, commended for taking that move—*[Interruption.]* It is interesting that this is, I think, the first time since I was elected to the House that Labour Members have sought to deflect me from making comments that are not of a purely adulatory nature about the remarks of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench.

Mr. Carrington *rose*——

Mr. Davies: Perhaps more understandably, one of my hon. Friends is now rising to deflect me from that purpose.

Mr. Carrington: I hesitate to deflect my hon. Friend from his purpose—it is beyond the reason of anyone to try to do so. My hon. Friend is a notable scourge of parliamentary draftsmen. He started his speech on that subject and raised considerable concerns among many Conservative Members on Second Reading and in Committee on the gobbledegook in the Bill. If the time scale for debating the Finance Bill was expanded next year, we would also need to be able to change the procedures for considering the Bill so that we could change the drafting. A notable factor of our discussions on the Finance Bill has been our inability to change the drafting, despite all the cogent arguments advanced by my hon. Friend on how badly drafted some provisions of the Bill are.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. I well understand the reluctance of Ministers to agree, on the spot in Committee, to changes in the Bill's drafting. It would lead to much better and more considered tax legislation if, first, there was more time between the publication of the Bill and the commencement of the Committee stage. That would allow more time for the Government to prepare for the Bill's Committee stage by discussing with their officials, the Revenue, and Customs and Excise any suggestions made about the Bill by outside interested parties.

Secondly, although it is a matter of the procedures of the House, it would be better if there were a slightly longer period between the end of the Committee stage and the beginning of Report stage to give the Government more time to consider new drafts and explore the various legal implications of any sensible changes in the Bill's wording. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) agrees that my suggestion is along the lines of his extremely positive and constructive intervention.

It should be common ground between all of us who are concerned——

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Sit down.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman does not like what I am saying. I do not think that he cares about the quality of tax legislation or parliamentary sovereignty, although he mouths all the right rhetoric about democracy and accountability. It is a great pity that I do not receive support on such issues on which there should be consensus among all parliamentarians, irrespective of specific views on the substance or content of the policies.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): There are two advantages in changing the timetable for discussion of the

Finance Bill. First, it might mean that future debates on it would not clash with Conservative Members' visits to Buckingham palace, which interfere with proper discussion of the Bill. Secondly, future discussions would take place in the middle of winter and Conservative Members might be more concerned about Government policies to impose VAT on the fuel bills of elderly people who will suffer as a result.

Mr. Davies: I gladly concede that the hon. Gentleman is ingenious in finding ways of raising the issue of VAT. He knows my views on that; I do not attempt to avoid the subject—I have not done so in the past, and will not do so in future. I do not resent the hon. Gentleman for raising the subject once again. It seems to be, not only natural and right, but a considerable privilege for Members of Parliament occasionally to be offered invitations by Her Majesty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. What does that have to do with the amendment? I must insist that the debate continues purely and simply along the lines of the amendment.

Mr. Davies: I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will concede that it had nothing at all to do with the amendment but everything to do with the intervention of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts). You know that it is not my habit to run away from points made by hon. Members

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It must be the habit of the hon. Gentleman to take note of instructions from the Chair—two wrongs do not make a right.

Mr. Davies: I take the view of the Chair.

I shall return to the point that I was making at the beginning of that series of interventions. Although it is important for the House to be concerned about the broad strategy of fiscal policy—which is of enormous significance to the economy and the country—it is also extremely important for Parliament to be able effectively to scrutinise the details of any legislation, including those of the Finance Bill.

Those of us who were in the private sector before we came to this place know that the devil is often in the detail. One thing that we do in the private sector when we are signing or proposing to sign a contract is read the detail. Surely that principle must apply as much to the Finance Bill as to any aspect of law making.

The Labour party has made it easy for me this afternoon because it has tabled an amendment that, by general agreement, is technically deficient or would produce a complete perversity if passed because we would end up with less time for parliamentary scrutiny, not more. Therefore, I have no dilemma at all, morally or otherwise, and I can say with great enthusiasm that I shall vote against the amendment. Nevertheless, I am glad that we have had a further opportunity to discuss the broad issues of principle that have been raised in this debate.

Mr. Dorrell: We have had a wide-ranging debate on this subject this afternoon. The question before the House is relatively narrow—it concerns the consequences for parliamentary procedure of the move to a unified Budget, which was announced by the former Chancellor in the 1992 Budget.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) and other hon. Members expressed support for the principle of a unified Budget. The hon. Gentleman even let slip the phrase that he was "enthusiastically in favour of" at least this aspect of the Government's approach to budgetary matters. I am grateful for that support and I share the enthusiasm that has been expressed on both sides of the House.

As the hon. Gentleman made clear, the principal purpose of moving to a unified Budget is to ensure that debate of the budgetary proposals—whether revenue or expenditure oriented—tabled by the Government is better informed and takes place against the background of a recognition of the fiscal realities that any Government face.

It is important to be clear that we are talking about the introduction of a unified Budget. None the less, it is a Budget that will be presented to the House as the Government's proposals and for which the Government will then seek the support of the House with regard to taxation and expenditure. We are not adopting the ideas that have been discussed for many years for a green Budget. When the Finance Bill is published, it will not be in the form of a consultative document—it will be the Government's proposals, for which we shall seek the support of the House and Parliament as a whole.

Nor are we moving in the direction of splitting the traditional Finance Bill between technical measures and tax rate questions—a distinction that some people who are interested in the subject have sought to draw. That distinction is easier to describe in general theory than to recognise in precise practice. It would also lead to two Finance Bills passing through what is already a crowded legislative programme, which is not a proposal that the Government find attractive.

We are talking about a specific Government proposal that the revenue and expenditure aspects of the budgetary process should be brought together into a single process of government during the late summer and autumn of the year and a single process in Parliament that is based on the presentation of the unified Budget in late November or early December.

Against that background, I refer to the proposal tabled by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East for consideration today. He said that he did not understand why the Government felt it necessary to include in the Finance Bill specific proposals for changing the operation of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968. He asked why we had to move so quickly: why could we not simply leave things as they are and see how they work in the new world? As I explained in an intervention in his speech, simply leaving things as they are is not an option because if the existing Provisional Collection of Taxes Act were allowed to operate without amendment it would have the effect of curtailing significantly the time available for parliamentary debate.

5.15 pm

It is therefore incumbent on the Government to propose changes to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act to preserve the scope for proper parliamentary debate. The policy steer that has led to that provision being included in the Bill is that we are seeking to replicate in the new world the provisions for parliamentary scrutiny that have existed until now. Essentially, we are replicating the status quo. As I said in an intervention on the hon.

Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), we are replicating the status quo but, in so far as we are changing it at all, we are changing it in the direction of extra parliamentary time.

I shall go through the proposed changes to demonstrate to the Committee that the effect of the changes is not, as is suspected in some parts of the House, to curtail debate but simply to replicate the existing arrangements and marginally to increase the time available for debate.

First, I shall examine this subject from the point of view of the change in the total time between Budget day and the day on which the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act authority expires. Under the old system, over the past six years we have seen Budget days vary between the latest date of 20 March and the earliest date of 10 March. Let us say that, on average, Budget day in the old world was fixed at 15 March. Although we originally said that the new Budget day would be some time near the end of November or the beginning of December, we have since refined that to place the emphasis on the new Budget day being at the end of November. Therefore, I take it as a working hypothesis that the new Budget day will be 25 November.

The difference between 15 March and 25 November is roughly three months and 20 days. We have brought forward the anticipated Budget day by roughly three months and 20 days. Our proposal is to bring forward the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act day from 5 August to 5 May. That brings it forward by exactly three months. Therefore, we are bringing forward Budget day by 20 days more than we are bringing forward the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act day, the consequence being that the gap between the two dates is 20 days longer than it is under the present arrangements. That does not lead to a curtailing of parliamentary debate.

The second stage of the argument is that hon. Members say that the calculation takes no account of the effect of recesses on the time available for parliamentary scrutiny. Let us examine the effect of recesses on the lengthened time that will be available between Budget day and the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act day. Under the existing system, between 15 March and 5 August we must accommodate the Easter recess, which normally runs for between one and one and a half weeks—let us say one and a half weeks—and the Whitsun recess, which is always precisely one week. My hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) referred to time in August which is, in reality, no longer available for parliamentary scrutiny because most hon. Members would receive extremely badly the suggestion that Parliament should sit into August.

The effect of the existing arrangements is to take out of the time available for parliamentary scrutiny one and a half weeks at Easter, one week at Whit and a further week at the end of the process—a total of three and a half weeks. Under the new arrangements, we shall continue to have to accommodate the Easter recess in one and a half weeks, and the Christmas recess, running probably to three weeks. So there will be four and a half weeks of recess time —an increase in the amount of recess time falling between Budget day and PCTA day of roughly one week. Of the 20 days extra time available, on a crude analysis one week or seven days is taken by extra recesses, leaving an additional 14 days—13 on the precise mathematics—available for parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Let us be clear what we are quarrelling about. Our fear is that under the new structure the Finance Bill will not be published until after Christmas and that there will be unstoppable pressure to complete the Committee stage before the Easter recess. If the Financial Secretary can say either that the Finance Bill will be published before Christmas—so that we and interested parties may study it over Christmas—or that the Government will be willing to continue the Committee stage after the Easter recess, our objections will be met.

Mr. Dorrell: I made it clear in Committee, and I repeat, that I cannot give an assurance that in all circumstances the Finance Bill will be published before Christmas. Nor can I give an absolute assurance that in all years, however late Easter falls, the Committee stage will continue after Easter. What if, for example, Easter fell at the end of March? It does not seem inconceivable that the Committee stage could continue after an Easter day falling in March. The key point is that we must leave time after the Committee stage for Report and Third Reading on the Floor of the House and due time for the Bill to be considered briefly in another place.

If the PCTA date is moved to 5 May as the Government propose, it does not seem to follow that in a normal year Third Reading in this House need be at any time before 30 April. So if the procedure in this House is to close on 30 April and Easter is in March, it is clearly possible to encompass a final week in Committee in April and Report and Third Reading in time for the process to be completed by the end of April.

I had intended to deal with that point by considering the timetable. The third perspective on the timetable is that under the existing arrangements the Finance Bill has been published in recent years roughly on 15 April. In practice, under the existing arrangements we must complete Third Reading in this House by 25 July, which is three months and 10 days. Under the new arrangements, even if the Finance Bill is published after Christmas—it would be published about 10 January—I do not think that in normal circumstances it would be necessary for us to complete Third Reading in this House before 30 April.

Under the new arrangements, therefore, the time between publication and Third Reading would be three months and 20 days, whereas under the existing arrangements the time between publication and Third Reading is three months and 10 days. On that analysis, roughly 10 days more parliamentary time would be available for considering the Finance Bill than there is under the existing arrangements.

I have not sought to argue that under our proposals there will be massive extra time for parliamentary scrutiny. I argue that they broadly replicate our present arrangements and that, in so far as they amend them, they do so by increasing the effective time available for consideration of the issues in this House by making available anything up to 10 days of extra parliamentary time. On that basis, I commend the Government's proposals to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 236, Noes 293.

Division No. 328] **[5.24 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Adams, Mrs Irene	Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ainger, Nick	Armstrong, Hilary
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Allen, Graham	Barnes, Harry
Alton, David	Barron, Kevin

Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Meale and
Mr. Gordon McMaster.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David

Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 207

RESIDENCE: AVAILABLE ACCOMMODATION

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I beg to move amendment No. 28, in page 160, line 24, leave out from beginning to end of line 4 on page 161.

A Budget that raises taxes, extends value added tax to domestic fuel, readjusts advance corporation tax in such a way as to impose a substantial burden on charities and pension funds, places a 1 per cent. increase on employees' national insurance contributions, refrains from indexing allowances and, in particular, restricts mortgage tax relief and married couple's allowance to the new 20 per cent. tax band, especially when combined with significant increases in excise duties—most noticeably, duties on petrol and cigarettes—is a tax-raising Budget.

The House now has a rare opportunity to discuss a tax concession. Admittedly, it is one that will cost only some £10 million in 1994-95. Nevertheless, it is a reduction in the tax burden. Over and over again, the Chief Secretary has spoken about the need for deficit reduction, tax increases and public expenditure cuts. Admittedly, he says less about why we are in this position, and he did not make these points so forcefully before the last general election, but he makes them emphatically now.

Let us take the Chief Secretary at his word. Let us also take at his word the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who said yesterday:

"If one's country is bust".—*[Official Report*, 12 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 757.]

We were also told by the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) that the Budget contains serious errors of judgment. If we are indeed in such difficult circumstances, as even Conservative Members seem to allege that we are, it must be extraordinarily difficult—I think that we understand the difficulty—for the Government to give a tax break to anyone. However, after careful consideration, the Conservative Government have found a group of people who, even in these difficult times, require a tax concession.

Who are these people? I know that the most compassionate of my hon. Friends, amazed at the

discovery of a group of disadvantaged citizens so deserving of relief that even this Government have noticed their plight, will be wondering if enough is being done for those people. Suggestions of food parcels, perhaps, could well emanate from my hon. Friends.

These people are not the poorest, most downtrodden in our society. This relief that the parliamentary Labour party is seeking to withdraw is to go to people who have substantial means, who are rich—people to whom the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), the former Chancellor, used to refer as the internationally mobile. This concession to them is being made at a time when the rest of the people of this country are being urged to tighten their belts.

The clause weakens the available accommodation test for residency. It is a relief that, were he to return to this country—if only to ask for his money back from the Conservative party—would be available to Mr. Asil Nadir. There are those who think that the Conservative party has already done enough to help Mr. Nadir, but that is clearly not the view of Treasury Ministers. Indeed, his plight—not his flight—and that of those like him was given extra special consideration by the Financial Secretary before the clause was inserted in the Bill.

In Committee, I was able to make reference to the script for a first-rate Granada Television "World in Action" programme that dealt with tax avoidance and evasion. There was a scene in it—to which I did not refer in Committee but which, I am sure, will inform the debate on the Floor of the House—that included a very familiar landmark, and the commentator said that this was another of Asil Nadir's tax havens. You will be astonished to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this was a shot of the fountain in Trafalgar square. The commentary went on as follows:

"WORLD IN ACTION has discovered that UK tax rules allowed Nadir a privileged status known as non domicile. So although he was one of the richest men living in Britain he paid comparatively little tax here. But our tax laws allowed Nadir to acquire several homes in Britain. Through an offshore trust he owned a country mansion, Baggrave Hall in Leicestershire."

The commentator went on to quote a tax partner from Moores Rowland, a Mr. Eastaway, who said:

"To have a non UK domicile is one of the great secrets of turning the United Kingdom into a tax haven."

5.45 pm

I am not sure that the House wants to turn the United Kingdom into a tax haven. I am certainly not sure that, in this time of stringency, when substantial imposts are necessary for all our other fellow citizens, we should be making an albeit relatively modest relaxation in the rules to give money to people who already seem to have rather large sums of money available to them. I do not understand why we should do that, especially in the present economic climate.

The Financial Secretary, in fairness to him, tried to explain it in Committee. As an explanation of why the clause was in the Bill, he said:

"It was represented to me, very persuasively, that"—the clause——"has dissuaded business men—and, indeed, tourists, though my principal concern is business men—from including this country in the range of options that they consider when making business decisions."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 24 June 1993; c. 592.]

The words that stick in my mind from that speech are "very persuasively". I am not certain what the Financial Secretary meant by those words, but "Business Age" magazine draws our attention to some £71 million worth of unexplained money in the Conservative party's accounts. "Business Age" has provided a helpful guide to the big donors and their possible motivation, on the assumption that that motivation extends beyond disinterested public spirit.

The reason most frequently cited for giving these large donations to the Conservative party is that it is in recognition and support of the Government's retention of favourable tax breaks for United Kingdom overseas subjects. Those donors are just the sort of people who could benefit from the changes that we are now discussing.

What sort of an argument is £71 million? To borrow an expression from the Financial Secretary, it is a very persuasive argument. It is my contention that if, in difficult times, it is necessary to increase the tax burden on our fellow citizens, any concession has to be very carefully considered. This is a concession to very rich people who do not, in any event, pay their fair share of tax in this country. We make this concession at a time when we are being asked, in the same Finance Bill, to make the most regressive changes to the value added tax regime that it would be possible to devise.

Let me make it clear that I would not give these tax-dodging scoundrels the benefit of this clause in any event. It is a handout from the public purse that cannot be justified. In the present circumstances, it is positively grotesque.

Mr. Beith: I share the view of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) that this is a worrying aspect of the Finance Bill. Like him, I studied the "Business Age" list of a series of donors to the Conservative party and was very struck by the way in which the motives were listed. There appeared again and again the motive of supporting the maintenance of tax breaks for United Kingdom subjects overseas. There were one or two large donors whose motives were described as completely unexplained. But there was a very large group —it includes people who, I believe, would say this quite clearly, and probably publicly, if asked—who were grateful to the present Government of the United Kingdom for maintaining a situation in which they felt that they were relatively favourably treated under United Kingdom tax laws. The sort of concession which is at the heart of that is the ability to take advantage of the residence rules.

It is difficult for Ministers to detach themselves from these issues when explaining them to the House. It is particularly difficult for the Paymaster General. When he was the Conservative party's vice-chairman and working at Conservative central office, I think that all these things must have passed him by. I cannot imagine that he was involved with any of the mysterious, undisclosed accounts that were published by river companies. I think that they just stuck him behind a desk, that it all passed him by and that it was handled by other people. I suspect that a lot of that goes on in Conservative central office.

What is becoming increasingly clear, however, is that a large number of people overseas are now prepared to put very substantial sums of money in the way of the Conservative party, if it is considered appropriate to do so, by way of accounts held overseas whose purposes are unidentified. Some people and some groups are prepared

[Mr. Beith]

to do that because they like the tax treatment that is afforded to United Kingdom subjects who are resident abroad.

There are other motives. There are those who want a favourable regulatory regime for their companies. Others are concerned about foreign policy issues. The single largest group, however, appears to be those who find this kind of tax treatment advantageous to them. When the Minister seeks to explain this, he will be judged not simply by his explanation but against the background of the substantial donations that have been made to his party by people who like this sort of thing.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) sounded more than mildly implausible when whipping themselves into a synthetic fury over this question. If it were true that the Government were interested in finding ways of safeguarding nefarious activities of the kind about which they are both concerned, it is profoundly improbable that it would have been this Government who tabled a proposal in 1988 to revise precisely the rules that apply now to the taxation of United Kingdom residents who are not domiciled in this country.

The issues that the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Gentleman have hinted at are on the table and in the public domain at least in part because the Government published a consultative document in 1988 that launched public discussion of exactly the issues that they raised. Neither of them, however, chose to tell the House about the results of that consultation. Virtually with one voice, the representations to the Government on that subject, from those of all political persuasions, were that it would be damaging to Britain's interests to go down the route that had been suggested in the consultative document, a document tabled on the authority of Ministers of this Government in 1988.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Most of the representations—not all of them, I accept—were from people who would be disadvantaged if the changes were made.

Mr. Dorrell: That hardly distinguishes this representation from any other representations in which the Government are engaged. My point is that the overwhelming majority of the representations were hostile to the ideas that Ministers of this Government had tabled.

Arguments were advanced in principle against the proposals. The arguments that were advanced—by, I stress, people of all political points of view—were precisely from the perspective of the disadvantaged citizen, the perspective that was espoused so eloquently by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East. The argument was—I find it persuasive—that to go down the route envisaged in the 1988 consultative document would make this country a less attractive place in which internationally mobile business men, whom the hon. Gentleman correctly identified as a legitimate target for consideration, could do business.

It was for that reason that the proposals in the consultative document were dropped. The announcement was made in 1989. As far as I know, there was no great outcry from either the Labour party or the Liberal Democrats when the decision was announced, because it was recognised to be in response to public concern.

The clause is motivated by precisely the same perspective and the same thought processes as those that led to the dropping of the 1988 proposal—that when considering who should pay tax in this country, the Government ought to pay regard to the proper priorities if we are to attract internationally mobile business activity to the United Kingdom. It was for that reason that we dropped the 1988 proposal. We did so in response to public consultation. Precisely the same reasons led us to table the clause; therefore, I oppose amendment No. 28.

I want tax to be raised fairly from people who are resident in this country. I also want there to be a tax system that is friendly to internationally mobile businesses. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East made it clear that he regards that as a secondary objective. I regard it as a primary objective.

Amendment negatived.

Schedule 2

VALUE ADDED TAX: PENALTIES ETC.

Amendment made: No. 16, in page 167, line 13, leave out 'and' and insert—

'(aa) in paragraph (b) of subsection (5) of that section, for the words from "have power" to the end of that paragraph there shall be substituted "have power under section 15A below to reduce a penalty under this section,"; and'.—*[Sir John Cope.]*

Schedule 5

REMOVAL EXPENSES AND BENEFITS

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 200, line 26, leave out '6th April 1993' and insert '4th April 1994'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 13, in page 200, line 28, leave out '6th April 1993' and insert '4th April 1994'.

No. 11, in page 200, line 30, leave out '6th April 1993' and insert '4th April 1994'.

Mr. Beith: This group of amendments is all about relocation expenses and their tax treatment. The amendments would delay the implementation of the new regime for taxing relocation expenses.

The issue was dealt with fairly extensively in Committee, but we were unable then to persuade the Government to raise the cap that they have placed on those relocation expenses that are non-taxable. We proposed that that tax threshold should be very much higher to reflect the real relocation costs. We propose in the amendments that there should at least be a transitional period.

The Government have just told us how important it is to provide favourable—indeed, generous—tax treatment to internationally mobile business men, yet they have failed to accept the case put to them by British industry that there should be more favourable tax treatment of those who are forced to move if business in this country is to be successful and efficient.

We are talking about firms that need to relocate people, if they are to succeed. We are referring to firms that have

to cope with major changes in their industry and in their markets. We are referring also to firms that are having to adapt and to firms that are feeling the consequences of the recession, yet they are trying to keep people in employment. Often, the only way in which they can keep people in employment and avoid redundancy is by relocation. They may relocate a whole plant to another site, or they may strengthen, through importing skilled people, a plant that would otherwise go to the wall. Relocation of this kind is important if businesses are to be flexible and able to adapt.

Relocation is difficult to achieve in the United Kingdom context, because of our housing problems. The rented housing sector is largely dominated by local authority housing, which makes it very difficult for people to move from one area to another. The private housing sector has been severely affected by the consequences of the recession. When, therefore, a company says to somebody, "We want you to move," he is likely to reply, "I can't afford to move on my wages." The company then has to construct a package that makes it feasible for that person to move.

The package will often involve help with removal expenses, but that is only the beginning of the story. It may be some time before the person concerned can sell his house or buy a house in the area where he has been relocated. All sorts of additional ancillary costs that affect families may be involved. Most of the firms involved—for example, Barclays bank, which does a great deal of this, estimate that the cost of relocation is between £20,000 and £30,000. That is the average cost of many of these removal and relocation packages. The Government, however, have set their face against accepting that that is the average cost of relocation packages. We seek to persuade them at least to make provision for a transitional period.

I have said that the Government have set their face against relocation expenses at this level. That is not quite the case. Among people in the public sector, there has been considerable concern about how, given the provision, they will relocate. Several Government Departments are involved in substantial relocation activity. Indeed, hon. Members of all parties have been trying to persuade the Government to relocate some of their work—to transfer it from the south-east to the areas of highest unemployment, for example.

6 pm

Other factors are involved in the relocation of Government Departments. Am I right in thinking that the Treasury has approved the grossing up of relocation expenses above the £8,000 limit paid to civil servants? Is it true that Departments know perfectly well that £8,000 is well below the real figure? I believe that they know perfectly well that much larger relocation packages will be necessary. It seems to me that Departments have been told by the Treasury that £8,000 is a figure plucked out of the air to be put in the Finance Bill. It appears that the Treasury is saying, "If you find that it is necessary to pay people £15,000, £20,000 or £25,000, you must gross up the amount. You must pay that amount plus what is necessary to bring it up to the amount originally intended." It is nonsensical if the Treasury itself—the very Department responsible for the Bill—has already admitted that the amount is too small and if Departments are already being told to get around the rules so that people may receive the much larger amounts that they know are involved.

It is likely that the Government's proposal will be harmful to industry. Firms will have difficulty with relocation packages unless they adopt the strategy that the Treasury is suggesting to Government Departments. Labour mobility will be harmed and relocation costs will be increased. Firms will have to gross up, as the Treasury suggests. There may be even harm to inward investment, which often involves foreign firms in the relocation of personnel in order to have key people at a new plant. Firms already struggling with relocation because they must concentrate operations on a single site will face higher costs. Training will be undermined as firms lay off partially trained people and re-employ to save on the expenses of relocating skilled people.

In these circumstances, the very least we must ask of the Government is that they provide a little more time for industry to adapt to the new and very restrictive regime. The proposals extend to a 12-page schedule, so they will clearly be quite complicated to implement. A period of grace would at least be of some help. If a new system were started on 6 April, there would be a period of notice of only two weeks—the interval between the Budget and the beginning of the financial year. No business plans relocation on the basis of a two-week period. Relocations are planned on a time scale of months or years. Many relocations already in progress have been planned long ago. In some cases, employees will be liable to tax on, say, £25,000—or £25,000 minus £8,000—while in others they will not, depending on the removal date. Some people in a firm will be adversely affected. If there were a period of notice—if this provision did not have to be implemented until next April—firms could plan around the scheme; thus, we could avoid a situation in which some people involved in a particular relocation exercise were much more favourably treated, from a tax point of view, than others.

Industry ought to be given some time to adapt. I hope that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury will not further distract the Financial Secretary as this is a matter that industry regards as very important. A period of grace would at least help us through the worst of the aftermath of the recession. The Government's view—we all hope that they are right—is that recovery is under way. A further year before the falling of the axe on tax-free relocation expenses would give a little more opportunity to firms still adapting as a direct consequence of recession, so that they would not have to abandon relocation packages on the ground that they could not afford them, or gross up at considerably greater cost.

It is clear that Departments recognise that the Government's £8,000 is inadequate. Obviously, the Treasury is aware of that fact. Industry feels very strongly about the matter—I have in mind the Confederation of British Industry, the Engineering Employers Federation and many other organisations. This is a last chance for the Government at least to provide a little more time before implementation of their proposal.

Mr. Dorrell: The right hon. Gentleman has made it clear that he favours a system that encourages flexibility where it is necessary for a business to move its operations. He agrees that unnecessary obstacles should not be put in the way of such mobility. I agree. It is important that the system be sufficiently flexible to facilitate mobility where it is clearly in an employer's interests to move an activity from one part of the country to another. But that is rather

[Mr. Dorrell]

different from the notion that mobility is a public good, that employers should receive tax treatment to encourage them to make some of their activities mobile. When an employer decides to move an activity from one area to another, he should not have to deal with unnecessary obstacles. However, the tax system should not in any way encourage such a decision. In this regard, the system and the public interest should be entirely neutral.

The changes that we are introducing remove what has amounted to a mild tax subsidy for a particular type of activity. The right hon. Gentleman has suggested that some people regard £25,000 removal packages as the norm. I simply do not believe that that is the normal cost of moving an individual from one part of the country to another. If it is the average, how is it that anybody ever moves house other than when paid by his employer to do so? Hon. Members ought to bring their critical faculties to bear on questions that we debate. Representations from interested groups to the effect that the average removal cost is £25,000 should be subjected to critical analysis. If they were analysed critically, they would be found to be wanting. The right hon. Gentleman asked me about grossing up in the case of public sector employees. That is not unknown, although we examine cases critically. When grossing up takes place, whether in this or in any other context, it is for Departments to decide what they need to do within the resources available to them. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary made the position very clear in the Standing Committee: he said that he would not entertain a suggestion that extra resources should flow to a Department that wanted to move people and to pay individuals' tax associated with the removal. Indeed, this flows from the policy stance that the Government have consistently adopted in respect of grossing up in the case of civil servants' tax bills.

Mr. Beith: I accept that no additional resources will be provided to enable Departments to gross up, but I should like to ask the Financial Secretary to confirm that Departments are examining, or have had to examine, relocation packages of more than £8,000, for which grossing up must be considered.

Mr. Dorrell: If a Department chose to gross up, it would be because it had decided that it needed to make a payment to a civil servant in respect of a removal in excess of £8,000. It is not a question whether the figure in excess of £8,000 includes an amount that is properly defined as betterment and, therefore, properly taxable. Spending Departments make payments to civil servants all the time, which are subject to tax. The question is not whether the payment is exceptional but whether it should be subject to tax. Against that background, we recognise that in order to move civil servants, or to encourage people in other walks of life to move, grossing up payments will be made. The principle is that the payment includes an element of betterment which is properly subjected to income tax. That principle underlies the provisions.

The Government have tabled what we believe are sensible proposals for transition. I cannot commend the amendment. The House should be aware that its practical effect would be not to extend the transition period but to abolish it. The Government have already withdrawn the extra statutory concessions with effect from 5 April this year, which were the arrangements whereby removal expenses were previously exempt from tax. It is only by allowing the Bill to be passed in its present form that the transitional provisions would reach the statute book. Although the right hon. Gentleman may have preferred a longer transitional period, I hope that he will recognise that the effect of the amendment would be not to lengthen but to abolish the transitional arrangements proposed by the Government. Against that background, I hope that he will feel able to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Beith: I do not accept the Minister's technical argument. We know that the matter proceeded on the basis that the extra statutory concession was withdrawn after a decision by Ministers. The extra statutory concession could have been used and could still be used as a vehicle for concession.

I do not accept the Minister's rather cavalier approach to grossing up. In this context, as in most others, grossing up is a device to ensure that what the employee and the employer—in this case, the employer being the Government—think might reasonably be a tax-free payment is still treated as if it were a tax-free payment and that the sum that the person involved receives in his hand is the same as if the payment had been tax free. It is a device, and one that should not be commended by the Treasury. The fact that the Treasury commends it suggests that the Treasury recognises internally that it has gone too far in setting the £8,000 limit.

For the Minister to argue that the issue should be dealt with in a tax-neutral way, and that it is wrong to treat relocation as a public good and therefore to allow any sort of concession, is an argument against having even a £8,000 limit. The logic of his case is that there should be no concession at all.

Ministers should be cautious about using the public good argument in matters of mobility. As they are transported to work in their chauffeur-driven cars on journeys on which they pay no tax, unlike other people, I hope that they will recline in their leather-covered seats —if they qualify for cars that have such seats—and ask themselves whether there is really any public good in their journeys being tax free. They should realise that other people have been told by their employers that if they want to keep their jobs they must move to the other end of the country, when the most that employers can put together to make such a move feasible, and without their paying tax, is £8,000. Otherwise, all the costs that employers find it necessary to subsidise, such as the cost of keeping two houses going until one can be sold, will be treated as a taxable benefit and the person involved will be taxed on it. That is not reasonable, and it is a perfectly sound argument for carrying the protest to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 38, Noes 300.

Division No. 329] **[6.13 pm**

AYES

Alton, David	Connarty, Michael
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Corbyn, Jeremy
Barnes, Harry	Cryer, Bob
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.	Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Bennett, Andrew F.	Graham, Thomas
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Harvey, Nick
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Hoey, Kate
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*	Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Canavan, Dennis	Johnston, Sir Russell
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*	Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*

Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Don Foster and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgld)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David

Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule 20

LLOYD'S UNDERWRITERS: SPECIAL RESERVE FUNDS

Amendment made: No. 6, in page 291, line 42, at end insert—

'(3) The arrangements must be such as to secure that, except as required or permitted (whether expressly or by necessary implication) by this Part or Part II of this Schedule, no payments shall be made into or out of the member's special reserve fund.'.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Amendment proposed: No. 21, in page 294, leave out lines 27 to 29.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 236, Noes 312.

Division No. 330] **[6.27 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Tipping, Paddy
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gordon McMaster and Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.

Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

6.38 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Portillo): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

[Mr. Michael Portillo]

It is some time since the Budget. We have been involved since then in detailed discussion of the Bill in Committee, and it is perhaps timely to set the Finance (No. 2) Bill once more in its strategic context.

Recently, there has been a lot of good news about the economy. We have had growth in the gross domestic product for the past three quarters and encouraging statistics on inflation and industrial production. We have seen the latest figures for retail sales rising by 3 per cent., and there has been good performance on exports. Business optimism is at its highest level for 10 years and today's figures for manufacturing output show that it rose by 1·8 per cent. in May. In the first five months of the year, manufacturing output recovered by more than half the total loss it sustained during the recession. In the past four months, even the figures for unemployment have been encouraging, very much against the expectations of many commentators.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development forecasts that Britain will have the fastest growth of any major European Community country in 1993, and that that will be repeated in 1994. Those are all encouraging statistics. The principal threat to our economic prospects now comes from the size of our fiscal deficit.

The threat posed by the size of the deficit is not removed by the series of good figures that we have had, although recovery is now clearly established across a range of indicators in the economy. Part of our deficit is caused by the cycle, by reduced receipts to the Government, and by extra money that the Government have to pay out in benefits to the unemployed. None the less, the Government have made provision in their new public spending plans to count separately those elements that are due to the cycle, and to focus upon the new control total.

Whatever the extent of the cyclical elements within the present fiscal deficit, to say that some elements are cyclical is not the same as saying that they will unwind automatically at the end of the recession. If one went to one's bank manager and said that one's large overdraft did not matter because it was merely cyclical, the bank manager would not be impressed, and would not let one off paying the debt interest.

That is the position in which the Government find themselves. The burden of debt interest is rising sharply and, over the next few years, it will rise by £10 billion a year. That is money that cannot be devoted to the public spending programmes that many of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members might regard as desirable.

There are important reasons why the Government should maintain control of the public sector deficit. I do not believe that the people of this country who have had to make great sacrifices during the recession, or those in business who have had to retrench during the recession, have any desire to see their Government living beyond their means on a sustained basis, and there can be no moral case for doing so.

That is why the Government have developed a medium-term strategy for dealing with our public sector borrowing requirement. We have also embarked on establishing a rhythm of good decision making, which is a vital ingredient for the restoration of confidence.

The autumn statement was made in November by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont). It set out for three years ahead the Government's public spending plans. In March this year, the Budget set taxation policy in a medium-term context, setting out the tax increases that will occur over the next three years.

That has been translated into the Finance (No. 2) Bill, consideration of which we are completing today. I believe that the rhythm of decision making—of decisions well thought out, well presented and stuck to—is a vital ingredient in restoring confidence. Its effects can now be seen in growing confidence, in the business optimism survey, which I have already quoted, which is the best for 10 years, and in the performance of the markets, with recent pressure on the pound being, if anything, upward rather than downward.

Mr. Betts: Of the £50 billion deficit this year, will the Chief Secretary tell the House how much he regards as cyclical, which will unwind naturally as part of any recovery, and how much is structural and will not unwind? Does he accept that there could be considerable damage to the unwinding of the cyclical element if the Government acted at the wrong time in the cycle to tackle the structural element?

Mr. Portillo: I should make it clear that to say that something is cyclical and that it will unwind is not the same thing. For example, the increase in the burden of debt interest is clearly cyclical, inasmuch as it is caused by the fact that the Government are borrowing more because they are spending more and receiving less. The fact that we have made those extra borrowings will not lead, at the end of the recession and when recovery is well under way, to our being let off the debt interest payment. The debt interest payment will still have to be made on the borrowings that have been incurred. So that which is cyclical and that which will unwind are not the same.

That is why, although one could make guesses about the cyclical element within the PSBR, the Government are rightly wary of pursuing that argument too far, because they recognise that not all the elements will unwind at the end of the period.

The Government are headed in the direction of reducing the public sector borrowing requirement by three routes: growth in the economy, which will help to reduce the cyclical elements to which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) referred and which will mean that there will be less to spend on social security and that the Government's receipts will increase; the constraint of public spending; and the tax rises announced in the Budget.

I recognise that some of the measures in the Bill are unpopular with my hon. Friends and in the country. That is why I should like to thank my hon. Friends for the support that they have given to the measures in the Bill. It is in no way satisfying to me to have to propose tax increases to my hon. Friends, but I hope that at least it has dealt with the myth that, in some way, to raise taxes is an easy option, whereas to constrain public spending is not.

Both constraining public spending and raising taxes are extremely difficult. My hon. Friends have been willing to support the difficult measures proposed in the Bill because they value the objective of achieving, above all, sound public finances. They are committed to restoring the

Government's finances. They recognise that the Government must not live beyond their means, and that that is what is expected of us by the people we govern.

Fairness is extremely important in the package that we put together. My hon. Friends have found difficult the proposals to extend VAT to fuel and power. I remind them that we have taken care in the Budget and the Bill to ensure that the extra taxes that we have to raise fall proportionately across the various divisions of income.

In the full year of the effects of the Bill, we will be raising an extra £10·5 billion of revenue. Of that, only £2·3 billion comes from the extension of VAT to fuel and power. The money will also come from the changed taxation of dividends, the change in taxation for the married couples allowance for those on higher tax rates, changes in taxation on company cars and the different treatment of mortgage interest relief, again confined to 20 per cent., and therefore affecting in particular those people on higher rates of tax.

Therefore, I believe that we have produced a package that is fair to people across the income ranges and I think it has been recognised as such by independent commentators.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): Since the Chief Secretary says that fairness is important, can he tell the House, and in particular his hon. Friends whom he will ask to vote to impose VAT on gas and electricity, how much money he will put into the compensation scheme to ensure that it does not disadvantage the poor, the elderly and those with disabilities?

Mr. Portillo: No, I cannot give an exact answer. The appropriate time to make that announcement will be in the autumn. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security is under an obligation to make an uprating statement to the House in the autumn, and when he does so he will take into account all the factors which at the time affect his judgment about what the appropriate uprating should be. I do not believe that it is right to try to prejudice the decision that is best taken at that time.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Chief Secretary said that there were three routes for controlling the Budget deficit—restraining spending, increasing taxes and growth. He did not give any idea of the proportions that he thought would be contributed by each of those avenues. Can he give us a broad-brush idea of, for example, how much of the PSBR he expects to be dealt with by increased growth?

Mr. Portillo: The present prospects for the course of the PSBR and all the assumptions on growth and on other matters are set out in the Red Book. They show a declining path for the PSBR over the next five years. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to study those assumptions, he will find them all set out. What can be answered with absolute precision is the contribution to be made from taxation, which is an extra £6·5 billion in 1994-95, and £10·5 billion in 1995-96.

The Government are concerned not just with borrowing, important though that is, but also with the level of public spending. That has now reached a level of around 45 per cent. of GDP. The Government believe that the burden imposed by public spending on the wealth-creating sector should be kept to a minimum. If that burden is allowed to grow too much, it will choke off the wealth-creating sector.

We believe that those who create the wealth in our society should be left with the lion's share of that wealth. We do not believe that the state has a pre-emptive right to help itself to more than half of what is produced by the people of the country.

The Government are wary of the burden that is imposed by the state, and we have therefore now embarked upon a new public spending round. We confirmed, following last month's Cabinet meeting, that the new control total figures in cash that we intend to achieve for 1994-95 and 1995-96 are the same as those that were announced at the time of last year's autumn statement and which were confirmed in the Red Book, published at the time of the Budget.

The targets that we have set ourselves are challenging —perhaps more challenging than my hon. Friends realise. They assume virtually no growth in real terms, either between this year and next year or between next year and the year after.

Within the total of public spending that has been so restricted, important pressures have been set up by programmes that are demand-led. In particular, I think of education; many more students are predicted to go into higher education in the years ahead. There are also the demands from social security, which is far and away the largest public spending programme.

The task that faces us is to find ways of reducing the trend rate of growth of programmes. If public spending is limited as a total to zero growth in real terms, but some programmes within it, such as social security, are growing by 3 per cent. in real terms, that obviously sets up a problem. We must reduce the trend rate of growth of those programmes, and probably make savings in other programmes.

I have been gratified by the support that my hon. Friends have given to the Government's objectives for the control of public spending. Their support makes the task a great deal easier. I hope that, when we come to propose specific measures to the House, we shall find the same support for the specific measures which are necessary to deliver those totals which have the support of my hon. Friends. Public spending control is important, because it plays a vital part in establishing Britain's competitiveness.

During the 1980s, Britain's proportion of GDP that was taken up by public spending moved from close to and sometimes above the EC average to a level well below the EC average, and much closer to the American average, although still some way above the Japanese average. That is still true today.

The amount of public spending within GDP is an important component in the competitiveness of this country. It has enabled us to run low rates of taxation that are attractive to investors and to people who want to do business, and has also provided good incentives to people in this country who are doing business. We forget the attraction of low rates of direct taxation at our peril.

The Bill is crafted to impose the minimum disincentive upon our economy, and to maintain incentives to help industry to keep costs low. Of all the recent statistics on the British economy, the improvement in competitiveness has been the most satisfying and perhaps the most important. We have seen productivity grow by 8 per cent. in the past year to its highest ever level. Unit labour costs have fallen

[Mr. Portillo]

by about 3 per cent., whereas German unit labour costs rose last year by 10 per cent. The wage increases in British industry today are lower than at any time for 25 years.

I pay tribute to British management for many of those achievements. One would not expect productivity to rise during a recession. One would expect businesses to find it difficult to cut their costs as fast as they are losing orders. But British business has improved productivity to a record level and, as a consequence, we expect that competitiveness will improve by 20 per cent. in a single year. We also expect British business to improve its share of world trade for the first time in three decades.

Exports are at a record level, up by 6·5 per cent. on a year ago. Competitiveness should concern not only this country but the rest of the EC. The Community has been out-performed in economic terms by Japan in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The EC was also out-performed by the United States in the 1980s. The prospect, I am afraid, is that the EC will continue to be outperformed by both the US and Japan.

That is why it is important to maintain competitiveness and protect incentives in the way that the Bill does. It is also important, of course, that we remain firmly outside the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty, which would drive up our costs to the highest levels in Europe, and would affect our competitiveness.

Mr. Beith: The Minister pays tribute to British management. What about the British workers? They, after all, have shown great flexibility and have adapted to new technologies. A fair proportion of their colleagues and friends have now found themselves out of work as part of the process of bringing about lower costs for some manufacturing companies.

Mr. Portillo: I agree that the costs of the recession have been felt by everyone in Britain. That is one of the reasons why the Government must not be the only institution in Britain not to feel the effects of the recession.

I recognise that immense costs have been paid by those who have become unemployed. I also recognise the flexibility of the British labour market, which is and will continue to be one of its great strengths in the years ahead. It may be too early to tell, but one of the reasons why the unemployment figures have turned may be the greater flexibility of the United Kingdom labour market. If so, I pay tribute to both management and to work force.

I also pay tribute, if I may, to Government policies, which have, in the face of opposition from the Opposition parties, created a more flexible and more responsive labour market, which has enabled Britain to be competitive and unemployment to fall.

I hope that unemployment falls more quickly, as the recovery comes upon the economy, than it did in the 1980s. All the strategies that I have talked about are clearly exemplified within the Finance Bill, and demonstrate the Government's clear medium-term policy for the British economy.

I am bound to ask myself, "What has been offered to us by the Opposition? What have they put up by way of reasonable alternatives during discussions on the Bill?" First of all, I turn to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). Ideally, a Chief Secretary to the Treasury should be flinty-faced, stony-hearted and odious. I believe that I fit the bill. But the shadow Chief Secretary also should be flinty-faced, stony-hearted and odious. To what extent does the hon. Lady fit the bill? Is she flinty-faced? No, she is kind and radiant-faced. Is she stony-hearted? No, she is open-hearted. She is generous to a fault. She wants to spend money on any good cause that is put her way. Those are not the natural instincts of a Chief Secretary.

Is the hon. Lady odious? Do Opposition spokesmen tremble over their pens when writing their speeches, worrying that they may inadvertently commit the Labour party to a new promise on public spending that has not been approved by the shadow Chief Secretary? I fear that they do not fear the hon. Lady. Indeed, I am afraid that they could not fear the hon. Lady. I am tempted to say that she has fragrance, and fragrance is not something which any Chief Secretary or shadow Chief Secretary should have.

My hon. Friends may protest that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) may appear better qualified for the job of shadow Chief Secretary. He is Grim Gordon, Gloomy Gordon, Glowering Gordon—indeed, anything other than Gay Gordon. He probably would make an admirable shadow Chief Secretary. Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman is shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, and it is incumbent upon him to come up with an economic policy. What have we had from the hon. Gentleman? He wishes to spend the receipts that are held by local authorities. He wishes, he says, to bring down unemployment to bring about a recovery. Both those aims demonstrate such complete economic illiteracy that I want to share it with the House.

If one were to spend the receipts of local authorities, which have after all been set aside against their debts, one would increase public borrowing and public spending. To say that one would be able to bring about recovery by reducing unemployment is nothing but a fudge. The House knows perfectly well that a recovery produced by the economic policies that we follow can reduce unemployment. It is not possible to reverse the process and say that one can reduce unemployment and thus bring about recovery.

The economy needs sound finances. It needs policies for sound finances. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East offers sound-bite finances. His policies were described by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) as sound bites strung together, and they do not constitute an economic policy. Unfortunately, that is all that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has to offer.

Moving up the scale, we come to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the Leader of the Opposition. He is the man who stands at the Opposition Dispatch Box and amuses the House. He is the man who makes speeches about hotels falling off cliffs and the grand national not starting properly, blames that on the Government and gets a laugh. One would think that he was auditioning to be the host of "Clive Anderson Talks Back". He is supposed to be auditioning for the role of Prime Minister. It is an extremely sad reflection on him that he is unable to come up to scratch. All around the country——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to sound like a spoilsport, but, before the right hon. Gentleman continues, I must ask what this has to do with the Third Reading of the Finance Bill.

Mr. Portillo: The connection with the Finance Bill, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that, during the passage of the Finance Bill, we had hoped to hear an exposition from the Opposition spokesmen about the Labour party's policies. Unfortunately, and to conclude this section, we have instead found a complete failure by the Opposition to put themselves forward as a reasonable Opposition and an alternative Government.

There is not a boardroom, factory floor or council estate in the country where any confidence is felt in the policies of the Opposition, even when people have read carefully the proceedings of the Finance Bill upstairs.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): So that the House can get him off the hook of that last passage, will the Chief Secretary now turn to serious matters and discuss the situation that will arise in the autumn when we will have the combined Budget? He has decided so much of the public expenditure that is settled for the next few years, much of which cannot be changed during the autumn Budget. What he can do in that Budget is raise taxation. He cannot adjust the balance between expenditure and revenue, because so much of the expenditure is already settled on.

Mr. Portillo: The right hon. Gentleman, by his tone, puts that forward as a criticism. The Government established a medium-term strategy for public spending, which is set out in the Finance Bill, and in all logic it will now bring together in a single statement both our plans for public spending—the details of how those totals are to be achieved—and our plans for taxation—any changes that may need to be made from the plans set out in the Finance Bill.

The right hon. Gentleman is criticising, apparently, the medium-term clarity that has been established by the Government. That clarity is, in my view, one of the great underlying strengths of our approach. That is also the view of the markets, which have shown their confidence over recent months.

Our economic strategy, as shown by the Bill, is clear. It extends beyond the three years covered by the public expenditure survey and beyond the years covered in the Bill. It clearly tells the nation what the Government want to achieve over the medium and long-term. We have a strategy for low inflation, and a clear medium-term framework to restore public finances. We have set fixed spending ceilings, above which we will not go. The Bill contains further measures for tackling the deficit in future.

We look forward to the unified Budget on which the right hon. Gentleman has just questioned me. In it, we will continue the steady and purposeful progress that we have made in achieving our economic objectives of low inflation, restored public finances and sustained growth. We shall make our choices. However difficult they may be, we shall make them. There will be many difficult decisions to take, but they will be taken well. We shall confirm that rhythm of good decison making about which I have spoken and which now underpins confidence.

A party that does not choose, or a party that cannot choose, is a party that does not govern. We are not afraid to choose, and that is why we now govern. When the critical economic decisions ahead have been made, the Government will present their package to the House, and we will then look to my right hon. and hon. Friends to support that package—as I know they will support the Finance Bill which is before us.

7.5 pm

Ms Harman: The Finance Bill makes it clear beyond all doubt that, because of the Government's failure on the economy over the past 14 years, the Conservative party is now the party of high taxation, high borrowing and high unemployment. Although the rhetoric is still there—we heard it again tonight—and although it was in the election addresses of Conservative Members and in the Tory manifesto, the Government's economic failure has led to a situation in which the rhetoric is wholly separate from reality. Conservative assertions about low taxation and sound public finance are now nothing more than an old aspiration that they have proved completely incapable of achieving.

It was clear from last night's debate that the Conservatives are divided, the Government are on the defensive and, worse than that, they have no strategy. Having failed to make the economy work properly, they are now—partly through desperation but also partly through dogma—planning this autumn to dismantle the welfare state. The autumn battle to defend public services will be a battle to defend the very heart of the welfare state.

The Chief Secretary said that there was good news on the economy, but the Finance Bill is dealing with the consequences of economic failure. If one looks at the measurements that matter—the growth of manufacturing output, gross domestic product and the change in manufacturing employment—the story is the same all round. We are way behind Japan. We are behind the USA. We are also behind Germany, Italy and France.

The Finance Bill does not contain any measures to help industry, but the Government have insisted on measures that threaten the North sea oil industry. Already today Shell has slashed exploration, which affects jobs.

Mr. Portillo: I am intrigued by the hon. Lady's comparison with Germany. I told her a moment ago that manufacturing output in this country had risen by 5 per cent. over the first five months of this year, while industrial production has fallen by 7 per cent. in Germany. How does she equate that with Germany being way ahead of us? Is she using a negative scale?

Ms Harman: I am not. The problem with Ministers is that they twist the baseline in order to present something that people know is completely at variance with reality. If we hear about the pound replacing the deutschmark, or of an economic miracle in this country, people will know that the Government are refusing to face reality. Therefore, there is no chance to put the economy right and deal with the deficit, and with investment in skills, in our infrastructure and in our industry.

The statement that the right hon. Gentleman has just made shows that he is more interested in presentation and trying to cover over the cracks of the Government's division than he is in having a serious economic policy to put right the deep problems in this country. He is not prepared to recognise the situation, so it is welcome that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) described the reality.

Last night, the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West said that the Government were "near

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bankrupt". The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) described the country as "bust". However, it is not only the Tory Back Benchers who have been describing the Government's economic failure. We have had a Conservative analysis of the economic failure of the past few years which I would like to quote to the House.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): As the hon. Lady will not pursue the point made by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, can she explain how, when she makes an incorrect statement about German and British industrial production, that is perfectly fair, but when my right hon. Friend produces the correct figures, that is just a matter of presentation?

Ms Harman: The Chief Secretary to the Treasury did not produce the correct figures. If we consider the growth of manufacturing output in the G7 countries between 1979 and 1992, Japan had 50 per cent. growth; the United States had 32 per cent. growth; Germany had 23 per cent. growth; Italy had growth of 16 per cent.; France had growth of 7 per cent; and Canada had growth of 8 per cent. Would the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) care to volunteer the growth figure for the United Kingdom? I will give way to the Chief Secretary if he can tell us how we compare.

Mr. Dorrell: Perhaps the hon. Lady would like to tell the House what happened to manufacturing output under the last Labour Government.

Ms Harman: Against a figure of 50 per cent. growth in manufacturing output in Japan between 1979 and 1992, the United Kingdom had growth of barely 5 per cent. I am glad that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has intervened because I was about to quote from his analysis of the Government's economic failures. The Financial Secretary said:

> "Think back six years. The yuppie revolution was in full swing. It had a lot going for it. It encouraged young people to regard wealth creation as a benign activity. It broke class barriers. It embraced change. It exuded confidence. All of that was positive. But it was built on sand."

How right he was. In this Finance Bill, the country is paying the price of those years of economic failure.

The Financial Secretary went on to say that

"the resources that were attracted, like moths to a lamp-bulb"—

and to property development and to what the hon. Gentleman described as

"the lure of easy money"—

were wasted resources. He said:

> "Resources are scarce, and we cannot afford the luxury of"—

and he then described his own Government's economic policy as "waste and distortion." I have to agree with the hon. Gentleman about that.

Mr. Dorrell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: No, I will not let the hon. Gentleman intervene.

Mr. Dorrell: Would the hon. Lady like to change her mind?

Ms Harman: No, I would not. I am afraid that I am going to be flinty-faced on this occasion.

This Finance Bill pays the price of economic failure, unemployment and the soaring cost of unemployment. When we consider the public sector borrowing requirement and the cost of unemployment, it is clear that the figures are enormous. The cost of unemployment in London and the south-east for one year is £8 billion. That is £8 billion just for one year to finance idleness, waste and forcing people to be on the dole.

That is why we have said all along that the reduction of unemployment should be at the heart of the Government's economic policy so that we can end the high dole bills and lift the fear of unemployment which, to this day, still hold the economy back. However, still lurking in the Government's view is the idea that the first objective is sound public finances, although the Government have failed to achieve that, and that somehow high unemployment is "a price worth paying".

Having failed to tackle unemployment, the Government are now turning on the welfare state.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): By how much does the hon. Lady believe that the public sector borrowing requirement could be lowered by reducing unemployment?

Ms Harman: It is clear that the PSBR is too high. That is the price that has been paid for economic failure and for high levels of unemployment. Economic failure has been the result of failure to invest in training, skills and our infrastructure. We need to invest in those areas to set the economy to rights.

It is no longer any good for the Conservative party to posture as the party of sound finances. The Conservatives have ripped the finances of this country to pieces through the failure of their economic policy. Having failed to tackle unemployment, the Government are now turning on the welfare state.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman cannot be trying to intervene on my point about the welfare state because clearly he has no connection with it. However, many people have.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has said that the growth of the social security budget is

"a sort of cuckoo in the nest."

He also said that

> "Prescription charges is only one of 100 different things to look at."

We have heard of a secret letter from the Secretary of State for Social Security referring to cutting and taxing invalidity benefit. He recognised in that letter that that would cause an outrage. The Government are turning on single mothers, complaining that they are on benefits and a drain on public finances. However, the Government deny them the child care and job opportunities that would enable them to work and be independent and able to support themselves and their children. That is what they want to do.

The Government have broken their promises. The Prime Minister said:

> "We have no plans and no need to extend the scope of VAT."

But that is exactly what the Government have done. The Government have said:

> "We are the only party that understands the need for lower taxation",

but in this Finance Bill they have raised taxation. The Prime Minister has also said:

"I have no plans to raise . . . the level of national insurance contributions."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 808.]

But that is exactly what he has done.

The Finance Bill raises taxes £17·5 billion over the next two years. It freezes personal allowances and puts 1p on national insurance contributions and it affects VAT. Even now, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is warning that further tax increases are in the offing.

Tory Members cannot justify those tax increases on the grounds that they are the only way to raise public money. During this Finance Bill, we proposed 14 separate measures that would raise money, deal with tax abuses and plug tax loopholes. Not only did the Government reject them all—they would not even allow them to be debated.

The Tories would rather freeze personal allowances than abolish tax relief for private medical insurance. They want to subsidise people using private medical insurance and give them tax relief while freezing everyone else's personal allowances. The Government would rather put 1p on national insurance than tax the share options given to top executives. That is the Government's sense of priorities. In addition, of course, the Government would rather put VAT on gas and electricity than make the gas and electricity companies pay their fair share of corporation tax.

Treasury Ministers will no doubt claim that this Budget —this Finance Bill—has been a success. But it has cost the Government a Chancellor. It has cost the Government 400 Tory county councillors. It cost them the Newbury by-election and it will cost them the by-election in Christchurch.

How can the Government call it a success to increase taxes for the low paid and cause dismay among the elderly? The Chancellor is setting the scene for cuts in the welfare state and tax increases in the autumn Budget. But the country wants to see an economic policy that begins the task of putting our industry and economy back on their feet.

The Chancellor and the Chief Secretary, possibly over a bottle of champagne, might congratulate themselves on getting the Finance Bill through Parliament, but for the people of this country fear of this Bill will be followed by dread of the bills that they cannot pay. Parliamentary proceedings on the Bill may be drawing to a close, but the political fallout has only just begun.

7.16 pm

Mr. John Watts (Slough): We have just heard the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) make some wild assertions. In particular, she mentioned the subject of tax relief for private medical insurance. She will remember that such tax relief is available only to those over the age of 60. When the proposal came before the House in an earlier Finance Bill, I did not vote in favour of it because I prefer not to increase the tax breaks that are available as a reduction of income tax. It will not be lost on the voters of Christchurch, 30 per cent. of whom are over the age of 60, that the hon. Lady is advocating, on behalf of the Labour party, that that tax concesson should be withdrawn.

I should like to consider three matters contained in the Bill which, as you reminded my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the subject of the debate.

I always look back on Finance Bills with a mixture of pleasure and disappointment. On Second Reading, I referred to the changes in the regime for petroleum revenue tax, and urged my right hon. and hon. Friends to improve the transitional relief offered. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary brought forward some further limited measures of transitional relief which the industry welcome, particularly the smaller companies towards which they are targeted. My hon. Friend knows, however, that I believe that those transitional measures do not go far enough.

The amendments which I tabled in Committee and which, with my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Sir C. Onslow) and others, I sought to table on Report, could not be debated on either occasion for technical reasons.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that he had a meeting last Thursday with the Financial Secretary? Will he further confirm that he told the oil companies' representatives that same evening that a deal had been stitched up and that the Government were going to accept his amendments Nos. 40 and 41?

Mr. Watts: No, I cannot confirm that. I can confirm that there was a meeting between my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, representatives from a number of oil companies, myself, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking and myself. At the conclusion of that meeting I certainly did not suggest to any representatives of the oil industry that any deal had been stitched up.

Mr. Hughes: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why I was telephoned on Friday morning, by a representative of an oil company who attended that meeting, and was asked, "Please will you make sure that no Labour Back Benchers sign the motion because, if they do, it will screw up the deal"?

Mr. Watts: I would have been very happy if I had been able to conclude a deal with my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, but that is not what happened. There may be some confusion in the mind of the person who spoke to the hon. Gentleman. At the conclusion of our meeting, we explained the way in which the amendments had been framed and why there were two separate sets of amendments.

We considered that one set of amendments would be technically in order for selection but would not produce the desired solution. The other set of amendments would have achieved our objective of a three-year relief period, but we understood that if the amendments were tabled by Back Benchers they could not be selected for technical reasons. They would be in order only if they were tabled by the Government.

Our amendments were tabled on Thursday, which is normally the last day for tabling amendments to be considered on Report. It was our outside hope that, if my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury were convinced of the force of our argument, they could be

[Mr. Watts]

persuaded to adopt our second set of amendments as Government amendments and provide a vehicle for them. It was not my intention, or that of any of my right hon. and hon. Friends, to convey to the representatives of the oil industry that any such deal had been struck. Indeed, as late as last evening, we discussed the matter further with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He had just returned from Brussels and we were grateful to him for making time to discuss the matter with us at such short notice. Sadly, the vehicle that we hoped to provide was not one that my right hon. and hon. Friends chose to ride in.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that this is a very important point, especially as Shell has announced that it is going to cut back on its drilling because of the changes that the Government intend to introduce.

Mr. Duncan: That is not what it said.

Mr. Darling: It is what it said.

The hon. Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) has mentioned that he had a private conversation with the Chancellor. Will he tell us whether the Government now accept that far more generous transitional relief must be offered to stop an even greater decline in exploration than that anticipated? That will have disastrous long-term consequences for the country's balance of payments.

Mr. Watts: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will answer for himself. It is not my understanding that my right hon. and hon. Friends are yet persuaded that there is a need to go further than the measures introduced in Committee.

The purpose of the amendments that I tabled, in Committee and on Report, was to obtain relief, in a tax neutral way, over a three-year transitional period. That would have been financed by restricting the reduction of PRT to 55 per cent. for that period rather than going immediately to the 50 per cent. rate mentioned in the Bill.

I am persuaded by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary's argument that the 50 per cent. rate of PRT will have the effect of stimulating further investment in existing mature fields, and that that will be beneficial to the future development of the North sea. I am not persuaded, however, that we will see such new investment in the near future. Any substantial investment will take two or three years to be productive. I believe that in that intervening period, exploration and appraisal activity will be subject to a marked decline before any major new investments come on stream.

Our proposals have been put in a number of different guises, but our intention has always been to smooth that transition. We want to give those parts of the industry that have been hardest hit by the tax changes more time to adapt. That would enable a high level of activity in the North sea to be maintained in the intervening period, and ensure smoother progress for our North sea oil industry.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify what happened at last week's meeting because I was given the same information as the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes)? It may be a question of who is misleading whom. Were the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends misleading the representatives of the oil companies with unwarranted expectations of success, or were he and his hon. Friends being misled by Ministers promising concessions that did not materialise?

It is to be regretted that the hon. Gentleman's amendments were not tabled on an all-party basis. If they had been, the issue could have been put to the test yesterday. Presumably, all-party amendments stand a better chance of selection than those tabled by Conservative Back Benchers.

Mr. Watts: I am clear in my own mind that neither I nor any of my right hon. or hon. Friends was misled by Ministers. It was not our intention to mislead any representative of the oil industry. I have tried to explain how I think some confusion may have arisen. I certainly did not give any indication to anyone in the industry with whom I was in contact that I believed that a deal had been done. I was certainly trying my hardest to bring about a solution, but we have failed. That is why I referred in my opening remarks to looking back on the Bill with a mixture of pleasure and disappointment. That failure is one of the disappointments.

Even at this late stage, I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury to look again at what has happened in the North sea. Perhaps they will be proved to be right and that the anticipated dramatic reduction in activity will not occur or, at least, will not be sustained—activity in the North sea has already markedly declined.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) referred to the announcement by Shell UK Exploration and Production yesterday that it was reducing its manning levels by 30 per cent. I understand that there have been some denials about whether that was directly related to the change in the tax regime, but there is no doubt that it intends to reduce its exploration activity.

Mr. Duncan: Do not the statements that Shell UK Exploration and Production has made to the press make it explicit that its decisions were made a long time ago and that its decision to reduce its activity has nothing whatever to do with the change in the PRT regime announced in the Budget?

Mr. Watts: That may be what the company maintains, but it is reducing its activity and, not surprisingly, some people will link the changes in the tax regime with that fact.

Mr. Dorrell: This is an important point. Opposition Members were shouting "No" when my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) intervened. My hon. Friend is right. The statement issued by Shell UK Exploration and Production on 12 July says:

"The cost cuts in the exploration division of Shell ExPro are not due to the proposed budget changes in PRT."

Nothing can be more explicit than that.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Financial Secretary has unwittingly—no doubt not intentionally—misled the House by his intervention. The memorandum written by a responsible person at Shell says clearly:

"Doubtless you are aware . . . some very significant changes in petroleum revenue tax regulations will be implemented this year by the Government. The main effect that this will have on exploration is that our net costs will go up by a factor of four. In these circumstances, our exploration programme will have to be reassessed carefully."

That is at variance with what the Financial Secretary said.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That may be an important point, but it is certainly not a point of order for the Chair. It should be raised by means of an intervention if the hon. Gentleman is able to have the Floor.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) asked whether orderly amendments could have been tabled on an all-party basis. To achieve a tax-neutral package of transitions, we would have needed to propose that the rate of PRT be maintained at more than 50 per cent. We wanted the transition to be a three-year period, which is longer than that provided for in the Bill. However, any such amendments tabled by mere Back Benchers would have been ruled out of order. I understand that the orderly amendment that we tabled was not selected because it was considered that the matter had been adequately debated both in Committee of the whole House and in Committee upstairs.

Mr. Robert Hughes: In attempting to explain the position, the hon. Gentleman is simply causing further confusion. Why did he and his right hon. Friends table an amendment which they knew in advance was out of order, and tell the oil companies that they knew it was out of order, if they had not believed that something would happen to it? Surely that was the worst thing to do because it was kidding the industry along.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman clearly did not hear my explanation. Two sets of amendments appear on the amendment paper today. The first deals with an enhancement of the 18-month transition period and could have been selected had it not been deemed that the matter had been adequately debated. We knew that the second set of amendments was not in order. It was tabled by Back Benchers and set out what we considered to be the proper solution to the problem. The Government could have adopted it as a suitable vehicle had they been persuaded of our argument but, sadly, that was not the case.

Mr. Darling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Watts: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman for the last time because I said that I would refer to three matters.

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way because I was the first hon. Member to raise the question of Shell. I have seen the text of the memorandum to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) referred. It says that the changed tax regime had made exploration four times more expensive. Shell has subsequently denied it, but companies do that sort of thing.

Our difficulty is that many Tory Back Benchers, including the hon. Gentleman, have unwittingly been sold a pup by the Government. Exploration and appraisal will suffer, and the oil companies may do better next time if they remember not to bother dealing with Tory Back-Bench Members or consultants, because that is throwing good money after bad.

Mr. Watts: Nobody has thrown money at me. I am not a consultant but I took an interest in the issue because it seemed to be a valid argument to pursue. I have financial interest neither in an oil company nor in a business representing an oil company. If I had such an interest, I would have declared it at the beginning of my speech. My understanding of the Shell memorandum is exactly as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) just stated. As he said, the company has now put a different gloss on the matter.

I was about to conclude my remarks on PRT by saying that I am still convinced that a substantial and damaging reduction in activity in the North sea could have been prevented had a three-year transition been provided. I hope that, if those of us who take that view are proved right and the Financial Secretary's more optimistic assumptions of what will happen in the next few months are proved wrong, even though it is too late Ministers will be prepared to reconsider the matter when preparing the November Budget and the next Finance Bill.

Lest it should be thought that I speak merely to pour condemnation on my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, let me say that he also gave me pleasure in Committee because, for five or six years, I have been arguing for a more favourable tax treatment of unit trusts selling into other European countries. The gist of the argument is that if unit trust companies could pay dividends gross to residents of other European countries, their export performance would be much better. Evidence suggests that that is so. Ten years ago, Luxembourg had virtually no such funds under management. It now manages £86 billion worth of funds and has outstripped the funds under British management.

I was therefore pleased when, in responding to the debate in Committee, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary said that suitable measures would be proposed in the November Budget and incorporated in the next Finance Bill following consultation with the industry in the intervening period. That was welcome news, not just for the industry but for the financial services industry in this country. To avoid doubt, may I confirm that I am not a consultant for the unit trust industry, although it kindly sent me a crate—12 bottles—of wine earlier this year. We excel in the financial services industry and could increase our earnings on exports to the European Community. The Bill's measures will be greatly welcomed.

The third and final measure to which I wish to refer is the abolition of the business expansion scheme. It was probably right for the Government to propose that the existing scheme should be brought to an end. However, faced with the loss of my legislative programme for the Finance Bill now that my proposals on unit trusts have been taken up, and needing to look for another cause, that new cause may be "Son of BES".

I am convinced that we need to provide a means of encouraging equity investment, particularly in small manufacturing companies and other small companies. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury will consider how that might be done. If they do not make their own proposals, I may argue the case for the next five or six years until, in the fullness of time, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary or his successor—I expect that my hon. Friend will be in a more exulted position by that time —concedes that it is a good argument and introduces his own measures.

Overall, this is a good Bill, although the measures relating to PRT are unattractive. It presents a balanced approach to improving the state of the national finances, and it is a good foundation on which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor can build as he prepares his Budget for presentation in November.

7.39 pm

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East) The Chief Secretary said at least one thing with which I agree: that on Second Reading, in Committee and on Third Reading, the main issues have remained the same. Those issues are the reneging on election promises, the failure to address the underlying problems in our economy, and the nature and effect of the huge tax increases that have been proposed and are to be introduced in the measure.

I think that all hon. Members will recall the clear commitments that were given before the general election. They were that there would be no extension of VAT, no increase in national insurance contributions and—a commitment given in the clearest of terms—tax decreases year on year. The excuse with which we have been repeatedly presented is that the circumstances that we now face have changed and were totally unforeseen when those honest commitments were given to the electorate before the general election.

However, the Chief Secretary said tonight that there was a lot of good news in the economy. He talked about the success in the last three quarters, the fact that unemployment was down, and forecasts that showed that we would have the highest growth of the nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. What on earth should we believe? If those success stories are correct, what are the unforeseen events that have happened since the Government gave those clear pre-general election commitments that there would be no tax increases?

Last night, I heard Conservative Members say that one can, in certain circumstances, renege on election pledges, but there has to be some honesty of intent. If the Government have honesty of intent, why are they boasting about the wonderful news in the economy? If there is wonderful news in the economy, where was the honesty of intent in those pre-general election promises? The Government cannot square the circle. One or the other of their claims is not true. The nation is getting sick of the Government's slick presentation and wants them to give the facts about the problems that face the country.

A couple of years ago, when we were enjoying a huge budget surplus, the Government took the opportunity to decrease taxes, and they gave those decreases to the better-off in society. The biggest single adjustment they made was the abolition of all tax grades above 40 per cent. That act alone gave more than £2 billion to those who are better off.

Now that we are picking up the cost of those foolish measures and the inability to sort out the long-term problems in our economy, we have a huge £50 billion deficit in public finances. There are two major proposals designed to deal with that deficit. The first is to increase national insurance contributions. That policy was deliberately chosen rather than an increase in income tax, because it hits those on average and below-average earnings, while protecting those in the highest income tax bracket. The second and far and away the worst proposal in the Budget is the appalling proposal to impose VAT on fuel.

There has been much disquiet about the election promises and the proposals. In the past few weeks, that concern has centred on the issue of VAT increases. Almost all the representations which I and, I think, others have received have been on the VAT issue. Almost all the representations that I have received have been from pensioners.

I do not believe that pensioners are the only people to have realised that they will be affected by the VAT proposals in the Budget; I do not believe that they are better informed than the rest of the population. The pensioners' representations have been made for one simple reason: fear. There is fear among ordinary pensioners living on, and just above, income support levels about how they will pay the increased fuel bills and survive.

We are told that the policy is not designed merely to raise revenue, but involves the environment. Does not the environment of those pensioners count? Is it not their world? Is their environment of no concern to those people who say that the measure is an environmental policy?

A recent survey conducted by Age Concern showed that already—without the implementation of the Budget proposals—30,000 to 40,000 more people die in this country in winter than in summer. It also discovered that 18 per cent. of pensioners had no insulation on their hot water tanks, 26 per cent. had no loft insulation, and 64 per cent. had no double-glazing on their windows.

If anyone—whether members of the Conservative party or supporters of Friends of the Earth—wants to support the measure on the grounds that it is a green policy, they should address the problems relating to pensioners. We are talking not about a green measure, but about a hypothermia enhancement measure—that is the effect that it will have on pensioners. That is the reason the pensioners have made representations, and the reason for their fear.

The people who have made representations to me fall into two categories. First, there are those who are already on income support, who are dependent on means-tested benefits and who do not believe that they will receive full compensation from the Government for the costs imposed on them by the proposals. They have no reason to believe that they will receive adequate compensation when they look at the Government's track record of deliberately and repeatedly reneging on their commitments.

The second category of people are those living just above income support levels, who receive no state benefits because they have struggled all their lives to make some small extra provision by paying into an occupational pension scheme or something similar. They now find that their prudence and the struggle that they have maintained throughout their lives by paying taxes and national insurance contributions has resulted in their being pushed into the poverty trap. The proposals will bring them no benefits.

The Chief Secretary said that he hoped that he had established a rhythm of good decision making. What sort of rhythm of decision making will the pensioners have to take up when they try to balance their water bills, council tax bills, rent bills and fuel bills? What sort of rhythm of good decision making does the Cheif Secretary suggest that the pensioners should adopt?

Undoubtedly, the Government are proposing deliberately and cynically to make the poorest people—the most vulnerable in the country—pay for their own mishandling of the economy over not only the past three or four years but the past 14 years.

The Conservative Government told the nation that they were the Government of prudent economic management. However, they have got themselves into such a mess that

we are now imposing these appalling measures on pensioners. It is disgraceful. I hope that the Government are never forgiven for deliberately reneging on their election pledges. I shall do everything in my power to ensure that they are not forgiven.

7.50 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): It is almost four months since the Budget statement was read to the House. Since then, we have studied it in great detail, on the Floor of the House and in Committee.

As we reflect on our deliberations, it is important to recall the mood that prevailed when the Budget was read. Spending was admittedly high, and we knew that that matter had to be addressed. There was a strong feeling that any severe attack on public spending could jeopardise what was seen to be a fragile recovery. My hon. Friends were wary of doing anything too severe so as not to put into reverse the small signs of progress that could already be observed as the economy crept out of recession.

On Budget day, I said that the Budget could have been tougher on the public sector borrowing requirement—I still hold that view—because I felt that the most attested economic phenomenon is probably the business cycle. However fragile we might think the recovery is, the business cycle has a momentum of its own which we expect to perform.

When I study research papers on economic indicators in the Library, I am always struck by how steeply the graph is pointing upwards to reflect the increasing size of the public sector borrowing requirement. That must determine our decision on whether the Finance Bill tackles what needs to be tackled.

A lot has happened since Budget day. Of course, we now have a new Chancellor. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), who drafted the Budget. He is an economic radical. The Budget definitely had his personal stamp on it. Setting aside all the political problems that have beset him since he spoke in the House on 16 March, he can feel justly proud of the way in which the Budget is shaped, and the economic prosperity that it will deliver in due course.

We must put the Budget in the context that, because the United Kingdom was the first country to go into recession we are showing that we are the first to come out of it. That puts us in a unique position to take advantage of the improved competitiveness in the British economy as we emerge from recession while our partners are still suffering.

Only a cursory look at Germany and France shows that, in contrast to our economic fortunes, they are facing severe difficulties. A visit to Germany shows that, in Stuttgart, 25,000 people have been laid off at the Mercedes-Benz factory, the production of Porsche cars has gone down by about 80 per cent., and the machine tool industry is all but in a state of collapse.

The German economy, which depends heavily on the motor industry, is facing severe difficulties. Effectively, having bought a bankrupt country, the Germans must now support the debt that they took on to do so. Having invested so much pride—and rightly so—in sustaining the value of their currency, they face a severe conflict between deciding how to protect the parity of the deutschmark and reducing interest rates to stimulate economic activity. I do not envy them that problem. Indeed, we had the same problem. None the less, it will shape the economic behaviour of our European partners over the next few years.

The problem in France is not quite so severe——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues his tour of Europe, I must remind him that we are debating the Third Reading of the Bill. Although it is in order to take some general economic policy as background, it must not turn into a debate on policy that is unrelated to the Third Reading of the Bill.

Mr. Duncan: I am grateful for your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I will abide by it. I was merely setting the Budget in context. The judgments contained in the Bill can be justified. In making such judgments, we must increasingly examine our European competitors to assess whether the judgments made in the House can be supported.

In reverting to the details of the Bill, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames will be vindicated in the details that he injected in the measures by having a delayed clawback in the structure of the public sector borrowing requirement for the future. To retrieve £6·5 billion in 1994-95 and £10·5 billion in 1995-96, it is necessary to build economic confidence, but at the same time not severely to attack a fragile recovery.

We are in a good position as a result of the Bill. Inflation is now below the EC average, and our interest rate is the lowest in the EC. At 6 per cent., it is the lowest rate since December 1977, and the fifth reduction since we left the exchange rate mechanism. As a result of the Bill, unemployment has shown an unexpected improvement, costs and earnings are increasingly contained, car registrations are up, and industrial production and exports are up.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Can the hon. Gentleman explain how unemployment has fallen as a result of the Bill when it has not yet been enacted?

Mr. Duncan: People are well aware of what the Budget contains, because the Bill has been discussed in detail in the House and in Committee. Indeed, giving the Bill Royal Assent merely confirms that the House wishes to see it enacted.

The Finance Bill sets the foundation for sustainable growth. We still have certain structural problems and a certain bias to housing, which has been addressed by ensuring that mortgage interest relief at source is at the lowest rate. There are many things that we will have to discuss in the November Budget.

The Finance Bill has brought us back to reality. It will ensure that we entertain realistic expectations of what the economy can deliver. It does not suggest that there is any good sense in making a dash for growth. Rather, we will see growth of 1 or perhaps 2 per cent., plus 1 per cent. and then another 1 per cent. The Bill will ensure that we have the sustainable prosperity for which we must aim.

During the passage of the Bill, we have listened in vain for any constructive alternative from Labour Members. The speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was completely bereft of any alternative proposal for or commitment to what she thinks the upper

[Mr. Duncan]

rate of tax should be. She did not say why the Labour party dropped its election policy of imposing an investment income surcharge on savers.

If she was still here, I would ask the hon. Lady whether she agrees with the shadow Chancellor that to raise income tax would be a mistake, and would probably take demand out of the economy. How would she fulfil her party's pledge to increase Government spending without raising taxes? What does she think is the correct level for the public sector borrowing requirement? We missed all that from Labour Members.

I commend the Bill to the House for the Third Reading that it so properly deserves.

8 pm

Mr. Beith: I will not attempt to answer many of the questions that the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) put to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), because I would be ruled out of order. We are supposed to be discussing what is in the Finance Bill.

The Chief Secretary sketched in the economic background, which it was reasonable for him to do, and I do not quarrel with the main elements he quoted as favourable and positive in the current economic climate, although he was inclined to leave out some unfavourable elements.

For example, the construction industry is still not showing the signs of recovery that are vital in that crucial sector of the economy. The unemployment news cannot give the Government ease and comfort. We have very high levels of unemployment, and most commentators expect them to persist, even if there are some offsetting job improvements through gains achieved by British exporters in world markets.

Hon. Members point out that many countries are going deeper into recession as we are coming out of it. They talk about that as good news, whereas it is really bad news for exporters, who must sell into markets which are in recession. Other countries being in recession acts as an inhibition on our recovery. We should not be pleased about their plight. No more should we be pleased about the continued high import penetration of our domestic economy, which remains a worry for industry.

I was tempted to intervene in the speech of the hon. Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) to say that he was pouring petrol over the Government but not putting a match to it. On the other hand, the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) last night poured domestic fuel over the Government and put a match to it by pointing out —*[Interruption.]* I am not sure whether political self-immolation was a necessary part of that—that the Christchurch by-election, and, by implication, any other by-elections that may occur in the near future, is likely to go against the Conservatives because of the provisions in this measure.

The Bill includes the hated and feared VAT on domestic fuel, imposed without adequate compensation or channelling of revenues into measures that will help people to pay for it by making their homes more energy-efficient. That alone is sufficient reason to oppose the Bill.

The Budget, of which the Bill is a part, contains in effect an income tax increase, even though it is not to be found in the Bill in that form. The 1p increase in national insurance contributions represents an income tax increase for the low-paid, because all higher levels of income are not subject to the 1p charge. Perks, which are subject to income tax but not to national insurance contributions, escape. In other words, it is a back-door income tax increase, and we were not able to discuss it at earlier stages of the Bill because it is being done through the national insurance system.

The Bill imposes substantial additional burdens on charities, through VAT and changes in advance corporation tax, both of which will hit them hard. Hon. Members are still receiving extensive representations on the issue from charities.

The Bill's petroleum revenue tax regime is costing thousands of jobs. That cannot be denied, because, whatever is happening at Shell, thousands of jobs will be lost in the oil industry and in many others which that industry supports and from which it buys. I was struck by a revised Shell statement, quoted in the *Financial Times* today, which bears the hallmark of some careful drafting. A company spokesman is reported as having said:

"The PRT changes have underlined, and given focus to, what we were already looking at in the North Sea".

Those were carefully crafted words. They put into sharp relief the fact that one of the only two companies which welcomed the new PRT regime is shedding a vast number of jobs. The other company is also shedding many jobs.

Mr. Dorrell: For the sake of completeness, the right hon. Gentleman will want the House to know that the sentence which he quoted finishes with the words:

"without further affecting the drilling programme."

Mr. Beith: Even so, it significantly affects the exploration programme, which is the complaint that everybody is making about the new PRT regime. Many companies, particularly those committed on the exploration side, are devastated by the new regime.

It is a bitter blow that, after all the pleas that they received, including many from Conservative Members, the Government have still not gone nearly far enough, even in transitional provisions which would have helped the industry with the difficulties that it is facing. The Government cannot be oblivious to the severe job impact that the regime is having, not just in Scotland but throughout the United Kingdom.

I urge the Government to realise that oil exploration workers live in all parts of Britain. One need only go to Newcastle airport on a Friday night or to Leeds station or Teesside airport to see people going home to all parts of the United Kingdom, particularly to areas down the east coast, from areas of oil activity. That is not to mention the many companies supplying the oil industry.

The Bill will unfairly tax people who are forced to move because of their work. In particular, it will tax van drivers unfairly, and what a group of people to pick on. Instead of imposing a scale of charges in a field of activity that increasingly has been taxed by the Revenue, when the Revenue caught up with it, the Government have imposed such a high scale charge that, for example, people on modest incomes who drive vans and take them home so that their tools will be safer overnight, rather than leaving the van on site, will be subject to an unfairly high tax charge.

There are serious faults in the Bill—right from large aspects to the micro-elements of its provisions. In many respects, it takes a wrong attitude to the tax system. That

attitude is not based on fairness. The Government are too fond of direct taxes, they are too fond of national insurance contributions as a means of raising the equivalent amounts by way of income tax, and they are too hostile to rises in standard and higher rates of income tax, which would be a fairer means of increasing taxation, if it is necessary to do that.

Had the Government wished to introduce provisions to achieve an extremely large increase in taxation over, say, the next two years—the Bill does precisely that—they should have addressed fairer means of achieving that objective. They would have been subject to much less criticism from the Opposition had they done so. They would still have been criticised for creating a situation in which such tax increases were necessary, but they would at least have placed those increases on the population on a fairer basis.

The Budget and the Finance Bill do not square the circle. There will remain a large public sector borrowing requirement. The Government must have regard to the PSBR and seek to reduce it, but I warn them not to be mesmerised by it. To do so could lead them into some extremely mistaken decisions. As well as a substantial budget deficit, there is in Britain a substantial investment deficit. There has been a considerable failure to invest in areas of crucial importance to the economy.

Historically, we have not in recent years had a high PSBR. We do not have a high level of existing national debt. We have a large and worrying PSBR which could have marked consequences, so we cannot ignore it, but if we were to rein back severely on investment as opposed to taking action on current expenditure, we could be adding to, rather than ending, the damage. We would be bringing about a situation in which the long-term problems of the British economy that have helped to get us into the present mess would persist into the future, and perhaps even get worse. So the Government must draw a distinction between current and investment expenditure in their attempts to deal with the PSBR. They must not be so mesmerised by the PSBR that investment and capital expenditure are severely damaged into the future.

The Chief Secretary set the Bill in the context of what he described as "steady and purposeful progress", and "good decision making". His use of such phrases surprised me, because we have been on a roller coaster. We have gone from the most ridiculous heights of boom into the most desperate depths of depression. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton knows that, because he has delivered a critique of Thatcherite economics, of which we shall hear more on an appropriate occasion.

Yet the Chief Secretary—the man who gave us the poll tax—talks about the considerable costs and other elements of Government that will have to be reined in. He has been an expensive man for the Government to have around—he gave us the poll tax and all its costly consequences—so he will find it hard to convince some of us that his credentials are sound when it comes to making sensible cuts in public expenditure.

The Chief Secretary may talk about good decision making, but I cannot recall another Finance Bill during my 20 years in the House when the Chancellor who delivered the Budget has been sacked before the Bill had completed its legislative course. Not only has he been sacked, but he comes before us in the midst of our considering the Bill and says that there has been

"too much short-termism, too much reacting to events".

He added:

"We give the impression of being in office but not in power. Far too many important decisions are made for 36 hours' publicity."

When we read the Bill, the right hon. Gentleman's words ring in our ears. He went on:

"I believe that in politics one should decide what is right and then decide the presentation, not the other way round. Unless this approach is changed, the Government will not survive, and will not deserve to survive."—[*Official Report*, 9 June 1993; Vol. 226, c. 283.]

We saw an instance of that last night, when, in a vote on a crucial part of the Bill, the Government had a majority of only eight. Their majority is shrinking, and it will shrink more after the Christchurch by-election: they will be increasingly unable to get Bills such as this through the House, and increasingly required to respond to the House's demands. Moreover, that will apply at a time when—as the Government themselves point out—difficult decisions must be made.

The Government cannot simply go for what is popular; I accept that. They must present the House with tough packages, which—while dealing with the current deficit, and the urgent needs of the economy—are at the same time seen to be fair. That, in my view, is where the Bill fails. It is seen not as a fair Finance Bill, but as an unfair way of inflicting the price of the Government's mistakes on the people.

Well may it be called a Bill: it is the bill that the people must pay for those mistakes. It is the sort of bill that arrives in a brown envelope through our constituents' letter boxes. It does not provide for constructive investment in the future, or for the easily definable good things that the country needs; it is the bill for the mistakes that the present Government have made. I well understand why so many people resent having to pay it, and resent the unfair distribution that it represents.

8.11 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): One of the aspects of the way in which the House deals with legislation is the fact that, by the time we discuss the Finance Bill, some time has elapsed since the Budget statement: it seems a considerable time to those of us who served on the Standing Committee.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) said, however, it is clear that recovery is now under way. We are seeing increased manufacturing output and more housing starts—an increase of 18,000 this year—lower inflation and more employment. At the time of the Budget statement, we wondered whether the recovery was sustainable; now we know that it is.

In a lucid intervention, the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) asked how the Budget could be taking effect when its provisions had not yet been passed. As the Chancellor said at the time, the important feature of the Budget was that any tax increases would come later so as not to choke off the recovery at its outset. His important statement that there would be no tax rises this year has made it possible for the recovery to take root as strongly as it has.

Dr. Reid: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: Many others wish to speak, but, as it is the hon. Gentleman, I will.

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy. Does his logic suggest that, when the tax increases are introduced next year, the recovery will be undermined?

Dr. Fox: Given his knowledge of economics, the hon. Gentleman should understand that, by that time, the recovery will be so well under way that the greatest threat will be not a lack of consumer confidence, but the need for sound public finances. The Government's overwhelming duty will be to tackle that task. In this context as in others, the Government will ultimately be judged on whether what we leave behind is better than what we inherited. That means not only improving living standards and lowering inflation and unemployment, but reducing public debt. That is the point that I made to the hon. Gentleman earlier.

Some hon. Members seem to believe that the Government will make short-term decisions. Several have already mentioned the Christchurch by-election. I trust that my ministerial colleagues will make no decisions that might be influenced in any way by the thought of a forthcoming by-election, but will do what the Conservative party was put in office to do—make the correct decisions, however unpopular they may be in the short term.

One fundamental principle must guide us. As we go for growth—as we undoubtedly will—the value of money should not be up for grabs in our economic policy. That means that we must reduce spending.

I praise the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in the spending review: it is surely right to consider welfare spending as part of overall spending. The welfare state was originally intended to be a genuine partnership between Government and those who needed help, rather than a perpetual Santa's grotto that would deliver money to anyone who happened to pass through it. That surely must still be the right approach.

It would also be wrong to suggest that the current recovery is based solely on the short-term measures that we have announced since the Budget. Surely that recovery is also due to the supply side reforms of the 1980s, not least the reform of the labour and trade union movements. The flexibility that we now enjoy will lead to faster falls in unemployment than we could otherwise have expected—and those supply side changes would have been possible only under a succession of Conservative Governments. We must resist the temptation to rewrite history as having begun in 1989 or 1992; the Government's economic policy goes back to 1979.

The lesson of the policy of the late 1980s is that growth is sustainable only if inflation is kept low. It gives Conservative Members no great pleasure to admit the mistakes of the monetary policy of the late 1980s—a policy that advocated over-loosening of a money supply that the Opposition urged us to loosen even further. At least their economic policy is consistent in one respect: they demand interest rates that are perpetually 1 per cent. lower than the Government want at any given time, whether the requirement is for a tightening or a loosening of the money supply.

We must not return to the house price inflation of the 1980s. We must be willing to tax consumption, and we must not be willing to tax earnings. That surely is one of the fundamental differences between Government and Opposition.

I am disappointed to note that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) is not present. She talked of 14 years of Conservative economic mismanagement; yet unemployment was reduced from 3·2 million in 1986 to 1·5 million in 1990, despite the arrival of 1 million more people on the jobs market. That is a record that we would gladly repeat. We repaid £14 billion of national debt in a year—the very national debt that the hon. Lady was keen to see repaid as soon as possible. But our monetary policy was too loose.

It is sad that, in a debate that lacks the fevered atmosphere of a more packed Chamber, the hon. Member for Peckham could not bring herself to accept the basic truth. She could not even accept that, while the German economy is now in recession, the British economy is growing. It is indeed sad when that level of maturity cannot be achieved on the Opposition Front Bench.

Even worse, the hon. Lady revealed that—as all of us who served on the Standing Committee already know—she does not know the numbers. When my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) asked by how much the public sector borrowing requirement would be reduced if unemployment fell, she was—as ever—unable to give a figure. It is a remarkable feat for a shadow Chief Secretary to make a speech in a finance debate without mentioning any figures. I suppose that Opposition Members must be very careful when the shadow Cabinet elections are approaching, even if three women have to be elected.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: No, I will not.

I was also disappointed to hear the accusation that the Government were not willing to tolerate debate on the Opposition's amendments to the Bill. The simple truth is that, if those on the Opposition Front Bench had been remotely competent in drafting the amendments, the Chair would not have ruled them out of order.

Our prosperity ultimately depends on sound public finances, honest money, individual and corporate incentive, and export-led growth in an increasingly deregulated market. I believe that this Finance Bill sets us well on the road, and I commend it to the House.

8:19 pm

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): This Finance Bill is very long; if my memory serves me aright, it runs to 312 pages. As I recall, the Chancellor's speech also set records for its length—it certainly felt like that sitting on these Benches listening to it. But long speeches and long Finance Bills do not add up to much, certainly not to a strategy for economic recovery. Indeed, any prospect of a sustained recovery will be undone by the legacy of 14 years of gross economic mismanagement and the inadequacies of this Finance Bill. The deep-seated problems of the United Kingdom's economy, which hon. Members on both sides of the House recognise, are left untouched by the Bill and, arguably, are compounded by it.

Take the long-promised consumer-led recovery about which we have heard so much this evening, and from the Government Front Bench over the last year or so. Even if it is accepted that a personal consumption boom rather than an investment-led recovery is necessary to get the

British economy back on its feet, the personal sector debt remains too high and confidence remains too low to promote a new consumer boom.

The threat of unemployment continues to deter too many individuals from taking major investment decisions. Since the general election, 8,000 people in Darlington have experienced unemployment. Unemployment remains the single biggest social and economic problem faced by this country. It is a sure sign of the Government's priorities that the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his first Mansion House speech, did not even utter the word "unemployment". He does not recognise the problem; he has no solution for it; and I am afraid that the Finance Bill is a direct reflection of that failure.

The Finance Bill threatens to make matters worse by imposing higher tax rises on people on low and middle incomes. Those people are still struggling with the effects of falling property prices; they are still suffering from having mortgage debts around their necks; and they still face the threat of redundancy. Any consumer upturn will be snuffed out by this approach.

The real failure of the Finance Bill—I believe that this is recognised, in all honesty, by hon. Members on both sides of the House—is that it turns its back on measures to plug the investment gaps that hinder Britain's ability to compete. With Europe already heading into a deep and damaging recession, and accounting for some 60 per cent. of United Kingdom exports, the prospects for an export-led recovery are difficult in any case; in this situation, it is surely doubly incumbent on the Government to act to help Britain's competitive position.

What has been the Government's response? The Bill introduces a special 40 per cent. capital allowance scheme, presumably because it is recognised that it will help to speed industrial investment. But the Government have ignored the pleas, not only of the Opposition but of the Confederation of British Industry and other business organisations, who have all called for the maintenance and extension of that special capital allowance scheme. Indeed, in the Red Book, the Government recognise that business investment this year will not remain stagnant, but will fall.

Mr. Dorrell: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to remind the House also that business investment in plant and machinery, which he says will fall this year, is now 50 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1979, and that total business investment, as the recession is coming to an end, is still higher than it was at any time during the 1960s and 1970s measured as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Milburn: If business investment has been so successful, the Minister might like to explain to the House why, even in the middle of a recession, British companies still cannot meet even weakened consumer demand, and hence the massive increase in Britain's imports bill. I notice that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, when he spoke earlier, lauded Britain's export performance, but he totally failed to mention the dreadful state of our imports bill. I am afraid that, once again, the Government's priorities and, indeed, their double dealing on economic statistics have been laid bare before the House and the country.

The parlous state to which our manufacturing base has been reduced by the Government requires more than rhetoric from the Prime Minister; it requires action, and it certainly requires more than a one-year, one-off, headline-grabbing investment incentive. British industry now receives less financial support from the Government than its competitors in any other European country. We are even falling behind the newly industrialising countries of the Pacific rim in terms of investment, training, and research and development.

The Finance Bill could have represented a turning point in the Government's approach. Instead, it is business as usual: it is free market, hands off, non-interventionist. The short-termism that has so characterised the last 14 years of Conservative economic policy has rarely been made more explicit. It will be the whole country that, in the medium term, will pay the price. The writing is already on the wall. The fact that the imports bill continues to boom in the middle of a recession is a sure sign that British manufacturing has been seriously weakened by the Government's performance. Whole sectors have simply been wiped out, so that even a modest recovery will precipitate a balance of payments crisis far worse than that envisaged by the former Chancellor when he delivered the Budget. The real results of the Government's economic mismanagement will be realised only when and if recovery finally arrives. It is then that their failures will be most clearly exposed.

Quite simply, the Finance Bill does nothing to tackle the economic mess created by the Conservatives. Instead, it asks the country to foot the bill for the Government's failures. Inevitably, it will be the people on low and middle incomes who will be asked to pay the price. They have been betrayed and let down by a Government who promised the earth—recovery, tax cuts and a new boom—and delivered precisely the reverse. The Finance Bill means the biggest rise in British history.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury outlined the figures—some £17 billion to £18 billion in just two years. The Bill makes a mockery of Tory claims from the last general election, but it is at least consistent in one respect: 14 years of Tory tax policy have increased, not cut, the tax burden, and it has weighed most heavily on those least able to pay. Meanwhile, the wealthiest people in society, representing a fraction of all taxpayers, have had the benefit of a veritable tax bonanza, paid for by the rest of us. The regressive nature of the tax rises, the imposition of value added tax on fuel, the freezing of personal allowances and, of course, the increase in national insurance contributions affect every taxpayer, but they particularly affect the low-paid.

The Finance Bill, interestingly, also hits those on middle incomes. In a parliamentary answer dated 22 April, the Financial Secretary admitted that, as a result of the freeze on personal allowances, there would be 120,000 more higher rate taxpayers. Similarly, restricting the married couple's allowance to 20 per cent., as proposed for the next financial year, would increase the number by a further 210,000. Like the poorest people in society, people on middle incomes are being asked to dig deeper to pay for the massive tax handouts to the very rich over the past few years.

I remind the House that top-rate tax cuts have earned the wealthiest more than £10 billion since 1988, when Lord Lawson, as he now is, introduced his tax-cutting Budget. They have done very well out of the Government, and they continue to do so. The Government's failure to tackle tax evasion and abuse earns the wealthiest people in society a pretty penny. Why should a person earning, say, £20,000 a year have to pay tax on his income, while a person who

[Mr. Milburn]

receives a bequest of, say, £100,000 pays nothing because he can afford to pay tax advisers and thereby avoid his inheritance tax liabilities?

The Government could have done something about that in the Finance Bill, but they refused to do so. The result is that we have a financial scandal on our hands. The nation's coffers are being plugged by increases in national insurance contributions and income tax and, of course, by the VAT extension. By contrast, the very wealthiest are getting off scot free.

The Bill continues to give inherited wealth an enormous tax break. The very richest are subsidised while the very poorest are penalised. So much for the Prime Minister's classless society. This Finance Bill is a con. It aids the wealthiest by affording enormous tax loopholes to them. It stings the poorest and those on middling incomes with swingeing tax rises. It does nothing to promote lasting recovery because it fails to promote investment in jobs or in industry. That is why the Bill deserves to be rejected by the House.

8.30 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies: For the second time this afternoon I should remind the House of my interests which are declared in the Register of Members' Interests, in particular of my connection with NatWest Securities, Dewe Rogerson and the Institute of Taxation.

We had a characteristic performance this afternoon by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). It was certainly long on charm and on what my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary rightly called fragrance. On substance, however, it was short, I fear, to the point of superficiality. *[Interruption.]* As the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) says from a sedentary position, that is what I always say. Yes, that is what I always say, precisely because it is always justified.

The Labour party's economic policy consists of saying, in the most mindless fashion, that the answer to unemployment is to spend money and that everything else will follow on from that. It is far from clear that that would happen. No coherent argument has been advanced by the Opposition showing why the sudden expenditure of public money would reduce unemployment. Very much the reverse would occur.

Even if we were to suppose that the spending of public money was the way automatically to reduce unemployment, the Opposition ought, if there were any economic rigour about their thinking or any reality at all about their plans, to tell us by how much they are prepared to increase taxation, or by how much they are prepared to see the public sector borrowing requirement increase in the short term in order to bring about the so-called reduction in unemployment over the medium or longer term that the model that they hawk about predicts. To that we are never given an answer. A so-called alternative Government who are not prepared to face the costs of their own policies deprives them automatically of the right to be taken seriously. The performance of the hon. Member for Peckham has done nothing even to begin to fill the enormous credibility gap that the Labour party has consistently opened up.

I pay sincere tribute to the Government's determination to reduce the PSBR. A year ago, I admit, I was less concerned about the rigour of fiscal policy. We were then part of the exchange rate mechanism. We are no longer part of it. Things have changed considerably. No country can with impunity afford for long to have a reduction in interest rates, a relaxation of monetary policy and a devaluation as well as an increase in the deficit, or a relaxation of fiscal policy. In present circumstances, therefore, it is particularly important that we should make a vigorous and, if necessary, a ruthless attempt to cut public expenditure and reduce the PSBR.

I pay tribute to the courage of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) and the rest of the Treasury Bench in putting together this Budget which has laid the basis for increases in public revenues next year and the year after that. I thoroughly agree with the revenue-raising measures that have been selected: the increase in the taxation of company cars and the application of tax to allowances at the 20 per cent. rate, which seems to me to be right and proper. I thoroughly agree, too, as I said earlier this afternoon, with the extension of VAT to domestic fuel.

When the combined Budget and public expenditure statement is made in November, I hope that those measures will be accompanied by a demonstrable effort on the part of the Government to cut their own spending—I hope to below the level of the control totals that were published last year for this year, next year and the year after. It is a necessary move. Therefore, I hope that it takes place.

As for VAT, I know that the Government will not be discouraged by the fundamentally synthetic agitation of the Opposition, none of which was accompanied by an explicit commitment by the Labour party to abolish VAT on domestic fuel should the Labour party, by some mischance, be returned to power. *[Interruption.]* Well, we shall see, but we are used to the Labour party accusing the Government of spending too little, of taxing too much and of having too large a PSBR.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): The hon. Gentleman sat with me throughout the Committee proceedings on this Bill and knows full well that European legislation will not allow this change to be revoked. Is he suggesting that the Labour party would defy European law, or is he suggesting that his own party would be in a position to do so?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman has put forward an absolutely splendid excuse.

Mr. Mandelson: That is true.

Mr. Davies: Indeed.

Mr. Mandelson: The hon. Gentleman should therefore sit down.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman clearly wants me to end my remarks, which encourages me to feel that I may be scoring a few hits.

I hope that the Government will go further and extend VAT to other things as well—in fact, to everything, with the sole exception of food and children's clothing, for which we have negotiated, with some difficulty, a derogation from Community rules. What I hope that the Government will not do and what they have correctly not done in the Finance Bill, which I hope we shall send on its

way this evening, is to increase direct taxes—income tax, capital gains tax and corporation tax. Those are the three——

Mr. Betts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No, I am not going to give way, and I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why. On several occasions this evening the hon. Member for Peckham refused to give way to me during her speech. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am normally very generous in giving way to the Opposition. I did so earlier today when I was on my feet. There must, however, be some reciprocity. Therefore I propose not to give way but to continue with my speech.

It seems to me to be absolutely right not to increase the rates of those three direct taxes. I hope that the Government will continue on that course when they present their next Budget at the end of this year. They are the most economically damaging taxes. Perhaps the most economically damaging of them all is capital gains tax, for it has a direct impact on risk taking in the economy. All three of them, though, have a direct impact on incentives to work, on incentives to invest, on the location of industry and on the choice of residence.

It is tempting and popular to say that the rich should be clobbered and that we ought to introduce a new higher rate of tax of 50, 60 or 70 per cent. for higher incomes or, alternatively, that the 40 per cent. rate ought to be increased in respect of those categories of income to which it currently applies.

But that would be very damaging. The more attractive, in political and demagogic terms, it is to increase the rate of income tax as one moves up the income scale, the more economically damaging it is to do so. We are talking about people who are relatively more and more internationally mobile—well paid lawyers and financiers, as well as the pop stars and tennis stars, who could pursue their activities equally well in Paris, New York, Geneva or any other one of a whole variety of places. It would be very foolish to drive those people away. In this context, I hope that the Government will be very careful indeed not to mess about with the residency and domicile rules. Were they to do so, many of the people to whom I have referred would not be here.

Over the past few years, there have been great advantages—in terms of inward investment, the location of industry and the residence of people—in our acquisition, for the first time since the second world war, of the reputation of being, by international standards, a lower-tax area. Previously we had the reverse reputation. I hope that nothing will be done to damage this very considerable achievement—one of many—of the Conservative Government over the past 15 years.

It is a pity that the Government have not taken the opportunity afforded by this Bill to iron out some of the anomalies that result from the differential taxation of certain benefits. I hope that they will do so next time round. As hon. Members know, some non-means-tested benefits, such as the old-age pension, are regarded as income—which, indeed, they are—and are subject to tax in the normal way, whereas others, such as child benefit and invalidity benefit, are not regarded as income and are not subject to tax. There can be no rhyme or reason in that. Taxing all those benefits would not in any way constitute an attack on the poor. People whose income consisted entirely of benefit would not be liable to tax. However, there is no reason why anyone receiving benefit on top of another significant income should not have to pay tax on it. I hope that the Government will address this matter.

The hon. Member for Peckham, among others, said much about the future of the welfare state. It is true that the welfare state does a wonderful job in the protection of many vulnerable people. It prevents a great deal of misery among families. All parties in the House are united in believing that a welfare state is necessary to a humane society. However, the present system is riddled with anomalies and perversities of all kinds and requires thorough examination. For example, it is absurd that teenagers receive housing benefit at public expense although they come from loving families that want them back. There have been some very tragic cases in my constituency. Why should children be paid to stay in some hostel in an inner city, such as Manchester or London, where they run all kinds of risks? In fact, public money is being used to support the unnecessary break-up of families.

I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not want me to stray into the general area of welfare state and social security policy. I should like, however, to refer to a number of very clear taxation implications in this field. For example, the Bill makes provision for the so-called protection of people in receipt of income at or below income support level from the effect of the extension of VAT to domestic fuel. It must be realised that every time we "protect" certain categories of people below the benefit level against such price increases but do not do the same for others, we produce a perverse social and economic situation. We reduce the gap between what people earn by way of income support and what they would earn if they were in work. As a result, we reduce the marginal return to work. We reduce, at the margin, the willingness of people to go back to work and, thereby, run a higher level of unemployment than is necessary. That is very dangerous.

If old people have a little income in addition to their pension, if they have worked all their lives and have made a great effort to save a little—perhaps a few hundred pounds a year, amounting to £10,000 or £20,000—out of a modest income, why should they be deprived of benefits on the ground that help is being targeted at people whose income is below a certain arbitrary poverty level? Such a policy would send to society as a whole the signal that work and thrift are not to be rewarded and that people who work and save will be made fools of. Clearly I am referring to those whose incomes are not much above the level that would entitle them to income support and other benefits such as assistance with mortgage interest payments. We would pay a price, in terms of employment and of the propensity to work and save—indeed, the whole culture of society—by going down that road. I hope that the Government will be very cautious.

This has been a good Budget in extremely difficult circumstances. No Chancellor could produce a block-buster, popular Budget in the present climate. Indeed, it would be wrong and irresponsible to do so. The Government have been quite ingenious in putting together a package that will enhance revenues. If ingenuity in this respect can be matched with ingenuity and equivalent effort in the reduction of Government expenditure, we shall show the world that we mean to bring our fiscal deficit down. We shall lay the basis for the confidence that our economy needs if the very encouraging upturn that we

[Mr. Davies]

have seen in recent months is to be sustained in the 1990s, as happened under the Conservative Government in the 1980s.

8.47 pm

Mr. Salmond: As several hon. Members who have sat through the debate want to participate, I shall be brief. The magic carpet that mysteriously transports Conservative Members into the Chamber has some time to operate.

As I listened to the Chief Secretary's speech, I had a strange feeling of déjà vu. I was trying to place the quotation that the right hon. Gentleman used at the climax of his address—the one about governing and choosing and choosing to govern. I knew that it was from a resignation speech, but we have had so many of those over the past few years that I could not quite place the valedictory address that was the source. Then it came to me. The speech was that of the noble Lord Lawson addressing the House as Chancellor. As on this occasion the idea came from the Government Front Bench, I thought that it must mark the rehabilitation—or at least the reconstruction and development—of Lord Lawson's position in the Conservative party. That must be very refreshing for the noble Lord after so many years of having the finger pointed at him for all the ills that have befallen the economy. However, it will be some time before the latest fallen Chancellor—who at half-past seven appeared like Banquo's ghost and took a long look at the Government Front Bench—reaches the stage of rehabilitation. I do not know which Minister would play the part of Macbeth, but I would not recommend an overnight stay in the house of any of them.

In an intervention during the speech of the Chief Secretary, I referred to growth in the economy. The Red Book forecast is 2·5 per cent.—exceptionally modest indeed. A growth rate of 2·5 per cent., on average, over the next few years is not just exceptionally disappointing—it will come nowhere near closing the fiscal deficit in the economy. Thus the Government's hard choices between tax increases and spending reductions will be very severe indeed. It also means that the structural weakness in the United Kingdom economy has been laid bare for all to see.

We have experienced the longest recession in living memory. Yet the recovery from recession is not so much a bounce back as a clawback. We are not engaged in a dash for growth; if anything, it is a crawl for growth, and the so-called economic miracle of the 1980s has been exposed for what it was—if, of course, the Government's forecasts for growth over the next few years are accurate.

If I were a member of the Government Front Bench, I would be worried not only about the £1 billion per week deficit in the public sector borrowing requirement but in particular about the £1 billion per week deficit on the balance of payments because, as sure as eggs are eggs, that deficit will ensure that the faltering recovery is aborted in a balance of payments crisis sooner rather than later.

It was interesting that, apart from a brief mention of the success of exports in recent months, at no point did the Chief Secretary show any appreciation of the extent and inevitability of the enduring problem of the balance of payments, especially when oil forms less of a protection for the United Kingdom's balance of payments. I should have liked the Bill to contain a realisation of the key underlying problem of the economy.

With the Budget, the Government visited a double whammy on the people of Scotland. The first blow was the changes to petroleum revenue tax. For the sake of completeness, I shall read into the record an internal memo distributed to Shell staff in Scotland. It gives what may be called the private company view of the effect of the oil tax changes as opposed to the public view which was hastily cobbled together when the private view was unfortunately released to the newspapers. The internal memo reads:

> "Doubtless you are aware . . . some very significant changes in Petroleum Revenue Tax regulations will be implemented this year by the Government . . . The main effect that this will have on exploration is that our net costs will go up by a factor of four. It will be clear that, under these circumstances, our exploration programme will have to be reassessed carefully.
>
> Strong reductions in this activity will force us into corresponding reductions in staff. In total we are looking at a reduction in manpower of approximately 20-30 per cent. of the present workforce in exploration between now and the end of 1994."

It is clear and unambiguous that the internal company view, at least of the exploration side of the business, is that the PRT changes will mean the loss of fairly massive numbers of jobs. Let us remember that that is the view of one of the handful of oil companies which were in favour of the PRT changes; one can only imagine what the consequences will be for the vast majority of oil-related companies which were strongly against the PRT changes.

We should be grateful to the hon. Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) for trying to enlighten us about the process which ended in something like a farce yesterday when the out-of-order amendments tabled by Conservative Back Benchers were not selected for debate. The hon. Gentleman probably left us none the wiser about the tactics of that group of Conservative Back Benchers, and I should have thought that in-order amendments tabled on an all-party basis may have had a better chance of selection than out-of-order amendments signed only by Conservative Back Benchers.

My constituents were this morning treated to the sight of the right hon. Member for Woking (Sir C. Onslow), on the front page of *The Press and Journal*, holding a copy of the newspaper and saying that he would fight on against the PRT changes and would be trying to speak in the debate tonight. It must be especially disappointing to them that that particular knight in shining armour has been notable by his absence.

I do not know if there is still a backroom, back-stair strategy to try to get a concession from the Government to mitigate what will otherwise be a calamity for jobs in the oil industry, a calamity running into the loss of thousands of jobs. To judge from his current demeanour, I do not think that the Financial Secretary is going to enlighten us. It was a great mistake that the issue could not be forced to a vote yesterday because there is clearly all-party concern about the impact of the PRT changes, just when the oil industry is in a cyclical downturn. It is probably one of the most significant matters in the Budget in terms of an immediate effect on jobs.

The second aspect of the double whammy is the well-ventilated increase in fuel tax. I and my colleagues have for many years campaigned for a cold climate allowance, a recognition within the social security

structure of the fact that there are different climatic conditions in various parts of the United Kingdom. Often, especially when there are only faltering changes to the current social security provision, we despaired of getting any reasonable concession, but never in our wildest imaginings did we think that we would end up with a cold climate surcharge through the imposition of value added tax on fuel. People who pay 30 per cent., 40 per cent. or 50 per cent. more a year on fuel than the United Kingdom average will be infinitely worse off. Let us be clear: the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel will not save the world from environmental damage, but it will sacrifice pensioners and low-income families, especially those in areas with poor climatic conditions.

In summary, this Budget was introduced by a failed Chancellor and it is being ushered by a failed Treasury team.

8.55 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye despite my discourtesy in not being in the Chamber to hear at least two speeches. I was attending an extremely important event elsewhere. You will understand that when the chairman of one's regional television company is hosting an event on the Terrace, and when he is a constituent, a certain priority attaches to being there, especially as the occasion was to say goodbye to the political editor of Central Television, Jon Lander, who has served this House so well in so many ways through the years.

This is a historic occasion because it is the last Finance Bill that we shall discuss separately from the public expenditure statement. I for one look forward to the new unified structure for presenting the national accounts, which we shall receive in November or early December this year. I suspect that the Treasury team has had an especially difficult battle in Committee trying to remember what is going into the next Finance Bill and what is in the current Bill. The House owes the team a debt of gratitude for the skill with which it negotiated the Bill through its Committee stage.

I look forward to the fact that in the combined expenditure statement there will be a splitting of capital and current expenditure. It is a long overdue measure which will allow for much greater clarity in the presentation of our national accounts and will enable the House to take a more enlightened and informed view of the true state of the public sector borrowing requirement.

I welcome the fact that the House recognises that the public sector borrowing requirement is the fundamental issue confronting the Treasury team and the Government. Even the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) seems able to agree with that. Having heard her remarks earlier, however, I am still not sure what the Labour party believes to be the right level for the PSBR. I have heard what Treasury Ministers and others have said about the likely relative weight of the cyclical and structural elements of the PSBR, but I regard the £15 billion to £20 billion structural element as being too high. I welcome unreservedly the steps taken in the Finance Bill to narrow that gap, raising about £6·5 billion of revenue in the next financial year and about £10·5 billion in the year after.

I cannot, however, unreservedly welcome the Bill. Sadly, certain things that I should have liked to see in it are not. Perhaps those omissions are, at least in part, a product of that first year fixation which seems to have mesmerised the Treasury down the years. I am afraid that, just as in business it is sometimes necessary to invest to generate revenues in later years, so it is necessary for the Treasury occasionally to take a view about what sums of money might sensibly be spent in year one to ensure that there are revenues to spend in years two, three and later.

Before mentioning two or three of those matters, I must declare an interest. For several years I have had the privilege of advising first the General Council of British Shipping and now the Chamber of Shipping, and my work with the shipping industry has persuaded me of the imperative need to do something to help that industry. I am disappointed that nothing in the Bill helps the shipping industry. In Committee on the Floor of the House we had a useful and constructive debate on an amendment when in a series of speeches Conservative Members expressed the concern that the party feels about the future of the shipping industry. It was something of a disappointment to me that Ministers were not able to be more generous in their response to that debate, for the shipping industry would derive special benefit from a more informed and enlightened approach to the first year fixation to which I referred earlier.

I am in no sense questioning the Chair's selection of amendments, but I regret that new clause 19 was not selected for debate on Report, as that would have enabled us to debate another aspect of the investment needs of the shipping industry. I think that I speak for the shipping industry when I say that I am grateful for the intelligent, informed and constructive debate with Treasury Ministers and officials that has been possible in recent months. As a result, we are at least beginning to build some kind of general agreement about the costs likely to be incurred as a result of the measures that the industry seeks. That is at least a step forward.

The House will be aware that two principal issues relating to investment in shipping would have been welcome in the Bill: 100 per cent. capital allowances for shipping, the subject of the amendment in Committee, and roll-over relief, the subject of new clause 19. Those measures alone will not produce the revival of the British shipping industry that all hon. Members want. Other measures relating to employment are necessary, but they are not matters for the Finance Bill.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary for his recent answer about relative corporate tax regimes as they relate to shipping industries in the European Community. That answer showed that, even on the Treasury figures, the relative advantage to the British shipping industry is much smaller than is sometimes claimed from the Dispatch Box. The answer did not deal fully with many of the important nuances that apply to shipping company taxation in other EC member states. The combination of those effects is to make the British taxation regime for the shipping industry the most unfavourable in the EC. I, for one, cannot accept that as a permanent state of affairs.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London recently stated from the Dispatch Box that he intended to seek to phase out other countries' state aid. His view is widely shared by Conservative Members. We do not want shipping, or any other industry, to be subsidised unreasonably, but when other countries provide advantages to their companies through the tax system, we should seek the same treatment for ours. My hon. Friend said that

[Mr. Peter Luff]

his policy was to seek to phase out those other state aids, so I am disappointed that the Government are not making much progress with the increases in aid being given by the German, French and Dutch Governments to their shipping industries. All those countries are doing more, and I am afraid that at present our Government seem reluctant to do anything.

We are in danger of throwing away an industry in which we enjoy real competitive advantages in the international economy. I understand that there is a problem with the way we do our public accounts. Who should pick up the bill? The Department of Transport obviously would not be happy with an increase in its budget provision for that sector without receiving some additional total funding from the Treasury, although it is worth recalling that only 2 per cent. of Department of Transport expenditure goes on air and sea combined. The Ministry of Defence, which ought to have a vested interest in picking up the bill because of the enormous bonus that a strong British merchant fleet provides to the country's defence, is also reluctant. The Treasury, because of the first year problem that I mentioned, seems to be equally reluctant. If I were an entrepreneurial member of the Cabinet I would beseech the Treasury to be allowed to pick up the bill in year one, so long as I could have the profits in years two, three, four, five and six, because I would have a lot more money to spend if I took that approach.

I especially agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) about residence and domiciliary rules. London remains the maritime centre of the world, and that is in large part due to the presence of foreign nationals engaged in shipping activities. It has been a long-running obsession of the Inland Revenue to try to tax those people on the same footing as British residents, which would kill the goose that lays the golden egg and drive those residents elsewhere, causing a great loss to the British economy. So I am glad that at least we seem to have resisted that temptation in the Bill.

Another industry that might have looked for slightly more sympathetic treatment in the Bill is the British beer industry. There must be concern about the effects of steadily higher rates of duty on beer, the effect that those rates have on depressing sales in the United Kingdom and especially the encouragement that that provides to personal and even illegal imports with the completion of the European single market. I hope that as Ministers approach the next Finance Bill they will look carefully at the price elasticity of those increases in duty and decide whether they generate additional or less revenue for the Exchequer, either through the port of Dover or in the loss of sales at the local pub.

The Government have recently taken a number of welcome steps to benefit the car industry, such as the abolition of the special car tax. One has only to look at the increase in car registrations that has occurred as a result. The Government have also benefited the scotch whisky industry. Speaking as someone who intends to holiday in Scotland this year, I am glad of the warm reception I shall get for that measure. The Government have even looked after the horse racing industry. All those measures are good and I hope that a similarly enlightened view will prevail in relation to brewing and shipping.

It has been said that the Bill contains hard thinks, and it does—especially the matter of VAT on fuel and power. I cannot pretend that I welcome that tax, but I recognise it as essential and one that I will definitely support. It is important to remember that fuel prices have fallen in real terms since 1986. Electricity prices are broadly level, but they are going down this year. Gas prices have fallen by 20 per cent. because of the tough regulation that the Government introduced to accompany the privatisation of those industries. Despite the phased increase in VAT over the next few years, many people will be paying less in real terms for gas than they would have been before the imposition of VAT and before the privatisation of those industries. We must remember that that compares sharply with fuel bills under the previous Labour Government, when electricity prices rose by 30 per cent. in real terms. What was done then to help the poorest members of society?

I believe that the imposition of VAT is important to raise revenue. That is its clear objective. I also have no hesitation in supporting it on environmental grounds. At Question Time earlier, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister explained the hypocrisy of the Opposition parties on that issue. We heard then of their policies. We heard what the Opposition said was necessary to protect the environment by reducing carbon dioxide emissions. I especially welcome the endorsement by Friends of the Earth of our attempts to increase measures taken to control carbon dioxide emissions.

It is right, though, to sound a small warning. I am sure that those on benefit will be fully compensated and I welcome that unreservedly. However, there is the question of those just above benefit levels, especially single elderly people. I hope that the next Finance Bill will not increase the burdens on those with modest incomes who are not eligible for benefit, especially those living on their own. A number of recent measures have had an adverse impact on that group and I hope that the burden will not increase in future Finance Bills.

The Bill has had a reassuring effect on foreign exchange markets, which has in turn affected interest rates. We should be careful before further reducing interest rates. I hear no great calls from companies in my constituency for a further reduction and we should recognise the implications that any reduction would have for those on fixed incomes.

I welcome the stability that the Finance Bill and the promise of future levels of revenue that the Government plans have brought to foreign exchange markets, and the beneficial effect that that has had on interest rates as a result.

The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) earlier accused the Government of not facing facts. I believe that the Bill shows that the Government are all too prepared to face the facts. I would remind her, were she still present, of the rise in manufacturing output. I would also remind her that in my region, the west midlands, manufacturing output and business optimism are running at the highest level for many years—according to one survey, the highest level since the survey began eight years ago.

The production of Land Rover Discovery vehicles is up by 44 per cent. and 300 more jobs are sought for the production line. Unemployment is down for the fourth month in a row, inflation is at a 29-year low, decades of decline in our share of world trade have been halted,

exports are up by 6·5 per cent. in the first quarter of this year and manufacturing investment is up by 5·4 per cent. in the same period.

Those are the facts that the Opposition should be facing and I hope that they will have the courage and honesty to do so, though somehow I doubt it. It is no wonder that in reflecting on the economic strategy of the Labour party and what it might have introduced through the Finance Bill if—God forbid—it had been the party in power, *Tribune* said on 23 April:

"Dissatisfaction with Labour's hopelessly unconvincing economic policies . . . is widespread within the Shadow Cabinet".

The success of this Finance Bill has been proved. There is growing recovery, a strengthening pound, falling unemployment and falling inflation. The broad strategy of the Bill is essential to our continued economic success. There are no sins of commission in the Bill. In a mildly critical passage, I have highlighted some sins of omission. I hope that the second 1993 Finance Bill will begin to address those sins of omission, but I have no hesitation in commending this Bill to the House.

9.9 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): The hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) referred to the improvement in the economy, and he referred specifically to the west midlands. I should remind him that there are still about 250,000 unemployed people in the west midlands. In my constituency, there are still redundancy announcements at companies such as GPT, which has announced 300 more redundancies over the past three or four weeks. The same thing is happening at Dunlop in Coventry. I should like to know where all the signs are that the economy in the west midlands is improving in the way in which the hon. Member for Worcester suggested.

There is no doubt that the Bill does not deal with the hidden time bomb of the balance of payments problem, to which many hon. Members referred. If we analyse the balance of payments, we may find that the industrial base of many of the wealth-creating industries—manufacturing industries—has been eroded. That has an effect on the creation of wealth in the national economy.

I was interested in the Prime Minister's statement yesterday in which he referred to the talks on the general agreement on tariffs and trade. The Government and their partners have not resolved the agricultural problems involved in GATT. Also within that statement—it is relevant to the Bill—the Prime Minister did not hold out any hope that there would be any major reduction of unemployment in the western economies. We must look at the Government's measures, particularly in the Bill, to tackle the balance of payments problem, unemployment and wealth creation.

Only a fortnight ago, together with a number of colleagues, I met the old-age pensioners' lobby. Some hon. Members have referred to the concerns of old-age pensioners and I do not want to dwell too much on that. When old-age pensioners apply for state benefits, their meagre savings are taken into account; as a result, the pensioners do not accrue any interest on them, and that affects their planned budgets. As we know, most old-age pensioners have some form of planned budget to run their homes, so they will be hurt by the increases in VAT and the changes in their state benefits. There is a double whammy which should be minimised.

Some Cabinet committees are looking at Government expenditure outside the Bill and as part of it. They are looking at cuts in the national health service and there has been talk about charges. About a fortnight ago, thousands of people outside the House expressed great concern about possible post office closures. Therefore, we are not just looking at the Bill in relation to the economy as we understand it. There are hidden factors at work within the economy that the Bill does not necessarily address. I hope that the House will give serious thought to those issues.

The Government have said that they have a medium-term economic strategy. They have not spelled out to the House what they mean by "medium-term". Do they mean 10 years down the road, three years or 12 months.

Over the past 14 years, we have had a succession of Budgets that it was claimed would put right all the economic ills of Britain. They have dismally failed to do that. It is no good going back 14 years and making comparisons with the last Labour Government. The economic policies that are practised by the Government are those of the ancient Britons rather than of the modern Britons.

The Chief Secretary's opening remarks certainly alluded to my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). I interpreted his remarks as a job description for the position not only of Chief Secretary but of shadow Chief Secretary. I could not help but think that that job description might have applied in an ideal world; in other words, his words showed the wishes and visions of a Don Quixote rather than those of a strong Government determined to tackle Britain's economic problems and equally determined that sacrifices should be made on a fair basis. The Bill does not address those matters.

9.15 pm

Mr. Betts: The Budget is almost exclusively about the Government's obsession with curing the Budget deficit that they have created. The previous Chancellor of the Exchequer talked in his resignation statement about the absence of long-term policy thinking from the Government. He could also have said, had he been more objective, that the Government's economic policy had been based on a number of obsessions.

The Government's obsession in the early 1980s was with dealing with inflation, and that obsession caused the disastrous collapse of our manufacturing industry. The Government were then obsessed with financial deregulation, which created the credit boom and the debt overhang with which the Government must now cope. Their obsession with inflation at the end of the 1980s caused the longest recession in Britain since the war. Now the Government's obsession is with the public sector borrowing requirement.

The Chancellor's one policy statement since his appointment—if one can call it that—said, in effect, that if the recovery is stronger than the Government think, tax incomes will go up. There will then be less of a need for the Government to act by making public expenditure reductions and further tax increases. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true: if the recovery is slightly less strong, there will be a greater need for the Government to impose more tax increases and cut expenditure further. The worry

[Mr. Betts]

is that the Government are obsessed totally with the PSBR. The recovery comes as an afterthought in that process.

The recovery and the appalling problems of unemployment should be the Government's prime objectives. I do not mean simply short-term unemployment, when people have been out of work for two or three weeks; I mean cases such as the young man to whom I talked in Sheffield recently. He is aged 27 and has never had a job in his life. He has moved from one training scheme to another. He has had the misfortune to spend the whole of his working life—or, in his case, non-working life—under the Government and their policies.

It is not true for the Government to say that the recovery is under way and that it is all right for them to deal with the PSBR by raising taxes or reducing expenditure. A recent survey of Sheffield industry was carried out by *The Star* and a local firm of accountants. The results showed that

"despite the recent spate of news concerning recovery, businesses believe the effects of the recession will be felt into 1994 and beyond and that the real recovery will be delayed until then."

More than half—62 per cent.—of business respondents "thought the recession would end in 1994 and beyond."

A similar figure—68 per cent.—thought that

"Government policy was not working for the benefit of UK businesses".

That is what businesses in Sheffield feel about the Government's claims about the recovery.

Despite the Chief Secretary's analysis of the PSBR, the problem is totally the Government's fault. Cyclical PSBR problems are the fault of the immediate recession, but the structural problems of the PSBR are the fault of the Government's long-term economic policy and the underlying weakness of the economy.

It worried me that the Chief Secretary did not answer my earlier question. The Government do not understand the difference between the cyclical and the structural problems of the PSBR or how to deal with them. If they get it wrong and attempt to tackle the structural problems at the wrong point in the economic cycle, they will squash any faint hope of recovery. That will cause damage for years to come. The Government have not faced up to that issue and are not prepared to answer questions about it. They have not seen the need for action, and their idea is that one can somehow mirror the national economic situation as an aggregate of household budgets.

The Chief Secretary talked about a bank account. That is a throwback to the neoclassical economics idea that macro-economics is merely micro-economics writ large. Let us learn some lessons from the past. Wynne Godley, one of the seven wise men appointed to help the Chancellor, said in a submission to the first round of the Chancellor's review that he believed that eventually the PSBR would

"add enough to national output to generate enough tax revenue . . . to cover not only the addition to public expenditure, but also the interest payments which have been generated by the additional public sector debt."

That answers the Chief Secretary's point about the problems of a cyclical recovery reducing the PSBR by the full amount.

I agree with my hon. Friends that the real problem for the Government is not the PSBR but the balance of payments crisis—a £12 billion debt at a time of economic depression. That boils down to a lack of economic and industrial capacity, caused by the Government's economic policies. The real problem for the Government is that there is a limit to the amount of recovery that can be generated without creating an even bigger balance of payments deficit. There is also a further restraint in the shape of how the cyclical element of the balance of payments can be dealt with during the recovery, and the Government have not come to grips with it. For an answer, they should go to the Bank for International Settlements, which recently said:

"Growth above the current rate will be required to reduce the budget deficit but could increase the current account deficit. On the other hand, growth compatible with a stable current account deficit might lead to an unsustainable rise in the public sector imbalance."

The Government are not facing up to that dilemma. It is no use Conservative Members saying that fiscal restraint is not the answer—that the Government can deal with the problem by relaxing monetary policy. We have not heard what the Government's monetary policy is. Do they have one? It is all very well saying that we have left the exchange rate mechanism so there are now no international restrictions; there is every evidence that the Government are merely shadowing the deutschmark at DM2.5. Is there an internal, domestic policy governing the money supply? It is certainly unclear how the Government see monetary and fiscal policy.

The Government have an obsession with the PSBR to the exclusion of all else. One objective does not make an economic policy. We know from the previous Chancellor that the Government have no long-term policies: in my submission, they have no short-term economic policies either. They have created an appalling economic mess. They should be condemned for that, and doubly condemned for the fact that they have no coherent economic strategy to get the country out of the mess that they have created.

9.22 pm

Mr. Hoon: The Bill is based on a lie told to the British people at the time of the general election—the lie that a Conservative Government had no need and no plans to raise taxation, and that people could vote Conservative in the expectation of tax cuts to come. That was the essence of the Conservative appeal to the electorate in the election campaign.

Within 12 months, the Government brought in the Bill, imposing a series of tax increases and changes on the British people—not only VAT increases and increases in national insurance contributions but alterations in allowances and reliefs against income tax for almost everyone, increasing taxes right across the range of measures that are available to any Government. When challenged repeatedly about that, the Chief Secretary defends each tax regime measure almost cheerfully. He cheerfully admitted this evening that this was a revenue-raising, tax-increasing Budget. He did that in Committee and he has done it again tonight. It is necessary, he says, to fund the £50 billion deficit at the heart of the Government's finances.

What is curious about the right hon. Gentleman's approach to the deficit is the fact that he has consistently failed to deal with its causes. Where does the deficit come from? It is almost as if it arrived one day from another

planet and was nothing to do with the Government, who have had, rather distastefully, to deal with it. Yet throughout the election campaign and parliamentary progress on the Bill Conservative Members have attacked the Labour party's spending plans even though a Conservative Government are forecasting a £50 billion deficit. They are therefore not in the strongest position from which to criticise.

Apart from admitting to a newly discovered enthusiasm for raising taxes, the Government have provided us with little analysis of how they got into such a sorry state. Instead, they continue to try to face both ways, claiming to be the party of tax cuts just as they significantly increase the burden of taxation on the British people.

In Committee, the Financial Secretary pointed to the limitation on reliefs to 20 per cent. as a sign of the Government's so-called commitment to reducing taxation. It is a remarkable exercise in double-speak for a tax-raising Government to try to claim credit for their so-called commitment to reducing taxes by increasing income tax for anyone with a mortgage, yet pretend that it was a sign of better things to come.

There is little doubt that the measures are designed to deceive and defraud the electorate—big tax increases now with a view to smaller tax reductions later. Some Conservative Members may ask what is wrong with that. The answer is clear: it is making the British economy and the British people subservient to the interests of the Conservative party in being re-elected. It makes them subservient to the interests of Ministers who want to keep their jobs, ahead of the real interests of the country.

Anyone who has any doubts about that argument should consider the history of the past two Budgets. The 1992 pre-election Budget was designed to win votes at a time when serious economic commentators were pointing to the dangers of the growing size of the public sector borrowing requirement. When asked about that during the general election, what did Ministers say? Minister after Minister stated that he saw no difficulty with the PSBR, that he had no need to raise taxes, that he had set the right targets for public expenditure.

Twelve months later, those same Ministers are standing on their heads, their forecasts and promises empty of content and meaning. Are we really to believe that they were genuinely caught out by some apparently unforeseen growth in the PSBR? Those same Ministers, in the 1992 general election campaign, confidently forecast recovery for the British economy. They predicted that their assessment of the country's needs for borrowing and taxation could be contained within the guidelines set out in the 1992 Budget. They had access to all of the relevant Government figures when they said last year that their assessments in April 1992 were accurate. They were either incompetent or dishonest. Which is it? It is important that we and the British people know the answer.

I have little doubt that the Government plan to make most people's lives more miserable this year, next year, and perhaps even the year after. By 1996, the likely Tory target date for a general election, they can start easing back. They can look for tax cuts and handouts going into a general election campaign, paid for by the tax increases in this year's Finance Bill. That is their real policy. It is not so much an economic policy as a re-election policy. By then, as electricity and gas bills start to hit the doormats with their 17·5 per cent. Government surcharge, the British people will be looking for change. The Government will no doubt introduce proposals to reduce the level of income tax, not for the benefit of the British economy, but simply to boost their prospects of re-election.

The Government cannot expect that deception to work yet again. It is time for them to stop playing politics with the British economy and to face up to the fundamental problems that their policies have created.

9.27 pm

Mr. Mandelson: It is no secret that Opposition Members hate the Budget, which is being implemented by the Bill. We hate it for what it does not do about unemployment, which has dramatically increased in so many regions and is still chronic in regions such as mine. We hate it for the unfairness of its measures and the savage impact that it will have on so many of the needy and most vulnerable. We hate it for the distance that the Government have travelled from the glossy gift-wrapped prospectus that they presented to the electorate in the election campaign last year, notwithstanding the fact that Opposition Members will be the political beneficiaries of the betrayal of so many of the Tories' supporters last year.

We wanted to see in this Budget ideas to get the young people in our constituencies and communities back to work, to get the long-term unemployed back to work, or at least on proper quality training schemes where they can pick up skills in readiness for the recovery, whenever it occurs. In no sense have we seen a Budget for jobs. That is undoubtedly the greatest indictment of the Budget and the Bill, the effect of which will be felt by so many people in our constituencies.

The Bill is grossly unfair and unequal in its impact on different sections of the community. It is ironic, although perhaps not surprising, that those of us who served on the Committee considering the Finance Bill spent many hours sorting out problems and making things better—but, tragically, not for the people in real and desperate need. Throughout, the Government cared most about their friends—for example, the Lloyd's names, for whom they have created what will probably turn out to be a highly beneficial tax shelter. For large oil companies, there is massively reduced petroleum revenue duties. As speaker after speaker has reminded us, this measure will destroy jobs in exploration among the medium-sized and smaller oil companies as well as the onshore activity that is so important in my constituency and others in Scotland and in the north-east.

The Committee even took time to create a tax break for wealthy foreigners so that they could buy homes here without running the risk that they might be caught for tax. Tory Members may say that that was worth only £10 million, but was that £10 million used for the poor, for the low-paid, for struggling businesses? No, it was for the friends of the Tory party. It was particularly symbolic for that.

It was noteworthy, but probably predictable, that nothing of equal value requiring similar effort was done throughout the proceedings of the Committee to close the loopholes and stop the abuses that offer such opportunities to the already wealthy and well-off, and other friends of the Conservative party. The Government know how to look after their friends. They have not even bothered to chase up those missing millions—the £1·7 billion—in last year's uncollected taxes. That is twice the sum that went uncollected in the previous year and possibly, most

[Mr. Mandelson]

significantly of all, twice the expected revenue from VAT on fuel that the Government are intending to claim next year.

In Committee, we should have spent our time implementing a straight quid pro quo, ensuring that there were measures in place to collect the uncollected taxes from the most wealthy and privileged, rather than extending VAT on fuel—a tax on warmth, light and heat. It is not surprising that that is seen as the most notorious, nefarious and objectionable feature of the Bill, which will haunt the Government from here to Christchurch and back via Newbury.

The contrast between what the Government promised that they would do for the low-paid, the typical taxpayer and the middle-income earner and those whom they are actually helping goes to the heart of what is so damnable and objectionable about the Bill. It has laid bare the whole cynical, fraudulent case that the Conservative party put to the voters at the election last year. The Tories said that it would be safe to reduce taxes and possible to lower borrowing and that it would not be necessary to increase costs or impose new charges. They said that economic growth would square the circle and deal with the details, yet the Budget and the Bill have put up taxes. The Bill has done nothing to get people back to work, enabling borrowing to be reduced; instead, it has increased the cost of living, of mortgages and employment and provided not a single new policy or fresh initiative to create new jobs or to spur enterprise and growth.

Overwhelmingly, people recognise that the country is in a hole. Everyone knows it and the Chancellor has even said it. Hardly a soul does not realise that, in the long term, we cannot live with the public sector financial deficit we have now. People know that difficult decisions have to be taken; they do not expect anything else. However, they do expect the Government to accept responsibility and to take action to get the economy moving. They expect the Government to respond vigorously and imaginatively to the crisis of unemployment. Above all, they expect the Government to be fair on the tax measures that they take. On all those counts, the Government have failed and the Finance Bill deserves to fail as well.

9.34 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Chief Secretary to the Treasury opened this debate by referring to the views of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. He treated us to a fairly partial run through the OECD's views of the British economy before describing himself as odious. In returning to those aspects of the OECD's review of the British economy which the Chief Secretary overlooked, I should like to draw the attention of the House to the OECD's review, which it instigated and reported on in its publication "Economic Outlook", in which it considered the health of the public sector in all OECD countries.

One would not have learnt this from the Chief Secretary's contribution to the debate, but the OECD found in its review that the United Kingdom compares very unfavourably with other OECD countries. Between 1989 and 1993, the United Kingdom's deficit widened by more than 9 per cent. of GDP, and that is more than that of any other G7 country. That point puts the Chief Secretary's remarks in context.

The unique depth and duration of the United Kingdom's recession are clearly partly responsible for that state of affairs, although I know that it is fashionable—and probably obligatory—for Conservative Members to blame the world recession for the shrinkage of the British economy.

The OECD estimates that 2·6 per cent. of GDP—about one third of the deficit—is a result of the recession. However, when the Chief Secretary was asked to quote even the broadest of estimates for those figures, he declined to do so. He could at least have quoted the OECD in that respect as he was keen enough to quote it on other matters. The OECD estimate would leave a PSBR of 5·7 per cent. of GDP which is structural. That means that the borrowing will remain even when the economy recovers. That structural deficit is a measure of the health of public sector finances, purged of the effects of short-term economic cycles. That is worse in the United Kingdom than in any other G7 country bar Italy. That is the problem which the Budget attempts to address.

Conservative Members always ask what Labour would do in such circumstances. I will answer that not by saying what Labour would do in the future, but by saying what Labour has done in the past. The problem has been made substantially worse by tax cuts of £6 billion given in 1988 and tax cuts of a further £2 billion to which we were treated in 1992 before the general election. Labour believed then, and we believe now, that those tax cuts were beyond what public finances could afford, and the blame for that lies with the Government and with no one else.

If people want to know what we said at the time, I can tell them that we voted against those measures. That is a matter of public record. A Labour Government would not have got us into the position into which the present Conservative Government have got us.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) pointed out, before the last election the Government said that the economy would grow by 2 per cent. in 1992-93, by 3·25 per cent. this year, by 3·75 per cent. next year and by 3·5 per cent. in 1995-96. The Red Book this year showed that the economy was stagnant for 1992-93. It forecast growth of just 2 per cent. this year, 2·5 per cent. next year and 2·75 per cent. for each year after that.

The Government boast of recovery and revise the forecasts down. The Government promised recovery and they now show that the economy did not grow for a year. The Government promised vigorous economic growth for the next five years, but they now say that the economy will be just 2 per cent. larger this year rather than the 5·25 per cent. promised last year. The Government have cut their forecast for the size of the economy in 1996-97 by 7 per cent., or some £55 billion.

That £55 billion means that the economy will be poorer by the equivalent of £1,000 a year for every man, woman and child in the country. Those are not short-term forecasts subject to the inevitable uncertainties arising from the vagaries in economic cycles. Those changes reflect a fundamentally different view about the capacity of the United Kingdom economy to grow and to improve living standards and pay for public services.

Last year the Government's figures showed a public sector borrowing requirement of £32 billion for the current

year; the Red Book shows that the Government now expect to borrow £50 billion. Last year, the Government showed the deficit declining to £6 billion in 1996-97. The Government said that there would be no need to cut spending or raise taxes and that the public finances would return to balance as the economy followed the recovery that I have just outlined. It has already been revealed that the £6 billion was massaged downwards on the orders of the former Chancellor, but now we are told that the borrowing required will be £46 billion if the Government do not raise taxes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) has pointed out that the Government painted a false picture last year. The Government said that the economy would recover; it did not do so for another year. The Government said that recovery would be vigorous; now they take a significantly gloomier view of growth prospects. The Government said that taxes would not need to be raised. Now, in line with the new realism about economic growth that the Chief Secretary treated us to earlier, he has said that taxes need to be increased.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) pointed out, the Conservatives were not content with lying about our tax policies before the general election; they comprehensively lied about their own.

The Chief Secretary, in opening the debate, asserted that the Budget was broadly distributionally neutral, with the average proportion of income lost equal across income deciles at around 2·5 per cent. But 2·5 per cent. of income is of differing importance to the poorest and richest groups in society. Is it not disproportionate to ask the rich and poor alike for the same proportion of their income to reduce the deficit?

Contrasting the distributional effects of what happens when the Government need to raise tax rather than cut it, surely it is right to assert that they have increased national insurance contributions when they have cut income tax. Individuals start to pay national insurance contributions on earnings at least £1,000 lower than those on which income tax is paid. The Government have frozen income tax allowance, which raises money from people on the lowest incomes, when they have cut the higher rates of tax.

All in all, the richest 10 per cent. of the population are now £4,500 a year better off after the tax and benefit changes since 1979, and the poorest 10 per cent. of our fellow citizens are actually £50 a year worse off.

None of this is popular, but it is typical of this Prime Minister's decision making that, when he was faced with an unpopular Chancellor and an unpopular Budget, he got rid of the Chancellor and kept the Budget.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) has pointed out that the Government have cynically dressed up the extension of VAT to domestic fuel as an environmental measure. The truth of the matter is that it is nothing more than a large tax rise. VAT on fuel is the most regressive extension of the VAT base. Before knock-on effects and compensation, it will raise 2 per cent. of net income from the poorest 10 per cent, and less than 0·5 per cent. from the richest 10 per cent. I ask even Conservative hon. Members, how can that be fair? At least some Conservative Members realised last night that it was not fair, and, very bravely, they voted with us in the Lobby to assert what one of them described as social justice. I noticed that his colleagues stared at him as if he had said something peculiarly offensive. Perhaps the Conservative party does regard social justice as something peculiarly offensive, but I bet that the electors of Christchurch do not.

Mr. Dorrell: They are not voting for the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Brown: I am not standing in the election. I prefer the climate in Newcastle.

As domestic heat and light are necessities, fuel consumption will not be cut by much as a result of this tax rise. If anyone is still giving the argument about the environment any credence, he cannot plausibly argue that the tax increase will do much to reduce the emissions of CO_2 in line with the United Nations climate for change convention. As my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) has pointed out, the changes hit the poorest the hardest.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) asked who gains and who loses in this year's Finance Bill. If the Government decided to have their legislation financially sponsored rather than the arrangements that pertain at present, this could be known as the British Petroleum Finance Bill. The petroleum industry would be happy to acknowledge sponsorship of this year's measures.

The heads of foreign states have also gained from the Bill. Those with an interest in foreign affairs will be pleased to learn that they remain relieved of any obligation to pay tax on their British income. The hereditary rulers of Brunei, Saudi Arabia, Dubai and Oman are now treated more favourably than our sovereign, but they gave large sums of money to the Conservative party and our sovereign did not—*[Interruption.]* Is the Chief Secretary trying to assert that Her Gracious Majesty gave money to the Conservative party, because I cannot believe it? I must have misheard that sedentary intervention.

The Bill makes a small concession to wealthy foreigners with tax-exempt status. If Asil Nadir were to return to this country, he would benefit from that little £10 million change to our tax regime. The British people, who have not contributed generously enough on a voluntary basis to Conservative party funds, are subject to a massive tax rise.

In a previous Third Reading speech on the Finance Bill I said that discussing the Finance Bill without the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) would be like discussing Hamlet without the ham. This will be the last Bill where we discuss the Budget with the right hon. Gentleman. Personally, I regret his passing. It is probably worth pointing out that that is the first nice thing that has been said about the right hon. Gentleman in the entire debate. What an astonishing legacy for a former Chancellor that not a single Conservative Member has said something nice about him.

Mr. Duncan: I did.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman protests his innocence, although I am not sure that it would be regarded as innocence by his colleagues in the Treasury. I hope that he will be rewarded with being forgiven with the passage of time.

It is sad that hon. Members who followed the Chancellor loyally through the Division Lobbies on the Budget could not find a decent word to say for him when discussing the legislation that he has brought to fruition.

[Mr. Brown]

His epitaph is not a single kind word from Conservative Members, even from his loyal deputy, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

The Bill includes value added tax on fuel; ACT changes hitting charities and pension funds; a 1 per cent. increase in employees' national insurance contributions; the non-indexation of allowances; restricting mortgage tax relief and married couples allowances to the new 20 per cent. band; and significant new increases in excise duties, notably on petrol and cigarettes.

Tonight we are invited not just to acknowledge the extent of the Government's mismanagement of the economy but to pay for it. I suggest that my hon. Friends reject that invitation.

9.48 pm

Mr. Dorrell: First, I wish to respond to the comment of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) about my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont). The most eloquent testimony of my hon. Friends' support for the Budget introduced by my right hon. Friend is for them to support the Third Reading tonight. I have not the slightest doubt that they will all take the opportunity to record their support for the Budget proposals tabled by my right hon. Friend on 16 March.

The Third Reading debate is the end of a long process in which the House and the Standing Committee considered the proposals tabled by my right hon. Friend on 16 March. My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) spoke about the petroleum revenue tax—one of the major tax proposals contained in the Budget. It has properly detained the Committee of the whole House and the Standing Committee as we have ensured that the issue is properly addressed. The concerns expressed within the oil industry and oil supply industries were also properly discussed.

It is true to say of my hon. Friend the Member for Slough and my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Sir C. Onslow), who has also taken a keen interest in the subject, that they accept, as do the vast majority of those actively involved in the oil industry, the objective of seeking to remove the distortions that the existing system of high rate and narrow base imposes on the oil industry through petroleum revenue tax. That objective is common ground.

As the Bill has proceeded, we have had considerable discussions on the nature of the transition arrangements which secure the transition from where we are now to where we all want to be. In the course of the Bill's consideration, the Government have sought to respond to the concerns expressed about the transition arrangements, not least by my hon. Friend the Member for Slough. The time has come to record the fact that, as the House has decided matters and the Bill has proceeded, it has become clear that there is a difference of opinion about the desirability of any further action on transitional arrangements. The House has made a decision in favour of the transition arrangements contained in the Bill.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Does the Minister understand the deep sense of betrayal felt in the oil industry this morning about the events over the weekend? Can he give a clear answer to the following question: at his meeting with his right hon. and hon. Friends on Thursday night, did he give a hint that he was likely to change his mind? If the answer is no, the placing of the amendments on the amendment paper was duplicitous, and if the answer is yes, he was being duplicitous.

Mr. Dorrell: There is nothing duplicitous about placing amendments on the amendment paper. I listened to the representations made by my hon. Friends and undertook —as I should in the circumstances—to report and discuss those representations with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. After the argument on the issue, it is important for us to be clear about matters.

The Government believe that the position set out in the Bill, on both the transition arrangements and the final objective, will endure in the long term. I can think of no perception more likely to undermine exploration and appraisal activity in the short term than the perception —if allowed to develop—that the Government may be about to reconsider the issues. That would be a powerful incentive for oil companies to delay exploration and appraisal until a future date when exploration and appraisal relief may be available. The Government have no plans to revisit the issue. We believe that the proposals contained in the Bill will endure, and when the results are clear our judgments will be vindicated.

We have agreed to look again at the narrow issue of the treatment of pipelines. We make no commitment, except in the broadest sense of maintaining the tax system—which is our continuing duty—to look again at any of the other issues relating to that subject contained in the Bill.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister knows all about undermining confidence in the oil industry. He said a few seconds ago that the House had made a decision on the subject. The House has had no opportunity, subsequent to the Government's refusal to make a concession in Committee, to make a decision on the subject, other than to vote in a few minutes' time.

Mr. Dorrell: The House has considered the matter both in Committee of the whole House and in Standing Committee.

As the Third Reading of the debate has unfolded, I have listened to speeches from right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. One factor which has become clear to me, particularly from the speeches of Opposition Members, is that not a single Opposition Member has made any serious reference to the fact that there are clear signs that recovery is under way in the British economy, as my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary made clear in his opening speech on Third Reading.

That perspective was almost totally lacking in the speeches made by Labour Members. One listened in vain to their speeches to hear a reference to the survey of the Confederation of Business Industry, which records the best sentiment among British business men since April 1983. One listened in vain to hear about the increase in retail sales of 3 per cent. over the past 12 months. One listened in vain for a reference to the increase in car registrations, which are up by 6·5 per cent. over the past 12 months.

Despite Labour Members' protestations of interest in the manufacturing sector, one listened in vain to them for a reference to the fact that manufacturing output has been

increasing for 12 months but has now reversed in the first five months of this year to more than half of the total loss of manufacturing output in the recession. Despite all the occasions over the years on which Labour Members have said that unemployment is the key factor, one listened in vain to their speeches for a single reference to the fact that unemployment has fallen in the past four months. That is good news, but reference was not made to it by Labour Members. I have further bad news for them——

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: I will not give way.

The further bad news is that we intend that the recovery which is under way, and to which Labour Members did not refer, will be sustained because the Government are determined to deliver the disciplines that will ensure that it is sustained.

I refer to the discipline of sound money. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) has taken to quoting my speeches back at me. That is great flattery. Because she repeatedly quotes from my speech about the dangers of inflation, I can only assume that she agrees with those dangers. For example, I assume that she agrees that inflation causes economic waste by giving inaccurate signals and introducing short-term planning horizons.

I assume that the hon. Lady agrees that inflation causes social injustice, which ensures that the system does not reward those who produce—it rewards those with the sharpest elbows. Inflation is a tax on the unsophisticated, to the benefit of the sophisticated. I am pleased to welcome her support for those propositions.

The hands of Labour Members are not clean on the subject of inflation—far from it. In the 1970s, the Labour Government were responsible for an average inflation rate of 15 per cent. during their years in office. What were they doing from 1986 to 1988 when the misjudgments which we acknowledge were being made led to an excess inflation rate? They were busy winding the handle that distributed the seeds of the harvest that came later.

In those years, what was Labour Members' formula for interest rates? They travelled the country telling us that interest rates should be fixed by a simple formula—X minus 2 per cent. when X was the prevailing interest rate. Whatever the interest rate, they wanted to see it cut. They did not see the dangers of inflation. If we had followed their nostrums, we would have made the matter worse.

In sharp contrast to that world, the Government have delivered the sound money and price stability objective that is the necessary precondition to sustainable growth. We have also made it clear that we will deliver sound public finance. That is the second discipline, which Labour Members talk about but on which we act. How would a Labour Government deliver sound public finance? It would not be through tax increases. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) shut and locked that door before the Budget when he said that to raise income tax, national insurance or VAT at that time would be a mistake. How would a Labour Government close the Budget deficit? Would the hon. Gentleman look to the hon. Member for Peckham? Would the whole burden rest on her? She wants more money for hospitals, schools, training and overseas aid. Under her, a spending round would be not so much a spending round as an auction.

The Bill lies at the heart of the difference between the parties. Others talk about the deficit. They recognise that it threatens sustainable recovery, but when asked what they would do about it, answer comes there none. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said of his party:

"We have failed to come up with an alternative analysis."

That is the luxury of opposition—sound-bite populism, the opportunity to be all things to all men. Labour Members have forgotten the dictum of Aneurin Bevan:

"The language of socialism is the religion of priorities."

The modern Labour party has lost its faith. The world in which Labour Members live is not the real world. The House knows it and the British people know it, which is why the British people have consistently rejected the plausible blandishments of the Opposition.

The Bill represents the Government's continuing commitment to deliver the disciplines which are the precondition of economic success, and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 311, Noes 274.

Division No. 331] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*	Carttiss, Michael
Aitken, Jonathan	Cash, William
Alexander, Richard	Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*	Churchill, Mr
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*	Clappison, James
Amess, David	Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Ancram, Michael	Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Arbuthnot, James	Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Coe, Sebastian
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*	Colvin, Michael
Ashby, David	Congdon, David
Aspinwall, Jack	Conway, Derek
Atkins, Robert	Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*	Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*	Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*	Couchman, James
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*	Cran, James
Baldry, Tony	Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*	Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Bates, Michael	Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Batiste, Spencer	Day, Stephen
Bellingham, Henry	Deva, Nirj Joseph
Bendall, Vivian	Devlin, Tim
Beresford, Sir Paul	Dickens, Geoffrey
Biffen, Rt Hon John	Dicks, Terry
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Dorrell, Stephen
Body, Sir Richard	Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas	Dover, Den
Booth, Hartley	Duncan, Alan
Boswell, Tim	Duncan-Smith, Iain
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*	Dunn, Bob
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia	Durant, Sir Anthony
Bowden, Andrew	Dykes, Hugh
Bowis, John	Eggar, Tim
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes	Elletson, Harold
Brandreth, Gyles	Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Brazier, Julian	Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Bright, Graham	Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*	Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela	Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*	Evennett, David
Budgen, Nicholas	Faber, David
Burns, Simon	Fabricant, Michael
Burt, Alistair	Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Butcher, John	Fenner, Dame Peggy
Butler, Peter	Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*	Fishburn, Dudley
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*	Forman, Nigel
Carrington, Matthew	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*

Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike

Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Andrew Mackinlay.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Education (Assisted Places)

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Eric Forth): I beg to move,

That the draft Education (Assisted Places) (Amendment) Regulations 1993, which were laid before this House on 29th June, be approved.

As hon. Members will know from debates in previous years, these draft amendment regulations are quite specific in their purpose. They are simple amendments to the principal regulations, which are the Education (Assisted Places) Regulations 1989. As such, I shall restrict my comments to these amendments only and will briefly explain their purpose to the House.

The amending regulations provide for the uprating of the parental contribution tables, which we have done on an annual basis since the inception of the scheme, and set out how much parents must pay towards their child's assisted place. There is also a small number of other technical amendments. I am sure that the House will find that the amendments I shall describe are quite straightforward.

Regulation 1 of the draft regulations deals with citation, commencement, application and interpretation. The regulations are to come into force on 27 August 1993.

Regulation 2 of the draft regulations increases the allowance made when calculating parents' total relevant income for each dependent child other than the assisted place holder. The amount is raised from £1,105 to £1,125 —that is, by the same percentage which applies to the uprating of the parental contribution scales, to which I shall return in a moment. This allowance is helpful to parents with larger families, and uprating it will ensure that their position is not worsened.

Regulation 3 deals purely with technical amendments. They are necessary in order to keep the definition of "total parental income" for the purposes of the scheme in line with tax legislation. They also update the wording of the regulations to reflect current terminology—hence the need now to refer in the regulations to the new Child Support Agency.

I come now to the main purpose of setting these regulations before the House today. Regulation 4 sets out the income bands used for assessing parents' contributions towards fees. These bands have been uprated to take account of the movement in the retail prices index to April of this year—that is, by 1·9 per cent. The threshold at or below which parents pay nothing towards fees is raised from £9,056 to £9,225, with corresponding increases in the thresholds for higher percentage contributions from income. The effect of this amendment is that parents will not be asked to increase contributions above the rate of inflation. They will continue to contribute roughly the same proportion of their income as they did last year.

I believe that the House will find this to be an equitable measure, taking into account the fact that parents in the scheme earn considerably less than the national average income. Assistance under the scheme follows the principle that the lower the income, the greater the Government assistance should be. The threshold for full remission of fees, to which I have just referred, is set deliberately low so that the least well-off families benefit most. The scale then rises by a fairly steep curve so that better-off families get reduced, and eventually no, assistance. I believe this to be right and in keeping with the aims of the scheme—to open doors of opportunity to those who would otherwise never be able to contemplate paying fees.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): How many children in Great Britain are now benefiting from the assisted places scheme?

Mr. Forth: Approximately 27,000. I can give the hon. Gentleman a more precise figure later, if he wants one.

The provisions and amendments that I have just described are necessary technicalities to ensure the continued smooth running of the assisted places scheme, which is proving to be increasingly popular with parents, as is evidenced by the unprecedented rate of take-up in schools. Nevertheless, the Government continue to take steps to ensure that the scheme provides for a realistic contribution from both the taxpayer and the parents and, by restricting the level of fees that can be applied by schools to assisted pupils, a continuation of the part played by individual schools as partners with the Government in this very successful scheme.

I commend the regulations to the House.

10.23 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): These amending regulations provide us with an opportunity to look again at this running sore on the body educational. There is no doubt that this scheme remains wrong in principle. It is quite simply a subsidy to the private sector, as is recognised by many people.

This year, there are 21 private schools receiving more than £750,000 each, and seven receiving more than £1 million each. There are 63 schools with more than 20 per cent. of their pupils on the assisted places scheme: 13 have 30 per cent. of their pupils on the scheme, and in two schools the proportion is more than 40 per cent. The position was made quite clear as long ago as 1986, when the headmaster of King Edward's school, 200 of whose pupil—if my memory serves me well—are on the scheme, said:

"It will not, therefore, surprise the reader if I defend the assisted places scheme. I believe that it is a good scheme. But I must be honest: it is a good scheme partly because it helps independent schools . . . While a very small minority of schools on the scheme—the Winchesters and Sedburghs—may indeed have no need of state support, the majority will have benefited considerably."

So the headmaster of an independent school sees this as a specific subsidy to his school.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, contrary to what he has just said, this represents a saving to the state sector? The vast majority of children who take up the scheme would otherwise be educated in the state sector. The amount that the Government have to pay is smaller than the sum that would be involved if those children were being educated in state schools.

Mr. Griffiths: That is not true. Some years ago, even the Independent Schools Information Service drew attention to the fact that a place in an independent school cost over £200 more than one in a state school. Later information put the figure at £400. It is indeed a costly scheme, and a subsidy to the private sector. It is also a blatant attempt to cream off very able children from the maintained sector.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): The hon. Gentleman mentioned King Edward's school. I presume that he means the one in Birmingham, which appeared on a list produced by one of his hon. Friends. The real point about schools such as King Edward's and Haberdashers' Aske's in my constituency is that they could fill the places with pupils whose parents were prepared to pay the fees. Certainly, Haberdashers' Aske's, King Edward's in Birmingham and, I suspect, many others on the scheme could fill the places many times over in that way but, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, they seek to open doors of opportunity for children whose parents are not able to afford the fees. That is what the scheme is doing, and the hon. Gentleman has no evidence to the contrary.

Mr. Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman has made a speech, responding to a point that I have not even made. My argument is that the assisted places cost the Government more money than places in maintained secondary schools and that it would be much better if the money were used to improve the facilities and increase the number of teachers in the state schools.

As I was saying before the hon. Gentleman's speech, the scheme is a blatant attempt to cream off very able children from the maintained sector. If the Government were truly concerned about the quality of education in the maintained sector, they would be doing everything possible to ensure that the policies were in place and the facilities and teachers available to make certain that all children could be educated to the best of their ability.

What is even worse, given the fact that there is a subsidy and an attempt to cream off the best pupils from the maintained schools, there is absolutely no evidence that the extra cost means better results. Her Majesty's inspectorate and the Audit Commission have examined the issues exhaustively and concluded that there is absolutely no evidence that pupils who go to such schools benefit in any way. In fact, when the scheme was introduced, John Rae, then headmaster of Westminster school, said:

"The Scheme was based on a false premise: that an independent school was automatically a better place to educate a bright child."

Plainly, it is not, and the scheme is a waste of money.

The scheme encourages educational snobbery which undermines maintained schools. It provides opportunities for a few at the expense of the many.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): It is a great pity that the hon. Gentleman knocks the education of poor children, because that is what he is doing. Is he aware that the assisted places scheme costs £95 million a year out of an education budget of £17 billion? If he thinks that children do not profit from the scheme he need only talk to poor parents in my constituency who will tell him the truth. Why should they not have the same opportunity as others?

Mr. Griffiths: It was the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) who said that the scheme covered about 1 per cent. of all pupils. If the hon. Gentleman is really concerned about the education of poor children, why does he not ensure that the facility is available to every child? The scheme is highly selective. It would be far better if the Government gave every state school an extra £400 per pupil. We would then see what more could be achieved by that simple expedient, without encouraging such a highly divisive system.

The idea of helping poor children has failed on the Government's own objectives. In the *Daily Mail* on 25 June 1981, the right hon. Member for Brent, North said that he wanted the scheme to cater for able children from the poorest homes. Lord Joseph, then Secretary of State for Education and Science, said that he saw the scheme as a way of producing a greater social mix in independent schools. With the scheme helping only 1 per cent. of pupils, that plainly is not happening.

Although it is true that two thirds of pupils on the scheme come from families with below average incomes, a third come from families with above average incomes. If the Government were intent on helping the poorest families, they would divert all the help to those on below average incomes. What gives the game away is that well over half the parents of even those on low incomes went to independent or selective schools. So we have a self-generating scheme: those who know about it and are in a position to take advantage of it do so.

If the schools are so good, why do the Government not provide the extra money for all children? The plain fact is that they do not. Why do they not spend the money to help able pupils in maintained schools? The money would be put to much better use there. Why do they not use the money to provide more nursery school places? There is a well-established and well-researched link between the provision of good nursery education and better performance in schools. That would be a far more effective use of public moneys.

What is worse is that we are now seeing that the scheme is badly managed. In 1992 the spending has to be capped to a maximum increase of 12 per cent. In the maintained sector, an increase of only 7 per cent. was allowed. In 1990-91 there was a £3 million overspend, even though 17 per cent. of the places remained unfilled. In 1991-92 the scheme was almost £11 million over budget. This year it is estimated that there will be a £78 million outturn in the Department's expenditure plans. Next year the plan is to spend £95 million. However, on table 10 on page 16 of the same document, the Government say that there will be only 286 extra places next year, but they are spending £17 million more. If that is computed on a per capita basis, it is nearly £60,000 extra per place. I invite the Minister to check the figures and explain to me how I have misread the tables.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that there is likely to be a steep increase in demand for places from Kent, where the Liberals, who have just taken control with the assistance of the Labour party, have decided to cut, in maintained schools, the teaching of history, geography and English in favour of what they call "enhanced centres of experience"?

Mr. Griffiths: I am afraid that, on the Department's figures, there will be only 286 more places next year, so if the hon. Gentleman is right there will be a lot of disappointed parents in Kent.

The whole scheme shows the Government's belief that they have failed. They are in effect admitting that they do not think that the maintained sector offers a good enough education for able children, so they want them to go to the independent sector. Funnily enough, it was the hon.

[Mr. Griffiths]

Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) who described the assisted places scheme in February last year as a lifebelt for many a talented child. He added:

"Although I am a Conservative I do have reservations about subsidising the independent sector for all time."

The point is that the money would be much better spent in the maintained sector.

Surplus places also come into the equation. Thirty-four of these schools have more than 200 pupils on the assisted places scheme, so children are being taken away from the maintained schools in some boroughs and counties. It would be far better if the Government devoted the resulting extra resources to the maintained sector. The Government want to uprate the scheme so as to keep going their preferential treatment of a small minority of parents. That is deplorable. It shows up the ideological divide between us: the Government are intent on giving privileges to the very few while we believe that the money should be spent on extending opportunities for excellence in education to everybody.

10.36 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) for recalling some words that I uttered some time last year. Since the speech that he has just made was rather similar to speeches he has made before on these occasions, he will forgive me if I deliver a speech similar to the one I made last time.

Although I continue to approve of the assisted places scheme, we ought to keep an open mind and enter, perhaps, into a more sophisticated debate than is possible when phrases such as "running sore", "creaming off" and the like are used.

A figure that has struck me is to be found in a press release from the Department for Education dated 5 July. While we are spending £76 million on this wholly worthwhile scheme, we have put £50 million into our "successful technology schools initiative", of which I also approve.

The Minister says that the assisted places scheme provides parental choice, raises standards and extends opportunities. That is all true, but I would like a system that would not involve our subsidising the private schools. I would like a system like that in certain continental countries, where these things can be achieved in the places where the children actually live. That is my point about the Government's welcome technology schools initiative.

Ideally, we would not face the stark choice between comprehensivisation—86 per cent. of secondary schools are comprehensive—and the lifebelt of the assisted places scheme. That is a stark and artificial situation, and we have got ourselves into it through our mistaken educational philosophies over several decades, not including the last one.

We have to do what Wandsworth has done and fight our way out of that. We have to have "parental choice", "raising standards", "extending opportunities" in the locality, and that can be done only by providing a variety of different schools in one locality, with selection not by ability—let us put to one side the old-fashioned class debate—but by the method that they have in more sophisticated continental countries, by what the child shows that he has aptitude for.

There must be movement between schools—the system should not be set rock hard, because some children develop later than others. If the Government can find the money to expand not so much the assisted places scheme as the technology schools initiative, it is possible to foresee a time when, in many deprived, semi-deprived or just normal areas, there is a genuine choice for children, of all backgrounds, with different aptitudes. Children from deprived backgrounds may have an aptitude for academic, intellectual work. Some may have an aptitude for engineering. As we all know, that does not mean 19th-century engineering—it is a demanding business.

We can envisage different schools for those different children. There might also be a comprehensive school, and why not? There should be no dogmatism, no bar on having different types of school. If one is not a dogmatist, one cannot object in principle to having a comprehensive school. Why cannot there be three types of school?

I could go on for some time, but I would bore everyone if I did. However, I want to add one point about private schools. They have always worried me—not in themselves, because, despite what the hon. Member for Bridgend said, their methods are far more educationally sound than those in many of the state schools—but because I dislike the social polarisation involved in the existence of private schools, which one sees in no other country to the same degree. It is a profoundly disturbing phenomenon. It continues, as the hon. Gentleman intimated, from generation to generation, which makes it even more profoundly disturbing.

One of the little thoughts that I should like to leave in the mind of my hon. Friend the Minister——

Mr. Rowe: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Walden: May I just finish this little thought before it slips my mind?

I am serious about the thought of buying out some private schools. We should never forget that there are some private schools that used to be direct grant schools —the equivalent of what we now call grant-maintained schools. They were forced by the activities of Labour Members or their predecessors into the private sector and are now closed to ordinary children.

I would like to see those schools, with all their traditions of excellence, come back into the state sector and be open to every child on a competitive basis, to go there without paying fees. Such a scheme would be the ultimate extension of the assisted places scheme, because everyone would have the chance to go to such schools.

Eton may not do that, but I have visited some former direct grant schools that would not be unattracted by the notion of selecting, free, from the brightest children, rather than having to take them from certain privileged and moneyed social classes, with a sprinkling of scholarships, as they do at present.

Mr. Rowe: Does my hon. Friend accept that one of the pressures for the continuation of private schools is the extraordinary difficulty which many maintained schools appear to have in retaining single sex education? Many parents want single sex education, and, in the case of girls, there is clear evidence that single sex education yields better results.

Mr. Walden: I hear what my hon. Friend says. I do not want to consider sex, although I know that that is a problem. One of the difficulties in our way of thinking in this country—I mean no offence to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe)—is the tendency to go off at a tangent.

What I am trying to address, perhaps unsuccessfully, as it is very late at night, is a very central issue. I want diversification for everyone on the ground, locally, rather than the stark and artificial choice between being forced, nine times out of 10, to go to a comprehensive school, and being bailed out by the state in a wholly artificial and very expensive way to the tune of £76 million to give a child a chance in an almost certainly better and more demanding educational environment.

I believe that the whole process is artificial, and therefore fundamentally suspect. However, for the moment I can think of nothing better. Let us get on with the technology schools initiative. Where the money is to come from is a separate debate, although I have my ideas about that as well.

10.46 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): It is an absolute disgrace that, at a time when most state schools are struggling to find enough resources to pay for teachers, equipment, books and for essential repairs and when there is a lack of nursery places, the Government continue to fund private education from public funds. They not only continue to subsidise private schools: they intend to increase that subsidy tonight.

When the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) was an Education Minister, he said that the scheme was intended for able children from the poorest homes. Why he thought able children from the poorest homes would want to go to public schools beats me—[HON. MEMBERS: "They do."] No, they do not. If Conservative Members listen to me, they will see that they do not.

Even if the right hon. Member for Brent, North was very sincere—I do not dispute that he was—he was wrong. The scheme is exploited by the middle class. Evidence and statistics clearly show that 60 per cent. of the children who benefit from the scheme have parents who are lawyers, civil servants, clergymen, teachers or other white collar workers. Only 10 per cent. of assisted places pupils come from working class parents and have fathers who are manual workers.

That is typical of the Government, and it epitomises their political philosophy. They subsidise the better-off at the expense of the less well-off. If parents want to send their children to public schools, that is their choice, but they should not do so at the expense of the vast majority of pupils in the state sector.

Let me give examples of the subsidies offered to parents wishing to send their children to Durham school, the well-known public school in my constituency. The annual fees for Durham school in 1991-92 were £5,638. A family earning £25,000 a year with one child on the assisted places scheme attending that school would have received a subsidy of £1,531. If the family had two children attending the school, it would have received a subsidy of £5,114 from the taxpayer. If a family earning £19,000 a year sent one child to the school, it would have received a subsidy of £3,500 a year. Should it have sent two children to that school, it would have received a subsidy of £8,000 a year from the public purse.

That is reprehensible. The state should not pay private schools large subsidies at a time when the state sector is strapped for resources. It should not pay subsidies to the private sector at any time, regardless of whether resources are scarce or not. The assisted places scheme is a deliberate attempt to subsidise the private sector and keep it viable.

Whether the scheme is being used by the middle class, the working class or, for that matter, any other class is irrelevant. The fact that that scheme is available in the first place is appalling. Money is being hived off from the state sector into private education at the expense of the state sector. That is what the scheme is all about.

It is a scandal that, this year, £95 million will be spent on the scheme. In 1995-96, that expenditure will increase to £106 million. In comparison, this year, the Government intend to spend just £131 million on the school building grant to the maintained sector, and plan to spend just £107 million on that grant in 1995-96. The Government plan to spend as much money on the private sector as they plan to spend on that building grant. That must be wrong and immoral.

I would not care, but the scheme does not even offer value for money. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) said, it costs £400 a year more to educate a child in a private school than in the state sector. That difference is based on the figures provided by the Independent Schools Information Service, ISIS, which can hardly be regarded as an independent-minded organisation by any stretch of the imagination.

There is no evidence that children on the scheme do better in private schools than they would have done had they been educated in state schools. The evidence suggests the contrary. In 1991, the Audit Commission produced a report, "Two Bs or not", on the A-level performances in schools and colleges. It suggested that no single type of institution appeared consistently more effective than any other in terms of obtaining A-level results. It found, significantly, that private schools did marginally less well than the sixth forms and tertiary colleges of the state sector. It reported that pupils got better results in the state sector.

As the scheme produces no better results from the pupils who participate in it, and given that the scheme was not initially intended to assist pupils of a certain background, who account for the majority of its participants, one can only conclude that it is a device used by the Government to meet the increase in the private school fees. It is a subsidy to the private sector from the state purse.

I will conclude by quoting, once again, the right hon. Member for Brent, North.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Hear, hear.

Mr. Steinberg: The hon. Gentleman should listen carefully to what that right hon. Gentleman said. He believed that the scheme had turned out to be a rescue for "distressed gentlefolk". He also suggested that it had taken the Tory party down a "side alley". I agree.

The Government have gone down a convenient side alley, because, through the scheme, they can subsidise private education. I suspect that that was always the intention.

10.54 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Unlike some hon. Members, I do not wish to flex ideological muscles against the independent sector. Some independent schools can make a valuable contribution to education.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) said that he was not ashamed to refer to the speech that he made last year, and I feel exactly the same way. Last year, I said that I did not want to attack independent schools, and that some of them could contribute to education. In responding to the debate, the Under-Secretary of State accused me of trying to have it both ways, so my argument may not have been clear enough.

Considerable evidence proves that mutual benefit accrues from the independent and state sectors working together in certain areas. For instance, we are well aware that most trade unions and many professional education associations have joint membership from both sectors. The National Association for the Teaching of English, the

Association for Science Education and the Secondary Heads Association are just a few examples of organisations that are working to improve the quality of education for the nation's children. There are many examples of joint in-service activity and shared use of premises, and even some examples of joint teaching.

So co-operation to mutual advantage is possible, and Liberal Democrats are happy and willing to support it. However, we are not prepared to support measures that foster elitism in our society and prop up ailing independent schools to the disadvantage of pupils in the state sector. The assisted places scheme comes dangerously close on both counts.

Equally worrying is the fact that the assisted places scheme is not only badly managed but missing its target. Only 24 hours ago, the Government put VAT on domestic fuel to help pay off their £50 billion public sector debt, but today they do not seem concerned about wasting money on a scheme with little demonstrable benefit to taxpayers. Until recently, it was not even fully taken up. Furthermore, even the Minister will accept that the scheme was overspent by some £10 million.

Given that such straitened financial resources are available in state sector schools, how can we justify spending £8,595 of state money on sending pupils to Charterhouse school, for example? That money could have been far better directed towards hard-pressed state schools. It cannot be right that the assisted places scheme is being used to prop up some independent schools suffering from falling rolls due to the recession.

Notwithstanding what the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) said in his lengthy intervention, the figures show that questions must be asked. Can it be right that a high percentage of pupils at a number of independent schools come through the assisted places scheme? For example, 39·9 per cent. of Batley grammar school's pupils, 37·3 per cent. of Denstone college's pupils, 38·5 per cent. of Hereford Cathedral school's pupils, 44·8 per cent. of St. Edward's college's pupils, and nearly 50 per cent. of Wisbech grammar school's pupils come through the scheme.

As the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) said, in a single year some seven schools received more than £1 million and more than 50 schools received some £500,000 of taxpayers' money through the assisted places scheme. Perhaps even worse, that money is being spent with no apparent reference to standards, quality or value.

We all know that our state schools are required to teach the national curriculum—I suspect that many of them would prefer not to have to do so, given its nature. Those schools are required to be regularly inspected by Ofsted and are expected to conform to the requirements of standard assessment tests for their children. None of those requirements applies to the independent sector schools, to which state money is given to support the pupils.

The Under-Secretary of State used the argument that we should not invest money into schools that do not conform to those three criteria—the national curriculum, Ofsted inspections and SATs—during the passage of the Education Bill. At that time he used that argument to show why money should not be given to Steiner schools. We are presented with the strange anomaly whereby the Under-Secretary today supports state money being put into independent schools that do not conform to those requirements.

In a similar debate last year I challenged the Under-Secretary to provide evidence to the House of value for money for the scheme and added value. On both counts, he was silent, except to tell us that the independent schools produced good examination results. Even he was honest enough to go on to say that one would expect that, given the selection procedures that are adopted by those schools.

Last year, I referred to views expressed by the Library of the House, whose officials had studied all the various research conducted into the success of the assisted places scheme in meeting its intended target of providing assisted places to bright children from less well-off backgrounds. At that time, the Library concluded:

> "Much of the research on the operation of the scheme has suggested that it has failed in its prime aim of giving good education to children from relatively poor backgrounds and is mainly subsidising middle class parents."

That view was not challenged last year by the Minister. I hope that he will be prepared to do so now—or does he accept the view expressed by the Library?

We cannot support a scheme that is badly managed and misses its intended target. Therefore, we will vote against the provision tonight. In consultation with those in both sectors, the Liberal Democrats will continue to explore alternative approaches to co-operation between the sectors to mutual benefit.

11.3 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): I welcome any scheme that seeks to nourish academically able children from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, the problem with the assisted places scheme is that it is such an impoverished and ideologically driven way of thinking about the subject that it fails to achieve that objective. In many respects, it is the original opt-out approach—it provides a subsidy to leave the system, rather than taking serious action to improve the system for the target group identified.

As we have heard from both sides of the House, the scheme fails even on its own terms. It is an expensive failure. We know that it currently costs nearly £76 million, and the cost is soon to rise again. It is overspent. It has take-up problems. Last year there were 5,671 vacant assisted places. Contrary to the claims that used to be made, the scheme now costs more per pupil than the maintained system. Various figures have been offered but the most recent ones given in parliamentary answers show that each assisted place now costs £3,100, compared with £2,195 in the maintained secondary sector. Therefore, one of the traditional claims for this scheme does not apply by a mile.

We were told that the scheme is failing to meet its claimed target. Much of the money is a subsidy to the lower middle class. Speaking as a member of the lower middle class, I am not entirely against that, although I cannot understand why my taxes should be used for that purpose. In 1989, a study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council reported that:

> "The scheme seems to have been yet another example of an educational reform targeted towards the working class but mainly benefiting children from middle-class backgrounds . . . Neither, in terms of the objectives that were originally defined for it or our own findings to date does there seem to be much scope or justification for extending it in its present form."

[Dr. Tony Wright]

If hon. Members are unhappy with that finding, they should look at the Independent Schools Information Service survey that was commissioned from MORI last year. That survey found that 41 per cent. of children taking up assisted places came from lower middle-class families with only 16 per cent. coming from families of semi-skilled or unskilled workers.

The right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) has been cited with acclamation many times in this debate. His most profound point about the scheme is that, even in its own terms, it is failing because there is no evidence that the children taking up places are from not only the poorest families but the poorest schools. For the scheme to make any sort of sense, it would take the most able children from the most failing schools. It would then be doing something significant. As the right hon. Gentleman argued—this is clearly true—the scheme is probably taking children with the most motivated parents, who ensure that they secure the best schools in the neighbourhood for their children. Therefore, the scheme is failing on a fundamental ground.

The scheme is transferring large sums of public money from the Exchequer to private schools. I shall not explore that matter, as other hon. Members have done so. Here we have a scheme with expanding and—in some senses—uncontrollable costs. It has problems with take-up and is substantially missing its intended targets.

What should a sensible Government do when faced with such a scheme? The Government are desperate to cut public spending—they are imposing VAT on domestic fuel and targeting the social security budget. Yet in those circumstances, and faced with a scheme with those characteristics, they spend more on it. Because they are spending more on this scheme, they are necessarily spending less on everything else. They are certainly spending less on other things in the education system of which we have no trouble assembling a list.

In conclusion, we should let this ill-conceived scheme wither on the vine. Anyone who examined the scheme would say that that is the most sensible thing to do. Indeed, all those who have examined the scheme sensibly say that that is the most sensible thing to do.

We should do something else—we should rescue the kernel of an idea that has got lost as the scheme has developed. We should do all that we can to nourish the academically able, especially those from academically and financially disadvantaged backgrounds. That is a educational task. I have some sympathy with what the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) said. In other words, there is a completely different educational agenda from that which the scheme represents.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am listening to the hon. Gentleman with great interest and finding some common ground with him. He said that he would like to do more for the academic child from a deprived or difficult background. He has not explained how he would do that, an omission that I hope he will remedy before he concludes. Having many years ago been governor of the Queen Elizabeth grammar school in Atherstone in north Warwickshire, I assure him that that wonderful school, before it was forced to go comprehensive, did precisely what he is now putting to the House.

Dr. Wright: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. An obvious example is large classes. We have recently confirmed evidence that there is a direct correlation between reduced class sizes and increased academic performance. The figures show that under the Conservatives class sizes have increased substantially. If the Government's objective were increased academic achievement, they would have followed the strategy of reducing class sizes.

The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) gave an interesting example, but I prefer to close with an example of my own, which is about the numbers entering university. The figures are shocking, and I simply relay them to the House. In England and Wales, 30 per cent. of university entrants come from private fee-paying schools, despite the fact that only 7·5 per cent. of school-leavers come from such schools.

If the Government were serious about wishing to make higher education available to all who might benefit from it, especially those from deprived and disadvantaged backgrounds, they would regard that figure as shocking and would devote greater energy to opening up the higher education system to children from such backgrounds.

Sadly, the Government have not done that, but are instead pursuing schemes such as the one before the House tonight. That is why we say that their proposal is completely irrelevant to what is required. By transferring public money in the way they propose, they are simply sustaining, propping up and further developing a system of schooling which, as the hon. Member for Buckingham said, has been one of the most damaging and divisive things to have happened to this country.

11.12 pm

Mr. Forth: Tempted though I am, I shall not indulge in a debate on the principle of the scheme because I should be called to order. As I said at the outset, this is a narrow debate on the regulations.

I had some difficulty understanding the arithmetic of the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths). My arithmetic suggests that if he took the total amount spent on this excellent scheme and spread it among all the pupils in the maintained sector, he might reach the total of about £13 per pupil. I am not sure what dramatic difference that would make to the quality and standard of education. I leave him to draw his own conclusion.

About 69 per cent. of pupils on the assisted places scheme come from the maintained schools sector, well exceeding the 60-40 rule that we set out for the scheme. That gives the lie to the facts that were claimed by Opposition Members, not least the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), who, in a rather pathetic parade of class-ridden prejudice of a kind that we have come to expect from him, completely ignored the facts.

For example, the hon. Gentleman ignored the fact that 56 per cent. of parents whose children go on the assisted places scheme earned less than £12,000 last year, and that 38 per cent.—about two out of every five—earn less than £9,000 per annum. How they represent the elite he claimed were taking advantage of the scheme is beyond me. I should have thought that such people might even have qualified for his soubriquet of the working class or manual working people of whom he approves. I suggest that he looks again at the statistics to see whether his class profile might be suggested to the House in a different form.

The hon. Gentleman has suggested that the scheme may not deliver quality. The achievements of assisted pupils in terms of GCSEs, A-levels and AS-levels are well above the national pass-grade result, and fully comparable with the achievements of the independent sector as a whole. All the evidence suggests that the achievements of pupils on the scheme compares very well with those of others—which contradicts what some Opposition Members have suggested.

Mr. Don Foster: Surely the Minister accepts that children selected according to ability are expected to do well in examinations. What he is telling us is no surprise; it is a repeat of what he said last year. Will he now tell us the evidence of added value from the scheme?

Mr. Forth: We are all repeating what we said last year. What mystifies me is why we have these debates annually, but if Opposition Members persist in coming to the House at this late hour and making the same speeches every year, I do not see why I should not do the same.

The fact is that all the evidence suggests that pupils whose parents put them forward for this excellent scheme fully vindicate not only the scheme and their parents' choice of education, but the schools that then enable them to achieve excellent results—results fully comparable with the results achieved by pupils in similar schools, and way beyond those of pupils generally and those educated in the maintained sector.

As for the accusations of elitism, I believe that they have been effectively disproved—not only by the income background that I described in response to the points made by the hon. Member for City of Durham, but by my points about the excellent level of achievement.

The brief but excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) was very much in tune with the thrust of the policies of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, starting with the White Paper "Choice and Diversity", which was produced last year. Of course we believe that the technology schools are an exciting new development in education; I suggest that the emphasis on specialisation—that is probably the word that best sums up what my hon. Friend was talking about: drawing out young people's aptitudes, and providing them with diversity and choice in terms of different schools in their localities—must represent the way ahead. I trust that the Government are trying to encourage that approach, through our different policies in the Department and through some of the measures in the Education Bill, which will return to the House next week.

I believe that these narrow regulations build on a scheme that has been in place for some time.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I asked for clarification earlier on a point that strikes me as rather important. According to page 2 of the Department's report of its expenditure plans, the estimated outturn for the scheme in 1992-93 is £78 million. The 1993-94 plans involve expenditure of £95 million—an extra £17 million.

On page 16—where the Government show the figures for the number of places available—it is made clear that, for that extra £17 million, only 286 places will be available. That is equivalent to nearly £60,000 per place. What is the reason for the big increase in spending and the small increase in numbers?

Mr. Forth: I will give the hon. Gentleman an off-the-cuff reply and write to him in more detail subsequently.

I believe that the missing link is take-up. I must confess that, every year, we have been embarrassed by the fact that the scheme exceeds all our expectations. Year upon year, more people than even we anticipated take up their places in the scheme, and we then find that we have to provide yet more money, which we gladly do every year. But it is an annual embarrassment to which I am very happy to confess. That is probably the reason for the gap that the hon. Gentleman is seeking to understand.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I certainly would appreciate a full answer, because I am not entirely convinced by that. In table 10, giving the number of places available, it is pointed out that at the moment the new places being made available are almost all being taken up. Last year, 97·6 per cent. were taken up. So there is not much room for a greater take-up. I appreciate that higher up there are some big gaps, but surely that cannot be the answer.

Mr. Forth: I believe that this is the answer. What certainly is not the case is that we are providing places at £60,000 each. Even some of the more exotic schools mentioned by hon. Gentlemen do not quite reach that fee level. It is most unlikely, to say the least, that the Department is funding places to the tune of £60,000 per place.

I will write to the hon. Gentleman and give him a very full explanation of this, because it seems that we are unable at this stage to agree.

I hope that I have persuaded the House——

Mr. Steinberg: The Minister accused me of being class-prejudiced, and perhaps I am. When I look at the other side of the House, that makes me class-prejudiced. The statistics that I gave him had not been produced by me; they were produced by the ISIS MORI poll, which said that 60 per cent. of the children came from middle-class homes, including Lloyd's, the civil service, and so on. So is the Isis MORI poll class-prejudiced as well?

Mr. Forth: I cannot imagine why the hon. Gentleman should disapprove of teachers and civil servants; that is beyond me and is for him to explain on some other occasion. From the facts that I gave—these are the more relevant ones, I believe—over half the parents of children in assisted places scheme places have incomes of less than £12,000 per annum.

I will not follow the hon. Gentleman's obsession with what their occupations are. I am much more interested in the fact that the scheme is doing what it was set up to do—that is, helping those on low incomes to get their children into good schools.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I would like to know the source of the Minister's information, quite simply.

Mr. Forth: The source of my information is the underpaid and overworked civil servants in my Department.

I hope that in this short debate I have been able to persuade the House that we should approve these excellent regulations, which update this excellent scheme, from which so many of our children benefit.

[Mr. Forth]

Question put:—
The House divided: Ayes 229, Noes 177.

Division No. 332] **[11.22 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. James Arbuthnot.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George

Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Leighton, Ron
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Rogers, Mrs. Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Spellar and
Mr. Andrew Mackinlay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Education (Assisted Places) (Amendment) Regulations 1993, which were laid before this House on 29th June, be approved.

Company Accounts

11.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): I beg to move,

That the draft Partnerships and Unlimited Companies (Accounts) Regulations 1993, which were laid before this House on 21st June, be approved.

Accounting requirements for companies in the European Community have been harmonised, principally through the fourth and seventh company law directives, but there was concern that companies in some member states were avoiding the disclosure requirements of those directives by conducting business through the equivalent of partnerships. The Council therefore adopted the partnerships directive to bring partnerships between limited companies and unlimited companies owned by limited ones within the scope of the accounting directives, requiring them to produce and publish accounts.

In Great Britain the directive and thus these regulations apply to partnerships, limited partnerships and unlimited companies where all the members with unlimited liability are themselves limited companies. For a limited partnership it is the nature of the general partner or partners only—the ones with unlimited liability—that matters.

To be within the scope of the regulations the general partner or partners must be limited companies. The regulations will not apply to most partnerships in Great Britain, such as those between accountants, solicitors and small traders, where one or more of the partners is a natural person, not a company. Partnerships between limited companies, or where the general partners are limited companies, are not thought to be particularly common in Great Britain. In fact, they amount to only about 3,500 out of 600,000.

We consulted business and others on the line to be taken in the negotiation of the directive. The conclusion of that consultation was that partnerships between companies, or where the general partner is a company, were not being used as a vehicle to avoid disclosure, the problem with which the directive seeks to deal. Our negotiators strove, therefore, to achieve sufficient options in the directive to ensure that existing practice in Great Britain could continue to be followed as far as possible.

It is important for those dealing with a partnership or unlimited company to know that its members or general partners are limited companies. The liability of members or general partners is unlimited, but, if they are limited companies and the debts of the partnership force them into liquidation, the creditors of the partnership would become unsecured creditors of the company up to the limits of the capital of the company. It is equally important for those dealing with and investing in a company to know that it has exposure to unlimited liability through partnerships and unlimited companies.

The regulations provide three ways in which accounting information about the partnership can be handled, depending on the circumstances. There are also provisions that apply to all companies and partnerships which are within the scope of the regulations, no matter which accounting treatment is used. The members of a partnership must give inquirers the name of at least one company member that has included the partnership in its accounts, or the names of all the company members that

[Mr. Neil Hamilton]

are publishing its accounts. Companies which are involved in partnerships or unlimited companies within the scope of these regulations must reveal their names and addresses and legal forms. The companies must also state in their accounts where the accounting information about the partnership is to be found.

The directive, when implemented in all member states, will require all companies incorporated in the Community to give such information about the partnerships and unlimited companies within its scope of which they are members. That will help companies in Britain to find out more about the companies that they are dealing with in other member states.

If the partnership is included in consolidated accounts by at least one of its partners, there will be no further requirement to draw up and publish accounts. The member companies must state in their accounts whether they have consolidated the partnership or whether another company has done so. In the latter case, the name of the other company must be given in the accounts.

Our aim has been to provide information for those dealing with the partnership and the company, while keeping the burdens to a minimum. My Department consulted last year on the method of implementation, and the approach that we have taken in these regulations was welcomed by the organisations that responded. We have estimated that the compliance costs will be low. A compliance cost assessment has been prepared and is available.

To give companies and partnerships the maximum time to adapt to the requirements, the directive permits member states not to apply its provisions to financial years commencing before 1 January 1995. The regulations would take advantage of this.

As I have explained, throughout the process of negotiation of the directive, and the consultation and drafting of these regulations, there has been no evidence that the problem with which the directive seeks to deal —the lack of disclosure of accounting information by partnerships between companies—is a problem in Britain. We therefore sought, and were successful in negotiating, options that would permit us to leave existing provisions largely intact. The regulations implement the directive in a most light-handed way.

I commend the regulations to the House.

11.39 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am grateful to the Minister for taking us rapidly through the regulations. There is usually a 10-minute speech arranged for these occasions, but I am aware of the quorum hovering in the Chamber at this hour. Therefore, I will not seek to delay the House unduly.

These regulations implement a Council directive dealing with annual accounts and consolidated accounts. They confirm again, if confirmation is necessary, that we are within the European framework, that we have been in a European framework for some 20 years now, and that we are developing that framework along lines of which even the noble Lady Thatcher would approve. We are creating harmonious conditions throughout the length and breadth of Europe so that company law and accountancy law are the same in all European countries.

Regulations such as these create a level playing field that companies will come to know and understand. The time may come when we will be debating a European company which is trans-national and which will incorporate the whole of our European company law. Indeed, such a law has been debated for the past 20 years, but it has yet to make its way on to the statute book. Perhaps with debates and regulations such as these we shall be able, little by little, to creep towards it.

The scope of the application of the regulations concerns partnerships, limited partnerships and unlimited companies, all of whose members, having unlimited liability, are limited companies. That may seem like gobbledegook to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but for the cogniscenti, it means that there is a difference in liability for partnerships and unlimited companies when compared to those that have limited their liability by incorporating themselves into limited liability companies.

There is a significant difference in the treatment of trading companies and partnerships not limited by liability and those which are. We shall debate that difference in greater detail and whether they should be subject to audit when we have the Minister's proposals for small businesses. It will be the Opposition's submission at that time that limited liability companies that do not wish to submit themselves to an audit should disincorporate themselves—take unlimited liability—with all its attendant risks, while leaving limited liability companies properly audited in the interests of full disclosure and in the interests of work force, bankers and outside parties, which may be shareholders. That is also for another debate, but it might be as well to put down a marker for the Minister's attention.

As I understand it—I am grateful to the Minister for explaining this to me—there are occasions, principally in Germany, where partnerships gather together from limited liability companies. Those dealing with such partnerships may do so on the basis that there is unlimited liability upon the partnership. As the Minister said, that is not often the case in our country, and it is not likely that such situations will arise, or, if they do, it will not be very often. Nevertheless, it is appropriate that there should be a common framework throughout the Community so that those dealing with such partnerships will know where they stand and will act accordingly.

As we read Sir Andrew Large's critique of our self-regulation organisations—acting within his Securities and Investment Board—it is being drummed into us that the principles of caveat emptor can never be removed from financial investment. There will always be an element of risk. Regulations such as these, bringing in their wake full disclosure, will provide the information for the investor to take into account when he takes his investment decisions and risks his money.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): The hon. Gentleman is an expert in French law and has practised at the French Bar. Can he tell us, with regard to partnerships, whether the same rules or uberrima fides—the utmost good faith—apply in other European countries as they do in Great Britain?

Mr. Bell: They certainly do. As I said earlier, one of the reasons for this directive is that it will cover the whole of

Europe so that the principles and concepts to which the hon. Gentleman referred conform with what we are debating and what we have in our country.

The Minister said that compliance would not be costly. It would be nice to look on the measure as constituting a mini securities and exchange commission, with its imposition of criminal penalties for failure to comply with the regulations. But of course such penalties already exist within the framework of the Financial Services Act 1986 and the Companies Act 1989. Still, it is nice to see the extension of criminal penalties for failure to comply with financial regulations, which edges us further towards the sort of statutory regulation which no doubt we will debate on the Floor of the House and towards which, if I have read Sir Andrew Large's report aright, even the Government are edging.

I promised the Minister not to have too long a saunter around the paddock of regulation and self-regulation, independent or statutory, and I hope that I have not done so. One of the difficulties of opening debates such as this one is that I cannot respond to any speech that the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) may make later. If he does make one, I shall listen to it with great interest. If he does not, I remind him that the best speeches can be kept for another occasion.

I assure the serried ranks of Conservative Members who are waiting to go home that none of my hon. Friends is loitering in the Corridors waiting to cast a vote or to press the button that will ring the Division bell. I thank the Minister for his courtesy and patience in explaining these technical but important regulations to the House. The attendance may have been a bit thin, but I assure him that his comments—and mine, I hope—will read well in *Hansard* tomorrow.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: With the leave of the House, I will not reply to the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Partnerships and Unlimited Companies (Accounts) Regulations 1993, which were laid before this House on 21st June, be approved.

ESTIMATES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 131 (Liaison Committee),

That this House agrees with the Report [8th July] of the Liaison Committee.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question agreed to.

Charities (Collections)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

11.46 pm

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): We were treated to a remarkable degree of brevity in the last debate, and I too will take only a few minutes. My purpose is not to raise any major issue but to fire a warning shot across the Minister's bows.

We have a remarkable tradition of charitable giving, which no other country in the world can equal or surpass. Part of that tradition is that we give freely, but over the years more and more charities have asked for our support, so it is quite right that we should impose certain controls on them, particularly when it comes to door-to-door collections.

In 1939, the House to House Collections Act was passed. It was adequate then, but given the number of charities today it is no longer so. Since 1939 there has been an explosion, not only in the number of charities, but in the energy and time that they devote to fund raising and door-to-door and street collections. It is therefore crucial that good controls should be exercised by authorities close to the areas where the collecting is to be done.

At first sight—certainly to a newcomer to the subject like me—local control by the district council seems the answer. That brings me to the reason why I asked for this debate.

We are raising money for a local hospice. For an area like west, south and north Dorset to raise £3·4 million in just over two years is quite an achievement. We have a target of £5 million, and I hope and expect that, by the end of next year, we shall have raised that money and the hospice will be opened. We were all—particularly my wife—delighted when we were granted a licence for one week for the whole of west Dorset to raise funds for our local hospice.

An immediate operation was set in train, which involved the distribution of some 200 to 300 tins, with all the paraphernalia—badges and other things—that go along with such an operation to ensure that we would raise the maximum amount. Every town, village and hamlet in west Dorset was covered, and people were prepared to go out to raise the money. I am always an optimist, and I thought that we would raise about £20,000 to add to the £3·4 million. In fact, we raised just half that sum.

Why did we not get anywhere near that target, when everyone locally supports the hospice project and wants to see it open? Before we started the week allocated to us, people began to phone in and say that, although they would like to help, sadly, they did not think that they could, because other charities were to be collecting that week. As the week progressed, more and more people phoned in and asked what was going on. It was nonsense, they said. They thought that they had the total licence and nobody would be in competition, but moving down the street at the same time as they were trying to collect were at least four other charities—Barnardos, the Diabetic Association, Action Aid and the Alexandra Rose. All those four charities were actively collecting, on the basis that they had exemption from registering because they were large, national charities.

That is our problem, and we were saddened by what had happened to Joseph Weld house. On Monday

[Sir Jim Spicer]

morning, I received a letter from Mr. Wilson, who is the divisional superintendent of our local St. John Ambulance. He said:

"I would like to make a formal, written complaint with regard to the fund-raising collection which took place in Dorchester and District between 25th June and 3rd July, 1993.

As I am the Superintendent of the Dorchester Combined Division of St. John Ambulance, I feel partly responsible for the situation as members of the public, understandably, felt aggrieved at what appeared to be constant requests for money. Some of my members received a very poor, even hostile, reception when selling flags.

As you know, our organisation is entirely voluntary and we are allocated one week each year for our Flag Day and House to House collections. Normally this is well supported, but this year we fell some £300 below our anticipated total. I believe that this is almost entirely due to the Dr. Barnardo's collection being held during the same week.

My main point is: why should we suffer these losses when we rely on the funds raised at this time? We are required to register well in advance and try to avoid competing with other Charities. Other organisations, however, are not required to register and can therefore collect at any time.

I should be grateful if you would raise my concerns with the appropriate authorities."

That rather indignant letter joins the indignant protests of my wife as the organiser of our fund-raising activity during that week.

However, it is a fact—I am quite certain that the Minister will bear witness to this—that things are going to change. Therefore, as I said at the beginning, all I intend to do is fire a shot across my hon. Friend's bows and say that the present situation cannot be allowed to continue.

My aim tonight is to highlight the present unsatisfactory situation that puts smaller and particularly local charities at a disadvantage and to seek from my hon. Friend an absolute assurance not only that, under the Charities Act 1992, there will be a tightening up, but that all charities will be required to register with local authorities and that small, but local, charities, will have their absolutely fair share of time.

I am president of my local British Legion. It would be inconceivable to me that, during that week, we should not devote all our thoughts and attention to the poppy day appeal. However, it seems that at least 50 per cent. of the year should be devoted to local charities. Otherwise, the 50 or so charities that have exemption at present can run roughshod over our local activity, push us to the wall and make our fund-raising insignificant.

That should not be allowed to happen. All I seek tonight is an assurance from my hon. Friend that we will see a change by early 1994, that more control will be vested locally, and that the national charities will not be given the free rein that they have at the moment.

11.56 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) on securing this debate. The fact that we are here at this comparatively late hour attests to the importance that he rightly attaches to the issue.

Before I address the particular matter of his concern and what he called his warning shot, I should say that I am pleased that he drew my attention and that of the House to the excellent work of the Dorset respite and hospice trust in his constituency. I share the public's admiration for those who care so compassionately for the terminally ill and give vital emotional support to their friends and relatives. That work requires great sensitivity and devotion; I pay tribute to what they are doing and applaud their extremely impressive efforts, which my hon. Friend described, to raise new funds to extend their work further.

As my hon. Friend explained so clearly, the very business of fund raising has brought him to this debate tonight. He described how the hospice's dedicated fund raisers, not least his wife, had planned their house-to-house collection and notified that to the local authority, and were then unhappy to find that other large national charities were also making house-to-house collections that evening.

I can understand those people feeling that they were all treading on each other's toes, and that their hospice cannot but have raised less than it would have done if the collectors had had a clear run on their own. I can also understand why my hon. Friend feels that there should be effective rules to avoid such an overlap. However, as he said, there are a large number of charities in England and Wales. More than 160,000 charities are registered with the Charity Commission. A good number of them are very small, many are confined to one area and some are very large indeed.

Altogether, the income of all charities in England and Wales has been estimated at perhaps £18 billion a year. While public charitable collections are only one source of that income, the net effect is that there is considerable pressure and, indeed, competition for the public's generosity.

The first main point that I must make in reply to my hon. Friend is that no one charity could, in all reasonableness, expect to have a monopoly on charitable appeals at any one time, even briefly and locally, unless other charities were correspondingly to be prevented from fund raising.

Even if public charitable collections were to be given over—briefly and locally—to a single charity, others would be free to compete in the same area and at the same time through other means of fund raising, such as direct mail, newspaper appeals and telephone fund raising.

Considerable overlap is, I fear, inevitable, and something that we must accept. My hon. Friend suggested that house-to-house collections by the larger charities should be confined to one half of the year only, but that would restrict those that have currently secured eligibility for an exemption order, issued by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

The law currently regulates collections under the House to House Collections Act 1939 and, in relation to street collections, the Police, Factories, etc (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1916. Only the 1939 Act provides for large national house-to-house collections to be granted an exemption order, removing them from local control. No equivalent provision exists in the 1916 Act, so permission for street collections—the familiar member of the public with the collecting can in the town centre on a Saturday —must always be applied for from each local authority.

Larger charities granted exemption orders by my Department for house-to-house collections are asked to notify local authorities in whose area they intend to collect. From time to time, they are reminded of the need to do so. Conversely, West Dorset district council and other local authorities, as a matter of good practice, point out to local charities that exemption-order-holding

charities may collect in the same area, and that those local charities cannot be guaranteed a monopoly. It may be constructive for those directly concerned to contact one another in order to co-ordinate their collections and minimise overlap.

I do not know what happened in the particular case to which my hon. Friend referred; certainly things did not appear to go as well as they might have done. I agree with him that it is anomalous that street and house-to-house collections for very similar purposes are controlled through separate primary legislation. That was remarked on by the efficiency scrutiny of the supervision of charities, chaired by Sir Philip Woodfield, in 1987. The proposal implemented through the Charities Act 1992 was to bring both types of collection together under more consistent legislation. In the 1992 Act, that type of joint activity is covered by the term "public charitable collection".

We are currently examining, as my hon. Friend accepted, how the new provisions can best be brought into force. We intend to complete that process by the end of next year. We must take into account many practical angles, such as the co-ordination of different collections between competing charities, including between permission to collect that is granted centrally under 1992 Act, from the Charity Commission, and that granted locally by district authorities.

I cannot promise my hon. Friend that any one type of charity or issuing authority will necessarily take precedence over another, but I agree that the issue should be thoroughly examined before a decision is made on what seems best. This debate represents a timely and constructive contribution to that examination and my hon. Friend's proposal, which, in effect, is for some form of rationing, is one of the possible new arrangements that we will consider.

Close consultation with various people and organisations that have first-hand knowledge is indispensable. Our intention to discuss new arrangements for public charitable collections with experienced practitioners follows similar initiatives that we have already taken in relation to the provisions of the 1992 Act dealing with charity accounts and the control of professional fund raising.

We are making good progress in implementing the new legislation, and this week we are issuing a consultation document on the control of professional fund raising. That has undoubtedly been strengthened with the benefit of practitioners' views.

My hon. Friend's suggestions and the particular experience of the Dorset respite and hospice trust will help to ensure that the forthcoming regulations under the appropriate provisions of the 1992 Act will be constructed wisely and effectively. I hope that they will do much to avoid the type of situation that my hon. Friend has rightly drawn to the attention of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 14 July 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL (WESTER BRIDGE) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Mr. Secretary Lang presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to Highland Regional Council (Wester Bridge); and the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered on Tuesday 20 July and to be printed. [Bill 237.]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Baghdad (US Attack)

1. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with representatives of the United Kingdom's Arab allies about the United States' attack upon Baghdad; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): The policies of the Baghdad regime of course cause us great concern and therefore we have frequent and close consultations with our Arab friends and partners.

Mr. Galloway: I thank the Minister for that answer, although it did not answer my question. In their discussions, did his allies tell him that when the 1,000 lb of explosives landed on the house of the celebrated Iraqi artist Leila al-Attar, killing her, her husband, and a member of her staff, and cruelly maiming her children, they had any idea what would arise from the ashes of that disaster? What rises from the ashes of Al Mansour is the barbarism of extremism and fundamentalism, which is breathing down the necks of the allies with whom he has had regular discussions. When the Minister reads of the latest murderous assault that will come any day now, will he bear in mind the fact that as long as our Government and the western powers are ready to pulverise Iraq, but appease Israel, and are ready to starve and blockade innocent Iraqis, but allow Serbia to get off with genocide in Yugoslavia, our Government's policies will be contributing to the disaster that is on its way?

Mr. Hogg: The death of anyone not connected with the aggressive policies of Iraq is to be deeply regretted. However, it was quite plain that the Government of Iraq were behind the attempt to assassinate former President Bush. That was a clear attack on the security of the United States. We believe that, in invoking article 51 of the charter, the United States was entitled to take the action it did, which received broad support.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: In considering a response to Iraq's failure to comply with the appropriate Security Council resolution, will the Government be in touch with the political opponents of Saddam Hussein outside Iraq and the Arab countries threatened by Iraq, and will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that any action taken is proportionate, involves the minimum loss of life and advances the long-term strategic aims of the United Nations?

Mr. Hogg: We will indeed ensure that any action that may have to be taken—I hasten to say that I hope that no action will have to be taken—is proportionate, causes the minimum casualties and is firmly based on international law. We are in continuing discussions with our Arab friends, partners and others about that issue and related matters.

Mr. Dalyell: For the reasons that I gave the Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Michael Burton, in the interview that was arranged for me by the Foreign Secretary, do Ministers accept that, whether they like it or not, sanctions and bombing strengthen the regime of Saddam Hussein in a way that nothing else could?

Mr. Hogg: I do not accept that point, but I accept that it is extraordinarily difficult by a policy either of sanctions or of bombing to displace Saddam Hussein. It is essential for all of us to ensure full compliance by Iraq with the mandatory elements of the Security Council resolutions, especially those that relate to the eradication of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. We must hold to the sanctions regime if we are to achieve that.

Lady Olga Maitland: What representations has my right hon. and learned Friend had from our Arab allies regarding the missing 627 Kuwaiti prisoners of war—male and female civilians—who were taken from their homes three years ago? To this date, Iraq has failed to comply with United Nations resolutions seeking their release. Will my right hon. and learned Friend make the greatest endeavours to achieve justice in that important humanitarian matter?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right. The Government of Kuwait raise the question with us on every possible occasion and we raise it with the Iraqis in New York and at the sanctions review meetings. It is one of the very important respects in which Iraq is in breach of the mandatory parts of the Security Council resolutions and it makes the relaxation of the sanctions regime impossible at the moment.

Mrs. Mahon: How does the Minister expect to secure the release of the three Britons being held in Iraq when his Government condone the bombing? The family of Michael Wainwright think that every time the British Government support such actions, they put the lives of those men in danger.

Mr. Hogg: It is important to separate the two issues. We are, of course, very concerned about the position of Mr. Ride, Mr. Wainwright and Mr. Dunn and we take

every opportunity to impress on the Iraqis the fact that we regard the sentences imposed on them as outrageous. As the hon. Lady knows, our representatives saw the three men a few days ago. The Russians have been extremely helpful in facilitating visits to the three men. We will do all that we can to secure their release, but we will not pay any kind of blackmail and we insist on our right to support, for example, the Americans when they exercise their right of self-defence under the charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Brazier: My right hon. and learned Friend has taken a tough and robust stand in forcing the Iraqi regime to conform to the United Nations requirements on weapons of mass destruction. Does he agree that this is a matter in which the vital interests of this country and of every other country in the west and in the civilised world are fundamentally involved? If the west backs off and the United Nations requirements on weapons of mass destruction are not enforced, the consequences are too horrible to consider.

Mr. Hogg: I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend has said. I had the pleasure of seeing Ambassador Ekeus a few days ago and he made two important points. First, he believes that there has been a substantial eradication of weapons of mass destruction by Iraq, but that it has not been completed. Secondly, he believes that provided that we hold to a tough verification and monitoring regime in future, we can prevent the Government of Iraq from reassembling weapons of mass destruction. He goes on to say—and I agree—that if we fail to hold to a tough policy of monitoring and verification, the chances are that the Iraqi Government will do just that.

Dr. John Cunningham: Although we of course support the determination to enforce the resolutions of the UN Security Council in respect of Iraq, what evidence is there that the frequent launching of missiles against Iraq is hastening that process? Is not it really the case that as well as causing the inevitable slaughter of innocent civilians, it causes Iraq to become more intransigent, especially when missiles are launched under questionable legal authority? Is not there also another grave consequence, which is that our friends and allies in other Arab countries in the middle east are themselves politically destabilised? Is not it far better to pursue the action being taken now in the name of the United Nations, which is further discussions and an insistence on Iraq's meeting the requirements of the resolutions, than to contemplate yet another missile attack, with yet more civilian casualties and yet more support for the odious regime of Saddam Hussein?

Mr. Hogg: The right hon. Gentleman has raised a number of points and I shall be unable to reply to them all. First, I say at once that I deplore as much as he does the civilian casualties. That is, indeed, a tragedy and one cannot pretend otherwise. Secondly, I do not believe that our friends and allies in the middle east are being destabilised.

Dr. John Cunningham: Yes, they are.

Mr. Hogg: I do not believe—it is a matter of judgment—that they are being destabilised in the way that the right hon. Gentleman has claimed. Thirdly, I do not feel uneasy about the legal basis for the action in the way that the right hon. Gentleman apparently does.

Lastly, of course we hope that we can avoid future military action. I hope that the Iraqis will comply with the mandatory elements of resolution 687, but the right hon. Gentleman must ask himself what we should do if they do not. That takes me back to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier).

G7 Summit (Tokyo)

2. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the G7 summit in Tokyo.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made a statement in the House on Monday. The progress made on trade was especially welcome and the market access package endorsed by the summit provides the much-needed impetus for resuming the multilateral negotiations in Geneva.

Mr. Moss: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it was the British Government's agenda for international economic recovery that found widespread acceptance in Tokyo, as it did in Copenhagen some weeks ago? As Britain is a leading advocate of free trade, does not the enhanced prospect of a successful conclusion to the GATT talks later this year mean good news for the British economy and for British jobs?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is right. We have pressed that view for a long time. It has proved to be a long road. We do not believe in systems for regional trade—Fortress Europe, Fortress Asia or Fortress North America—which are not good for a world trading country such as ours, so we were encouraged by the success on trade access. We can approach the main GATT negotiations in Geneva with a good deal more optimism than seemed likely a few weeks ago.

Mr. Winnick: What is the use of fine words about Bosnia when, on Monday, 12 people were killed and 15 were seriously injured queuing for water as a result of the action by Serbian war criminals? It should be clear to the Government, and to other western Governments, following the summit, that the Serbians will continue their aggression, their murder and their crimes and atrocities against humanity, as long as they believe that they can get away with it? What on earth is the west going to do about it?

Mr. Hurd: I will talk about that when I answer a later question, but the two immediate needs are to keep people alive by continuing humanitarian supplies—Mrs. Ogata urged that in London on Monday—and to bring the fighting to an end, which will happen only through a negotiated settlement, unless the hon. Member and others in the west are prepared to do something that no one has been prepared to do, which is to send an international expeditionary force to impose a particular solution. No one has suggested that, save one or two Opposition Members. No Government have suggested that. The rhetoric that has done so much harm in the matter has come from exaggerated expectations, leading to exaggerated criticisms.

Mr. Budgen: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most important outcome of the G7 meeting was that it was

plain that the British Government were not going to engage in any military intervention in Bosnia? Was not that a significant demonstration of leadership and choice to the British nation and a rejection of the dangerous and deceitful dream of world government, which the parties of the left in the House enjoyed for at least 100 years? Did not the Government at last demonstrate a true Tory view—that British soldiers should risk their lives only in upholding the British national interest?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend knows that 2,500 British troops are in Bosnia. They are helping to keep people alive. They have so far escorted 950 convoys and 45,700 tonnes of food, mainly to Muslims and Croats. Many Bosnians, of all backgrounds, would have been dead had it not been for the British effort, so I do not entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I think that was, and remains, a thoroughly worthwhile effort. However, I do not believe, and have never used rhetoric that would lead anyone to believe, that it was part of Britain's interests to pretend that we could sort out every man-made disaster in the world, of which there are many at the moment. The United Nations is struggling with great difficulty in places such as Somalia, Iraq—which we have just dealt with—Afghanistan, Angola, Mozambique and Bosnia to do what it can. It is in our interest to do our bit, but we should not over-pretend, or let rhetoric get in the way of reality.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Did the G7 consider the reports from Iran that it might want to send as many as 17,000 troops to Bosnia? If that were to happen, what would be the response of the western democracies?

Mr. Hurd: It is for the Secretary-General to assess replies to his request for more troops for Bosnia. I am glad that the French are sending more and I hope that other European countries that have been thinking of it will do so. I believe that there is a strong case for having Muslim contingents there. I do not personally think that Iran would be a suitable candidate for that.

Hong Kong

3. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Governor of Hong Kong to discuss the future of Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: On Friday 9 July. I reported to him on my visit to Peking on 8 and 9 July. In Peking I had useful wide-ranging talks with Chinese leaders. On the electoral issue, I was able to focus their attention on the essential points and to make plain the need for more rapid progress. I emphasised the need for fair and open elections acceptable to the people of Hong Kong and for the negotiations to concentrate on three things: the functional constituencies, the election committee and the through train—that is to say, the need for clear, objective criteria for candidates standing in the 1995 elections to remain members of the legislature for a full four-year term. Chinese leaders also agreed to speed up work on the airport and in the joint liaison group.

Mr. Sims: I thank my right hon. Friend for that detailed reply. He mentioned the joint liaison group which, clearly, has a key role to play between now and 1997, but it has been making particularly slow progress. What success does he think that he had in discussing with officials in Beijing and with the Governor ways in which the work of that group could be expedited? Will he take this opportunity of explaining to the House the implication of the establishment with the Chinese of the preliminary working committee?

Mr. Hurd: On the first point, yes, we made some progress inasmuch as the dates for future meetings have been fixed for September and later this year in Peking and London. I emphasised—this was not contradicted—the need to get on with much of the agenda, for example the air services agreement, defence lands and the technical changing of legislation. I hope that there is progress there, although the next few months will show whether that hope is real.

I raised the matter of the preparatory working group with the Chinese Foreign Minister who is to be chairman of the group and received an assurance that it was not aimed at interfering in or complicating the work of the joint liaison group or, indeed, the administration of Hong Kong by Britain up to June 1997.

Mr. Rogers: When I met Governor Patten on his visit here on 1 July I was pleased to hear that the process of getting democratic structures into place by 1997 was advancing and that the through train has been pursued assiduously. When will the Secretary of State make a decision on the future of the non-Chinese ethnic minorities in Hong Kong? There are 7,000 such people, mainly of Indian origin, who were removed to Hong Kong as many as 100 years ago and who are likely to become stateless under the citizenship propositions. Surely they deserve much better treatment from this Government than what has been proposed.

Mr. Hurd: This is a long-standing argument and I know the strength of the case. It was dealt with a few days ago on 9 July by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department. He repeated the assurance that the group already has: that if, against all expectations, they come under pressure to leave Hong Kong and have nowhere else to go, the Government of the day would consider with considerable and particular sympathy their case for admission to this country.

European Community (Enlargement)

4. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards enlarging the EC.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): Accession negotiations are in train with Austria, Finland Sweden and Norway. The June European Council set a target date of 1 January 1995 for their accession. It also agreed that the six associate countries of eastern Europe should become members as soon as they could assume the responsibilities of membership. On 30 June, the Commission's opinions on the applications for membership of Malta and Cyprus were issued. We welcome those developments.

Mr. Garnier: While I welcome the proposals for the accession of, in particular, the European Free Trade Association countries, because they will be net contributors, will my hon. Friend keep a firm hold on the present: first, by ensuring that the deliberations of EC Ministers are dealt with more effectively by their meetings beginning on

time; secondly, by ensuring that there is a complete absence of pettifogging and nitpicking regulations emanating from Europe; thirdly, by ensuring that article 3(b) is brought into effect as soon as possible; and, fourthly, will he do his best to ensure that the social chapter is kept well offshore?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I can give my hon. Friend those assurances. We, too, want article 3(b) of the treaty brought into effect as soon as possible, but that requires ratification first. I know that my hon. Friend will play his part in that. I believe that the accession of the additional EFTA states will help us, as they, too, believe in a decentralised, open-trading Community with strong budget discipline. That will help us to resist those who want an enclosed, protectionist, centralised, socialist Europe.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Despite the schedule of events that the Minister sketched in his opening reply and the fact that, for example, Finland acknowledges the diplomatic role that Britain is playing within the Community to assist it in its progress towards membership, will the Minister none the less acknowledge that there are fears among various parties in various countries within the existing Community that the British Government—not least because of reports about the Foreign Office preparation for the next set of intergovernmental conferences, if we can look that far forward—see the enlargement process as a means of putting the brakes, along the lines that the hon. Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) was hinting at, on the process of further European integration? Will he allay fears on that matter?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government welcome the accession negotiations, which are well under way and going well. We were in the lead in inviting other member states to set a target date for the accession of the additional states. We want to strengthen Europe by enlarging it.

Mr. Channon: Will my hon. Friend say a word more about the accession of the associate states that were part of the old Soviet Union? What does he think is now the likely timetable for them?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We believe that Europe should be open to any application from a European state that is democratic and willing to take on the responsibilities of membership. That includes the states of eastern and central Europe. I have to be candid in saying that their membership must be some years away, but the Copenhagen summit was clear in welcoming their eventual accession.

Mr. Hoon: Assuming that enlargement is completed successfully, what consequential changes in the decision-making processes of the European Community does the Minister expect will be necessary? In particular, does he expect that more majority voting in the Council of Ministers will be required?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No, that does not necessarily follow, although it is true that the accession of four additional states will cause us to look again at some of the institutional mechanisms. The number of votes that each of the accession states has remains to be negotiated.

Democratic Elections

5. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to how many countries he has made representations in the last six months urging them to hold democratic elections.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): We have made such representations to 12 countries in the past six months.

Mr. Evans: I thank the Minister for his reply. Does he agree that, in the middle east, the only true democracy is Israel? In view of that, and if he believes in democracy, will he tell me why the Government discriminate against Israel, in both trade and aid? We know that the shambles opposite do not know anything about democracy, dominated as they are by the unions—no say no pay, and all that nonsense—but we do. In view of that, does not he think that the Government should give their undivided support to the Government of Israel?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I agree with my hon. Friend that Israel is a democracy, although I hope that it will resolve the problems of the occupied territories in the context of the current peace process. It is not true that we discriminate against Israel. Only last week at the Tokyo summit there was a call for removal of the Arab boycott.

Mr. Grocott: Does the Minister agree that the violation by the Nigerian military authorities of the democratic process in Nigeria last month was tragic not only for the people of Nigeria, but in the precedent that it set—an all-too-frequent precedent—for those around the world who accept the democratic process only when it gives them the results that they want? Will the Minister confirm that that violation of the democratic process in Nigeria has resulted in bloodshed and a further infringement of civil and human rights? Will he further confirm to the House and to the Nigerian authorities that there can be no normalisation of relations with Nigeria—rather, relations will inevitably deteriorate—until the regime there understands that the only legitimate source of political authority is not the army but the will of the people?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, we have taken a strong line and we have deplored the decision of the Nigerian Government not to respect the elections and to seek another way forward. We have made it absolutely clear that we will not normalise relations until a proper democratic civilian regime is in place in Nigeria.

Mr. Devlin: Will my hon. Friend be making representations to the Chinese Government about the present situation in Tibet, where no democratic elections have been held since the invasion in 1948 and where recently large-scale riots in the streets have been savagely put down by the Chinese occupation forces?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised that matter with the Chinese Government in Peking last week and made our position clear.

Ms Eagle: Is the Minister aware of the increasingly dangerous situation in Cambodia following its elections, particularly the gains of influence and territory being made by Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge? Is it not disgraceful that the western powers have included that appalling

organisation in the so-called peace effort and allowed it to make gains which bring the probability of another year zero even closer?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are actively encouraging the Cambodian authorities to complete the new constitution and form a Government who respect the wishes of the Cambodian people as expressed in that election.

Mr. Colvin: I am sure that one of the countries to which Her Majesty's Government will have made representations is the Republic of South Africa. Have the Government expressed any preference for the sort of democratic structure that they would like to see in place in that country when the reforms—which are long overdue, and welcome—are in place? Will he acknowledge that a federal or perhaps a confederal system in South Africa is more likely not only to protect the democratic rights of minority groups but to assist that country to the economic recovery without which the people's economic aspirations are not likely to be met after the elections are held?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We welcome the South African Government's decision to hold elections on 27 April next year, but the constitutional arrangements for those elections are a matter for the South African people in their current discussions. We continue to give strong support for negotiations to end the current violence.

Bosnia

6. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he proposes to take to ensure that Serb and Croat aggression in Bosnia is not rewarded by territorial acquisition.

Mr. Hurd: A solution dictated by the Serbs and Croats at the expense of the Bosnian Muslims would not be accepted by the international community. Lord Owen and Mr. Stoltenberg continue the search for an equitable negotiated settlement based on the concept of one Bosnia. Mr. Stoltenberg briefed the United Nations Security Council yesterday. This would have to involve Serb and Croat withdrawal from the present positions taken by force. Sanctions will continue to be enforced against Serbia and Montenegro until the conditions set by the Security Council are met. We believe that the time has come for the European Community, perhaps on Monday, to consider economic measures against Croatia so long as Croatia, too, is engaged in activities contrary to internationally established principles.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the Foreign Secretary recognise that that answer essentially reiterates the policy that he and the Government have pursued during the past year and more? That policy has failed to stop the aggression by the Serbs and Croats and the sickening slaughter of innocent men, women and children in Sarajevo and countless other Bosnian towns.

When will the Foreign Secretary recognise that the lesson of history is that aggressors are not stopped by fine words and declarations, but only by the prospect of superior military force? Does he also recognise that until the United Nations acts firmly and concertedly to stop the aggression there will not be an end to the sickening killing?

Mr. Hurd: The difficulties of following that advice may be seen in Somalia today, and the situation in Somalia is easy compared with the problems of Bosnia. That is why I repeat that no Government with whom we have been in contact—in fact, no Government at all—have proposed, as the hon. Gentleman does, that an international expeditionary force be sent to impose a solution to the civil war in Bosnia and then stay there to enforce that solution for one, two, five or 10 years. Many half-measures have been suggested, and we have analysed them.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, we have not managed to stop the fighting with the present policies. What we can do is provide a framework of ideas for a negotiated settlement, put economic and financial pressures on those stimulating the fighting—I mentioned that in relation to Croatia—and help to keep people alive.

Mr. Fry: Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is not enough to say that the UN and this country will not condone the Croat and Serb invasions of parts of Bosnia? That cannot be done without making it clear that the only way to enforce any settlement is to ensure that there can be a degree of resettlement of the people who have been subject to ethnic cleansing. That will not be decided by a few words. There will be a need for an international force to ensure that resettlement can take place. Is my right hon. Friend prepared to take that up with the UN as soon—I hope that it will be soon—as some kind of settlement is agreed among the three parties?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is right. Once there is a negotiated settlement, which cannot be dictated by Serbs and Croats, the question of saving people and establishing them in new homes or their old homes arises immediately. There will have to be a big international effort. The Heads of Government said at their meeting in Tokyo that that cannot be undertaken at the dictate of Serbs and Croats. Lord Owen and Mr. Stoltenberg are not seeking to press the Bosnia Muslims into accepting a particular settlement. They are saying that it is worth while from everybody's point of view that the discussions in Geneva should continue to see whether such a settlement can emerge based on one Bosnia, either a confederation or a federation.

Dr. John Cunningham: Few people, apart from the right hon. Gentleman, are in any doubt that the outcome in Bosnia is being dictated by Serbian and Croatian aggression. All the evidence points to that inescapable conclusion, and the deplorable statement from Washington in May this year was almost an invitation to that end.

Is it not time that the right hon. Gentleman stopped issuing threadbare threats of tougher measures which never emerge? The use of air power is never ruled out, but it is never ruled in. That is in stark contrast with Iraq, where the war is over but missiles have been used in furtherance of United Nations resolutions. The war is continuing in Bosnia, but no action, even limited action, is taken.

There are options between the present position and the all-out expeditionary force to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, but no action is being taken. The outcome is a deplorable defeat for the EC and for the United Nations.

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman is a firm disciple of the "something must be done" school. I listened with growing bafflement to the rigmarole of the Leader of the

Opposition elaborating on this theme in answer to the Prime Minister on Monday. The right hon. Gentleman is rightly against lifting the arms embargo. He talks about air power, but I do not know what he means; it has never been spelt out. What does he think will be achieved? The position is clear: NATO and the Security Council have agreed that if UNPROFOR troops, and our troops, are attacked from the air, NATO can defend them. That is perfectly clear and has been made perfectly clear to everyone. The right hon. Gentleman must get out of the habit of supposing in a vague and unformulated way that the half-measures that he is advocating will produce results which could be produced only by something so drastic that not even he would propose it.

Departmental Personnel

7. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the number of personnel in post on Foreign and Commonwealth Office duties *(a)* abroad and *(b)* in the United Kingdom; at what cost; what were the corresponding figures five, 10 and 15 years ago in numbers and cost in real terms; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): The total diplomatic wing United Kingdom-based establishment of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is currently 6,648, of which 4,048 are serving at home and 2,600 overseas. The corresponding figures in earlier years were 6,578 in 1988-89, of which 3,775 were serving at home and 2,793 overseas, 6,763 in 1983 and 7,275 in 1978. A breakdown of personnel between home and overseas in 1978 and 1983 is not available.

The estimated pay bill for 1993-94 is £265 million. The equivalent figure on the same price base for 1988-89 was £257 million and for 1983-84 £251 million. A comparable figure for 1978-79 is not available.

These figures should be seen against the background of increasing demands on the diplomatic wing. We continue to exercise rigorous control over United Kingdom-based staff numbers at home and overseas.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply—*[Interruption.]* For all the hilarity in the House, I am sure that we are grateful to all members of staff in embassies and consulates around the world for the excellent work that they do for our country. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that the number of staff in post in the foreign service is diminishing rather than increasing at a time when more are needed because the world situation is so much more complex with the break-up of countries into much smaller units? Will he convey the support of the House to the Treasury and say that we want more people in post and properly supported because that is the only way in which this country's influence can be sustained and improved and in which trade can be improved?

Mr. Goodlad: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. The Government will ensure that the level of staffing in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is equal to the tasks laid on us.

Ms Coffey: Has the Minister received any more information from Foreign Office staff in Turkey about the possible release date for my constituent David Rowbottom and his partner who are being held by the PKK? Can he give the families any assurances because, as he will appreciate, they are extremely worried?

Mr. Goodlad: I will write to the hon. Lady.

Mr. Wilkinson: What evidence is there that, as we supposedly proceed towards ever-closer union in Europe, there will be an ever-diminishing number of Foreign and Commonwealth diplomats stationed in European Community countries? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there will be no diminution of posts, but rather the opposite, in the real growth areas in the world where significant economic advances are being made and where opportunities really exist for British business, such as the Pacific basin and south America?

Mr. Goodlad: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We shall have people where they are needed.

Mr. George Robertson: Is there any chance that Foreign Office Ministers might drop the supercilious veneer that they deploy in circumstances in which the most trivial and most serious issues are still at stake?

Will the right hon. Gentleman come clean with the House and with the country about what the consequences will be if the Treasury gets its way with regard to the cuts in our diplomatic representation overseas and, especially, the cuts in the British Council and in the BBC World Service? Why will Ministers not speak out about the permanent—perhaps irreparable—damage that will be done to institutions such as the BBC World Service, which is respected across the planet, which almost every day speaks with authority and balance to some 146 million people, and which may well face budget cuts of about £13 million next year? Surely it is the duty of the Foreign Office to come out from behind the diplomatic language and fight for its corner and for the country.

Mr. Goodlad: The hon. Gentleman is extremely eloquent in dreaming up ghosts at which to start. I can assure him that we will ensure that the resources provided are equal to the tasks laid upon us.

Mr. Allason: Will my right hon. Friend and his colleagues exercise a little less reticence in attacking ill-informed press criticism of Foreign Office expenditure overseas? Will he confirm that the appointment of the Governor of Bermuda, for example, costs the British taxpayer nothing and that the Government of Bermuda meets the bill in full? Why was it left to the Governor of Bermuda, and not Foreign Office Ministers, to draw attention to the crass criticism in *The Mail on Sunday* and *The Times*, among other newspapers?

Mr. Goodlad: If I were to occupy myself dealing with crass criticism by newspapers I should not have time for anything else. However, my hon. Friend is absolutely right that the Governor of Bermuda costs the British taxpayer nothing, as he is paid for by Bermuda. The Premier of Bermuda is in this country today and is very welcome here.

Sierra Leone

8. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the present state of United Kingdom relations with Sierra Leone.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are hopeful that our relations will improve.

Mr. Jones: I hope that our relations will improve sufficiently to enable the United Kingdom Government to ask the Sierra Leone Government to honour pension commitments that are still outstanding after, in some cases, 40 years. I refer to United Kingdom citizens who are ex-employees of the Colonial Office, having worked in educational establishments in Sierra Leone. If there is no improvement, will the United Kingdom Government pay the pensions of those people at long last?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I will certainly look into the question of our representations to the Sierra Leone Government about the pensions to which the hon. Gentleman refers. He will know that we have many issues outstanding with the Sierra Leone Government. We were very distressed by their conduct last year, and we are seeking, by persuasion, to bring about an improvement in the political situation there, in so far as we can influence it.

Bosnia

9. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed Bosnia with his European counterparts.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend did so at the Copenhagen meeting of the European Council on 21 and 22 June and, again, in the margins of the Tokyo summit held between 7 and 9 July.

Mr. Alton: In the absence of European troops in Bosnia and of the political will to commit them, can the Minister say what we shall do when the members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference appeal to the United Nations to commit up to 18,000 troops there? Given our own indifference to the plight of people who have been masscared in Bosnia, to the mutilation of that country, and to its right to self-determination and sovereignty, and even though we have failed to commit troops for the purpose of saving people there, we should say that we will not oppose the placing of Islamic troops to defend the interests of Muslims, who continue to be massacred.

Mr. Hogg: I have heard some pretty silly questions in this place, but that is one of the silliest. All hon. Members, with the possible exception of the hon. Gentleman, know that we now have 2,400 troops in Bosnia. In addition, there are very substantial French and other European formations. I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

Sir Michael Marshall: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, in consultation with our European partners, there is scope to seek to deter aggression in Bosnia if we can take forward the process of bringing to justice those who are guilty of crimes against humanity? In that regard, does my right hon. and learned Friend believe that it will be possible to name names so that we can deter those who have gone in for ethnic cleansing and other horrors?

Mr. Hogg: The Security Council has made it plain that there should be an ad hoc Yugoslav war crimes tribunal. I agree with that. What is even more important, however, is that we get the parties to the fighting to start negotiating.

Mr. McAvoy: Does the Minister really believe that Serbian expansionism will stop when Bosnia vanishes from the map? It is well known that the Serbians will extend their aggression to other areas in the Balkans once they have finished with Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Secretary of State has outlined the difficulties and dangers involved in supporting the use of United Nations troops in Bosnia. Does the Minister accept, however, that the same doubts and difficulties existed at the time of the Kuwait-Iraq war? The Secretary of State supported intervention then. What is the difference between Iraq and Bosnia? Is it Arab oil?

Mr. Hogg: Two questions are rolled up in that question. As to Bosnia, it is our determination that there shall continue to be a state of Bosnia. We are seeking to carry forward negotiations whereby the three warring factions can live in peace within the existing frontiers of Bosnia. Whether that is a confederal or federal solution is a matter for the parties involved. That we hope and intend to see a state of Bosnia in future is clear and beyond doubt.

The hon. Gentleman's second question was broadly whether the situation in former Yugoslavia is the same as that in the Gulf. The answer is no. There are remarkable differences. To start with, what we are seeing in Bosnia and indeed throughout much of former Yugoslavia is, in essence, a civil war. What we saw in the Gulf was a clear attack on one sovereign state by another. Moreover, in the Gulf war it was easy to define one's political objective, which was the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait. In Bosnia, what one is seeking to achieve is political negotiation and then a settlement through discussion.

Mr. Churchill: Is it not a cruel and cynical betrayal of the Bosnian Muslims that the United Nations should send in a United Nations protection force with no mandate to protect and should declare safe havens that it has no intention to make safe? For how much longer will the United Nations and Her Majesty's Government maintain a position whereby we deny the victims of aggression any outside assistance and refuse to let them have access to the means of self-defence when we know that the other side —the Serbs—started the conflict with more than 10 times as much ammunition and hardware?

Mr. Hogg: We need to be clear about this. The United Nations is neither more nor less than its member states. Therefore, the essential question is whether the member states—in particular, the United Kingdom—are prepared to put combat troops into Bosnia to wage war. If the answer is no—and that, indeed, is the answer—people must not encourage the Bosnian Muslims to suppose something different.

Kenya (Press Harassment)

10. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's representations concerning harassment of the press in Kenya.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have repeatedly stressed at the highest levels of the Kenyan Government the importance of a free press.

Sir David Steel: The Minister knows from my question on Monday that I am particularly concerned about the case of Fotoform publishers, in which we have a particular

locus because its managing director is a British citizen. Is he aware that since its presses, which I visited in May, were raided and forced to close, three of the company's publications—*Society*, *Finance* and *Law Monthly*—have been suspended? That is direct harassment of the press. My latest information is that the judgment that should have been delivered yesterday was not forthcoming and that the case is still continuing. Such suppression of the press is outrageous and we have a particular duty to make repeated condemnation of it.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am, of course, aware of that case and of the right hon. Gentleman's interest in it. We exchanged words about it on Monday. He will know that we take a strong line about it. I am extremely disappointed that the case was adjourned yesterday. We believe that the legal proceedings should be concluded as soon as possible.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend make it clear to the Kenyan Government and other Governments that economic assistance from this country depends on those Governments adhering to basic principles of human and political rights?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes. As my hon. Friend is aware, the elections in Kenya were, ultimately, conducted successfully, even though in the run-up to them there was cause for concern. The Government and the International Monetary Fund have made it clear to the Kenyan Government that further balance of payments support depends on their complying with a shadow programme that they have negotiated with the IMF.

Israel (EC Application)

11. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made with Israel's application for associate member status with the EC.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The 1975 co-operation agreement provides the present basis of the relationship between the EC and Israel. In 1992, the EC and Israel agreed to examine how those arrangements might be updated. The Commission has had exploratory talks with Israel and will soon propose a draft negotiating mandate to the Council.

Mrs. Kennedy: Does the Minister believe that the economic regeneration of that region is the surest way to achieve stability and lasting peace? If so, will he actively promote—not merely support—Israel's application for associate membership of the EC? Will he further consider the active promotion of Israel's application to join the "Western European and Others" group of the United Nations?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am cautious about using the term "association agreement" because it might imply that EC membership is in prospect when at present it is not. I agree that it is a matter of mutual interest to develop trade relations and better political dialogue.

Mr. Dykes: Does my hon. Friend agree that Israel's application for associate-only status would be considerably reinforced if the British Government would put pressure on the Arab countries to remove their boycott, which harms Israel's economic performance? If Israel now has the imagination to reach genuine and lasting peace with the Palestinians in the present negotiations, the great prize of the near east common market will be available, including maximum support from the European Community.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I confirm to my hon. Friend that we deplore the Arab boycott of Israel.

Mr. Burden: Does the Minister agree that, if it is reasonable for Israel to seek closer relationships with the European Community, it is reasonable for the international and European communities to seek from Israel reasonable standards of conduct of the sort expected of other countries? That includes ending the economic strangulation of the west bank and Gaza strip, respecting the rights of Palestinians living in the occupied territories, and abiding by international resolutions such as ending the illegal occupation of the west bank and Gaza strip and the illegal annexation of east Jerusalem.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has repeatedly made it clear that the Israeli defence forces must respect human rights in the occupied territories. We deplore all violence of that nature as well as terrorist activities against Israeli citizens.

Middle East

12. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in the peace process in the middle east, and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The 10th round of bilateral negotiations adjourned in Washington on 1 July. The Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have reached an important moment. Both sides now face the decision whether to engage in detailed negotiations about interim arrangements in the occupied territories. We think that they should.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the present agreeable climate in the peace process would be better promoted by a constructive dialogue with the newly pragmatic Palestine Liberation Organisation rather than allowing Hammas and fundamentalist groups in the region to continue to pose a dangerous threat to the whole of the middle east?

Mr. Hogg: I certainly think that Hammas poses a threat to the middle east in general and to the peace talks in particular. That is why it is extremely important that urgent progress should be made in the peace negotiations now under way.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Does the Minister agree that the middle east talks are threatened by a three-and-a-half month closure of Gaza which, after 26 years of occupation, does not have the finance to sustain itself and in some cases lacks the basic infrastructure for water, sewerage and a financial system? Does he also agree that, while Israel has a right to legitimate security rightly, as an occupying power it also has a duty to look after the interests of the occupied population? If the Israelis will not help the Gazans, will the Government do something through the EC to help them?

Mr. Hogg: I certainly think that if we are to see progress in the talks it is important that the Palestinians and the Israeli people see that positive advantages are to be gained

from those talks. Therefore, I say to the Government of Israel that they must lift the weight of the occupation—there are various ways in which to do that—and I say to the Palestinians that they must stop the violence.

Mr. Carrington: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the process of peace negotiations in the middle east depends crucially on the brokering by the United States of a settlement? Will my right hon. and learned Friend put pressure on the United States Government to encourage Israel to bring the future of Jerusalem into the negotiations in a constructive manner?

Mr. Hogg: I entirely agree that the role of the United States is critical to a successful outcome of the negotiations. We, the United Kingdom Government, will do what we can to support the process, but our agenda is not separate from that of the United States. The negotiators must hurry, as it is always possible that; if there is no progress the enthusiasm of the United States to remain involved may diminish. I think it is prudent to leave the issue of Jerusalem until last.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I wish to raise with you, Madam Speaker, a point of order of which I gave you notice: the apparent conflict between the rulings that you gave yesterday and that Mr. Speaker Weatherill gave some time ago on Standing Order No. 20 and its terms.

In exchanges yesterday, you said:

"The matter in question must be urgent, and it must relate to new developments, such as a change of policy."—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 834.]

Standing Order No. 20 states:

"On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday a Member rising in his place at the commencement of public business may propose, in an application lasting not more than three minutes, to move the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration."

I put it to you, Madam Speaker, that the ruling that you gave yesterday, which was initially given by Mr. Speaker Weatherill, does not give that permissive right to hon. Members to move an application for Standing Order No. 20. If your ruling is accepted—I have no reason to think that it is not—it requires amendment of Standing Order No. 20. Therefore, I should like advice from you on how such an amendment can be secured, because, unless an amendment is made, it seems that Standing Order No. 20 is in direct conflict with the ruling that you made yesterday and that made by Mr. Speaker Weatherill some years ago.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On the same point of order, Madam Speaker. I am grateful for your letter, and I wish to raise a point of order arising from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). Many of us can recall when hon. Members, whether the occupants of the Chair liked it or not, stated at your office that they were going to make an application and, as far as I can recall—the Clerks will no doubt advise if this is wrong—there were no restrictions.

During the 1974-79 period, Conservative Members, when in opposition, used to make four or five applications each day. No doubt on each occasion the Members involved took the view that they stood no chance of succeeding, but there were no restrictions on them trying.

I accept entirely that it was not you, Madam Speaker, but your predecessor who made it more difficult to make applications. However, with all due respect, I wish to ask you when that change was made and what opportunity the House was given to decide, on a vote, whether that should be the case. Undoubtedly, there has been a change, and it is now far more difficult to get permission to move an application under Standing Order No. 20. The matter should be put to the House and a vote taken accordingly.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): There is an ironic side to this whole episode in connection with Speaker Weatherill. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said that, in 1974-79, when a Labour Government were in office, we had to put up with four or five applications a day for SO9s, as they were then called, from Tory Members. The deputy Chief Whip of the Tory party at that time was none other than the man who was later to become Speaker Weatherill, and he organised the SO9s.

Madam Speaker: That is hardly a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West) *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Is it the same point?

Mr. Canavan: No.

Madam Speaker: In that case, I shall respond to the point of order. I am not able to relax the practice of the Chair in this matter. Contrary to what some hon. Members said yesterday, that practice has been applied consistently for several years. If I relaxed the practice, the House would be exposed to a spate of three-minute applications which had no possibility of success because they bore no relation to the criteria that I have to apply.

Those criteria are that the matter must be specific, important and urgent, and must be matter for which a Minister has responsibility. Of course, I shall continue to offer constructive suggestions to hon. Members who make Standing Order No. 20 applications so that they might pursue the matter, which I quite understand concerns them, in some other way.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to the point of order, Madam Speaker. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and others have said, there was a spate of applications in 1975. By what alchemy, at what point and when was the change made? Who decided it? On reflection, some of us think that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover is right, and that this has all been done by the powers that be since television has been brought in. What it is all about is television at prime time. The question is succinct: how and at what moment was the change made and by whom, and was it made with the authority of the House?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman was a Member at that time. If he and all of us reflect, we will remember that, in the period 1978-79, which hon. Members are recalling there was a spate of urgent issues. We all have long enough memories to understand what they were. If the hon. Gentleman wants to know about the urgency requirement in a Standing Order No. 20 application, he will find that it is there for him to read. If the House wishes to change our procedures or the Standing Order, which is quite specific, there are ways and means, as the hon. Gentleman knows, for him to do so.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I must take other points of order. I have dealt with the previous one. Some hon. Members are taking up the time of the House on a day that is crucial to other hon. Members.

Mr. Canavan: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is different from the last one. One of your many onerous duties is to chair the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland. The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 states quite clearly that, in making recommendations about the drawing up of parliamentary constituency boundaries, the commission must have regard to local government area boundaries.

Traditionally in Scotland, local government area boundaries have been determined after very careful consideration and, in many cases, after public consultation by the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland. Major restructuring involving the creation of

new authorities or the abolition of existing ones, has usually been done after careful consideration by some form of independent commission.

However, for the proposals that will be before the House this afternoon, that has not been done. There have been accusations of gerrymandering, and it would put you, Madam Speaker, in an invidious position if the work of your commission, the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland, were prejudiced in any way by the implementation of the gerrymandered local government proposals that will be before the House today.

Will you use your position as Chair of the Scottish Parliamentary Boundary Commission and your good offices to try to bring about some kind of independent commission to study this matter carefully and see that the proposals that will be before the House today are scrapped, or at least shelved until the whole matter of Scottish local government is given the fullest possible consideration by an independent commission chaired by somebody who is neutral and fair-minded, such as your good self?

Madam Speaker: These are still only proposals. The hon. Gentleman has made some interesting points which are better raised in the debate, which, if we ever reach it, will be shortly. He should put his concerns to the Minister at that time.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): On a different point of order, Madam Speaker. May I refer you to the amendment tabled today in the name of the Prime Minister, which relates to the debate that we are about to have on Scottish local government? It refers to the Government's White Paper, which contains proposals to set up

"a single tier of strong and acceptable all-purpose authorities."

If you read the Government's White Paper, you will find that they are proposing to remove water, police and fire services from those single-tier authorities. Therefore, the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister is misleading and inaccurate, and on that basis will you rule it out of order?

Madam Speaker: As soon as we start the debate, I will give my ruling on the amendment, but we are not in the debate yet.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): You will recall, Madam Speaker that, some time ago at Question Time, I said to the Minister for Energy that the President of the Board of Trade had dipped his hand in the till of the miners' pensions. The Minister, in the House, vehemently denied that, but in this morning's paper it was admitted that Ministers had urged British Coal to raid the pension funds.

Has the Minister for Energy offered to come to the House to make an apology——

Madam Speaker: Order. What appears in newspapers has nothing whatsoever to do with the Chair of the House. All 650 Members could bring in their newspapers and ask me whether I thought they were correct. It is a terrible abuse of the time of the House.

Mr. Enright: It is the court reporter.

Madam Speaker: I do not give a—*[Laughter.]* I do not care whether it is the court reporter or the most junior reporter on my local paper; it is not an issue for the Chair or for the House.

I had a point of order yesterday from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) to which I wish to reply. The hon. Gentleman raised with me the effect of article 21 of the Act of Union on the implementation of the Government's proposals for local government reorganisation in Scotland. As the House is aware, I rule on the orderliness of the business before the House and not on hypothetical questions. I am satisfied that the motion before the House today is perfectly in order. Consideration of the orderliness of a future Local Government (Scotland) Bill will have to wait until the text of the Bill is available and I have been able to see it.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Your ruling is slightly ambiguous. Scottish Members would like to know whether the determination of Scottish local authority boundaries and structure and the future of water supplies will be dictated by the votes of English Members of Parliament in the House, regardless of and notwithstanding the Act of Union.

I thank you for your consideration of the matter, but you will appreciate its importance. If the conventions of the United Kingdom Parliament dictate that English Conservative Members, many rolling in from the liquid dungeons of this place at the end of the day, dictate that——

Madam Speaker: Order. I patiently listened to the hon. Gentleman's point of order. He put it to me clearly, and I took some time in considering it. This is a United Kingdom Parliament, and we all determine together what happens in the various parts of this nation.

Mr. Salmond: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. There can be no further point of order. I carefully considered the hon. Gentleman's point of order yesterday. I have gone into it thoroughly, and I answered it today by saying that this is a United Kingdom Parliament and every one of us is entitled to make a decision on what comes before the House.

Women into Parliament

3.44 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Representation of the People Acts with a view to increasing the number of women elected to Parliament; and for connected purposes.

By great good fortune, and with the co-operation of the people who arrange ten-minute Bills, today is the birthday of Emmeline Pankhurst—and this year marks the 75th anniversary of women's suffrage. A group of women Members of Parliament from all parties have got together to commemorate those great events to stage an exhibition in the House called "Women into Politics"—which you, Madam Speaker, graciously opened on Monday.

Today, Lady Thatcher, our first woman Prime Minister, unveiled a plaque to suffragettes in St. Stephen's hall. It is the first time that suffragettes have been commemorated in the House.

Since 1918, only 163 women have been elected to Parliament, compared with 3,986 men. Almost half that number of women were in Parliament for only one Session, because they were given marginal seats to fight or were elected at by-elections, and therefore did not spend more than a couple of years here.

Perhaps it is not surprising that there have only been 10 women Cabinet members, while 388 men have served in the Cabinets. One fifth of all women Cabinet Ministers are in office today, and there are still 17 Government Departments without a woman politician, or which have never had a woman politician in them. Women have a view on every subject. How can their views be reflected in legislation if they are not in the room when key decisions about legislation are made?

Things are getting a little better. At the last general election, 60 women were elected—the largest number ever—but they still account for less than 10 per cent. of the membership of the House. It is not true that women do not come forward as candidates. It is just much harder for them to be adopted for safe seats. You, Madam Speaker, tried for 16 years before being elected, and many of us got here almost by a lucky fluke.

Throughout the history of our democracy, women have had to battle for recognition. Until recently, they did not have property rights or the right to their earnings if they were married, and had to fight for a university education and to be accepted into the professions. The suffragettes were not militant feminists, but Christian women who believed that democracy was part of the Christian message, which taught that women were equal to men.

Parliament is still very much a man's world. If women are to make a contribution in their own style, men must accept the need for structures to change. In my time as a Member of Parliament, the need for changing working conditions has been debated but nothing has come of it.

Even the few women who made it to the House have effected profound changes in respect of care of the elderly, children, maternity services and health. Such topics were not considered suitable topics for Parliament to debate before women arrived. They were laughed at or thought too embarrassing to discuss. Women such as Margaret Bondfield, the first woman Cabinet Minister, Eleanor Rathbone, Irene Ward, Megan Lloyd-George and Barbara Castle battled to make this a more caring country.

In the past, Parliament met to raise money to fight the king's wars. Today it meets to raise taxes that are mainly spent on social services and social structures. Those areas are second nature to women because of their upbringing and experience, and ones in which they can make a key contribution to the deliberations of the House.

Historically, Parliament has always been refreshed by the injection of people from different backgrounds. It was once dominated by merchants and landowners. Now, small business men and trade unionists take their place here. Surely now is the time for that trust to extend to the inclusion of far more women in our deliberations. There needs to be a critical mass of women for the priorities in this place to change.

Parliament is broadened by the insights and energies of these newcomers. No one is detracting from existing Members, or the contributions made by men, but stating that women have a key economic role to play, not just outside but inside this building. It is time for us to encourage more women into the House.

Women have all the qualities necessary to be Members of Parliament—not that those qualities are exceptional—and we will know that women have really reached their place in our political community when they are allowed to be as mediocre as some of the men who occupy these Benches.

There is not a level playing field between men and women when it comes to selection for parliamentary seats. If there were, there would be no need for my Bill. Different parties address the matter in different ways. Some parties consider the possibility of quotas, others proportional representation, and still others may—like Bernard Shaw—recommend a coupled vote.

A Parliament with more women would be more equitable, and would more fairly reflect the changes that have taken place in society, particularly in the lives and status of women. I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House to support the principles that I have outlined in my Bill, and I commend it to the House.

3.51 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): It is with some diffidence that I oppose the motion moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman).

I sympathise with much of what my hon. Friend and her supporters seek to achieve, but I disagree fundamentally with the method that they have chosen to achieve those objectives—that of tinkering with our present electoral system, which is epitomised in the Representation of the People Acts.

One of the greatest strengths of our democratic system is the single-member constituency. I have always opposed any suggestion of introducing proportional representation. It would divide the electorate, so that, for example, Conservative voters would approach a Conservative Member of Parliament to deal with their problems, socialist voters would approach a socialist Member of Parliament and Liberal voters would approach a Liberal Member of Parliament.

A secondary result would be that even more power would be put in the hands of the party hierarchy over the selection of candidates, and that centre of decision-making would be taken away from where it should rightly be, at grass-roots level in the constituencies. The people who live

in an area should have the freedom to choose an individual to represent them, whether that individual be male or female.

Our existing arrangements for electoral representation have worked well, and have not debarred women from coming forward as candidates. Women Members have made a considerable contribution to the House, to the political life of the country and to society as a whole. With you in the Chair, Madam Speaker, hon. Members are continually reminded that it is possible for women to achieve the highest and most influential of offices, and to fulfil the ensuing responsibilities with great distinction.

I remind the House that the Head of State and the head of the established Church in this country is a woman. Until relatively recently, we had our first woman Prime Minister, who was outstanding in terms of both leadership and intellect. Currently, two members of the Cabinet are women, seven members of the Government are women and 59 right hon. and hon. Members are women. The leaders of countless county borough and parish councils are women. The hard-working grass-roots majority of the membership, certainly of the Conservative party, are women.

If we consider the gradual manner in which our parliamentary democracy came into being over a period of centuries and the way in which the franchise was extended from a limited number to include all adults, we see that the speed with which women have, in the last few decades alone, seized the initiative is truly remarkable. The enthusiasm of my hon. Friend further to hasten this process by any form of positive discrimination should not be allowed to undermine the progress which has been made, or to alter the Representation of the People Acts, which are one of the foundation stones upon which our system of free elections is based.

I support 100 per cent. any attempt to encourage more women Members into this House of Commons, but I completely oppose any attempt to change the rules, to fiddle the rules, to enable them so to do.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Teresa Gorman, Ms Jean Corston, Mrs. Margaret Ewing and Mrs. Ray Michie.

Women into Parliament

Mrs. Teresa Gorman accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Representation of the Peoples Acts with a view to increasing the number of women elected to Parliament; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 16 July, and to be printed. [Bill 238.]

Orders of the Day

OPPOSITION DAY

[17th Allotted Day]

Local Government and Water (Scotland)

Madam Speaker: I have looked at the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister. It is perfectly in order and has been selected for debate.

May I make a plea at this stage for short speeches? There are a great many Members in all parts of the House who wish to speak in the debate.

3.56 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I beg to move,

That this House notes the publication of the White Paper 'Shaping the Future-The New Councils'; considers that these proposals have been brought forward without adequate consultation, and represent costly and unnecessary changes not sustained by general support for their introduction; condemns the blatant manipulation of boundaries for narrow party interests, consistent with an approach to the governance of Britain which centralises power and disregards the basic consensus necessary to a healthy democracy; welcomes the success of the public campaign against outright privatisation of water, but notes the continuing threat to the future of these services posed by the proposals in the White Paper to remove them from local authority control; and demands that Her Majesty's Government withdraws the White Paper, establishes an independent Commission to review the whole question of local government in Scotland, retains water and sewerage in local authority control, and makes proper provision for adequate investment in these services.

I ought to say that we intend to oppose the amendment that stands in the name of the Prime Minister and his right hon. Friends.

There is a widespread belief that Scotland is usually the first to be at the receiving end of this Government's most damaging initiatives. That is certainly true of the discredited poll tax and the discredited Ministers who supported it, but the Secretary of State for Scotland can make no plea of mitigation in respect of local government and water privatisation. He already knows of the disasters that followed that elsewhere in the United Kingdom. He also knows now that Scotland is at the end of the queue.

What the Secretary of State announced last Thursday was not the product of original thought on his part. His announcement consisted of two proposals: to rearrange the map of Scottish local government to the advantage of his party, and to move a step closer to the selling of Scottish water. Both proposals have already been visited on other parts of the United Kingdom. The people of Scotland, having seen the so-called future, in Tory eyes, know that it does not work.

The fact is that the Government have one overriding conviction, and have adopted it in Scotland as well: if they cannot win elections, abolish them—*[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), must know that they won 11 out of 72 seats in Scotland and that they have a mere 16 per cent. of support, according to the opinion polls, among the people of Scotland—hardly a mandate to do anything in Scotland, far less to impose this nonsense upon us.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way in a moment.

We saw their solution to the problems that democracy poses. The Greater London council, the metropolitan counties and the Inner London education authority caused problems for the Tories and were abolished. Scotland has now been presented with the same sort of treatment.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman referred to 11 Tory Members from Scotland. How many Scottish seats did he forecast the Tory party would get before the general election? Will he note that we achieved 25 per cent. of the vote at the general election?

Mr. Clarke: One thing that I will forecast is that, even with the gerrymandering, the Tories will not get in next time. They know that they cannot win Strathclyde, Lothian, Central or Fife, they suffered humiliating losses in Tayside, Grampian, Dumfries and Galloway and they did not do all that well in the district elections.

What is their answer? It is the same one as we have seen before—the London solution: sweep them away. They respond to the problem of voters who continue to elect Labour councils by creating safe havens for themselves. What is much worse is that they take away from councils as many powers and services as possible, reduce democratic accountability and prepare for sell-offs to the highest bidders.

On water and sewerage, the House will know that there was not a hint in the Tory manifesto at the general election in Scotland of the Government's proposals on water privatisation, or a suggestion that water would be up for sale. Most people in Scotland—indeed, 98 per cent.—believe that water is a gift from God.

Last Thursday, the Government stopped short—but not far short—of selling off water as a result of the Scottish people's influence and determination, not because there was a sudden change on the road to Damascus on the part of the Secretary of State for Scotland.

A few days before the House returned after the summer recess last year, and at considerable expense to taxpayers, the Secretary of State launched a glossy document in Glasgow. The document was full of marks, photographs and nice graphics, and even contained an explanation of why it rains in Scotland. Following that, a firm of consultants was commissioned, at a cost to the taxpayers of upwards of £100,000. It caused months of deep uncertainty among workers and consumers, and nearly 3,000 replies were received, of which only 1 per cent. favoured privatisation. All of that, for what?

The document that we saw last week was not even a full page—it had a mere four paragraphs on water. However, it still managed to disguise the real thinking of the Secretary of State on the matter. Why did he not tell us that water and sewerage will be left in the hands of democratically elected local authorities?

Those local authorities have 150 years of service in protecting the public in terms of health. They know about investment, and they know that they are entitled to protect God's gift to Scotland, as the Scottish people see it. The Government's determination to move in and profiteer is not welcomed either in Ayr or elsewhere.

The Secretary of State said that the public ownership of three new water companies can be combined with a major role for the private sector in providing and financing much of the essential and large capital investment programme that is needed over the next decade. Therefore, the private companies will be providers as well as providing finance.

Perhaps the Secretary of State will tell us how that will work. What is the difference between the franchising option and what he suggested last Thursday? Nothing in the White Paper suggests that he has abandoned all hope of privatisation. We have seen a U-turn, but one that will last only to this side of the next election, as we saw in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State has been less than honest in Scotland, so let us be clear that his paving Bill will be a major issue at the next general election in Scotland, and we will, of course, invite the Scottish people to decide.

As with water, the Government cannot conceal how they see the role of local government. For the Labour party, that role is about democracy, it is about elected councillors, it is about serving the local community, it is about accountability, and it is about sustaining high standards of services. They are all noble ideals that were once accepted as a consensus by all political parties on behalf of the Scottish people.

For the Government, in their miserable documents, that role is about centralisation, about competitive tendering and, in the end, about local councils organising meetings to award contracts to people who are not accountable to anybody.

The Government issued another glossy document in the past year with a flourish of publicity, including the publication of a video that I understand was called "Lang—the Movie". Civil servants advised the Secretary of State, so in future Ministers may take more account of advice from elsewhere. We were told that "Lang—the Movie" cost £25,000—many will ask if the right hon. Gentleman's presentation was worth that amount. All that was missing was Scarlett O'Hara saying that the Scottish people could not give a damn about his proposals.

That costly exercise offered the Scottish people options of 24 or 35 or 51 authorities. Did the Government respond to the replies? No, not really. They were not responding to people's replies to the various options. During that apology for a consultation exercise, the Government had their own ideas, and those ideas related not to what the people of Scotland wanted, and certainly not to an independent commission, but to a small minority view that coincides with what appear to be the interests of a small number of Tory Members.

During that important consultation on the future of local government, Ministers have been both prosecutors and jury, while the people had no right of appeal.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): In support of the hon. Gentleman, he will remember the sentence in the White Paper that says:

"The Government recognise the time and effort devoted to preparing these reponses, and have examined them with great care".

The responses have been on public view in St. Andrew's house over the past week. There were 108 submissions in the Borders, which have been examined, and of those only three support the proposals advanced by the Government to take Berwickshire out of the Borders region. Not surprisingly, the three who support it are the Conservative group on Berwickshire district council, the Conservative group on Lothian regional council and a single Conservative councillor. Is that public consultation?

Mr. Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman has done a service to the House in exposing what amounts to a disgraceful exercise. I invite the Secretary of State to publish not only those documents to which the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) referred, but other documents that are relevant to our discussions.

The Government claim that there is no evidence of gerrymandering, yet since Thursday—again I challenge the Secretary of State to deny this when he replies—not one independent commentator has been willing to say that the Government's exercise was not influenced by party political considerations alone.

Arthur Midwinter, an academic expert so clearly regarded as non-partisan as to be invited to the Prime Minister's breakfast sitting and invited to give advice during the state visit in the past year, said:

"Stirling, East Renfrewshire, Berwickshire and East Lothian represented Toytown councils."

If I am mistaken about the influences on the Government, perhaps the Secretary of State, after his wide-ranging consultation, will tell us which serious commentator or advisory body, other than the Tory party, advised him to put Helensburgh into Argyll, to take Musselburgh out of East Lothian or to put Barrhead into Greater Eastwood. If he will do so, I am happy to give way.

I am happy to give way to him if he can name a single independent body that supports the proposals. I am happy to give way even to his sidekick, the hon. Member for Eastwood, if he will tell us of any independent body that supported such a view. The fact is, as is clear from the silence, that nobody did, because nobody would support a proposal so reeking of political corruption and so consistent with party political advantage. I am still happy to give way.

The House can reach only one conclusion—that the Secretary of State is the "Jim'll Fix It" of Scottish politics. He has fixed it for the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), he has fixed it for the hon. Member for Eastwood, and he thinks that he has fixed it for the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie). He certainly has not fixed it for the Scottish people, because they have fixed it for him. As someone else might have said at the Dispatch Box, never in the history of local government reform has so much been owed by so few to so few.

Let us consider the carve-up of Renfrewshire. West Renfrewshire has three times the population of East Renfrewshire. No doubt Eastwood has a consideration in these matters, and no doubt we shall get an impartial explanation of how such a conclusion was reached. North Ayrshire includes Cumnock and Doon Valley in the south, and is more than three times as large as South Ayrshire. There is a farcical situation in the Lothians. West Lothian is physically separated from Midlothian, and Musselburgh and Prestonpans are thrown in for good measure. West Lothian is three times as large as Berwickshire and East Lothian.

Are we to conclude that it is now official policy that three voters for a Labour council may be compared with one for a Tory council? That is hardly a model for a modern democracy. Stirling, the model toytown council, spent a year—*[Interruption.]* As the hon. Member for Eastwood is being so provocative, I shall spell it out again, especially as I have no wish to misquote Professor Midwinter.

Stirling, the model toytown council, spent a year selling everything in sight, no doubt on the advice of the hon. Member for Stirling. I have no doubt that the Government want to do the same to regional services. We are entitled to ask seriously, because the voters of Stirling regard the matter as serious, whether such a small council will begin to take responsibilities for education and social work.

Twenty years ago, the Wheatley report said that an ideal size of council area for social work was 200,000 people. The Secretary of State has often said that the regions have achieved quality of service and identity with local communities. The same is true of education, in terms of economies of scale, delegation of management, direct accountability of staff to councillors and direct accountability of councillors to voters, which the Secretary of State has told us his proposals are all about. Those factors represent a successful recipe for the delivery of strategic services.

The most important question before the House is whether the quality of services and their delivery will be met by the Government's proposals. In social work, what evidence is there to overturn Wheatley? Wheatley, after a long period of consideration and genuine consultation, produced an excellent report, not a sham report based on narrow political dogma.

Where is the evidence that social work departments are better and stronger if they are smaller? Where is the evidence that they can provide the necessary services? Where is the evidence that the needs of the vulnerable who are suffering under the Government's so-called policy on community care will be met by the Government's proposals? Since we are dealing with people who have to work with much larger health boards—in terms of co-operation with community care—perhaps the Secretary of State will tell us more about how he expects the system to work.

Since we are told that the Government are also willing to leave such important matters as education to local authorities, what guarantees are there that the people of Scotland will avoid the bitter experience of those in inner London? The Government argued that abolishing the Inner London education authority would cut costs—something that Tory Ministers repeatedly told us would work—and Ministers are telling us the same of our future in Scotland, but they must know that, in London, the opposite has happened. London boroughs, forced to duplicate central administration and to increase bureaucracy, have upped the number of managers by 67 per cent., which would blow the Government's costing to smithereens. Inner London boroughs were forced to duplicate specialist education services or to abandon them.

Perhaps we shall hear evidence today of what will happen to youth work in Scotland, to adult education and to special needs, based on the inner London experience, which no Secretary of State worth his salt would wish to emulate. When so many young Scots are imperilled by unemployment and drug-related crimes, community education and youth work may be among the victims of the Government's ideological obsessions. That is another reason why the people of Scotland find the Government's proposals so unattrative.

Last week, we had a short exchange in the House about transitional costs. I invite the Secretary of State to be more forthcoming today. We are told that, on the Government's estimate, the transitional cost would be about £200 million. Since, in response to my hon. Friend the Member

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for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), he made it clear that that would have to be found from other elements of the Scottish Office budget, will he tell us which parts of that budget will be cut?

Which services will lose £200 million to pay for the schemes? When the Treasury is clawing back every penny, threatening pensions and benefits, imposing a new tax on people heating their homes and so on, why does the Secretary of State feel that it is the right time to spend £200 million on such an exercise?

All that unnecessary expenditure will not provide a single extra police officer on the beat, a single extra teacher in a school or a single extra home help for the most needy. There is nothing in the proposals that would save a single Tory seat. The Government are unashamedly offering us a two-tier system, but it is based on joint boards, on buying in services and on competitive tendering—a system in which the Secretary of State takes decisions and even makes appointments. Few Hon. Members understand how he can justify that on the basis of democracy.

Only one of the many organisations providing services will be directly accountable to the community. When numerous submissions were made to the Secretary of State, why did he disregard the importance of accountability? Was not that the strong view of the local community councils, of the elected councils, at district, regional and island level? Was not that the strong view of virtually all the voluntary organisations in Scotland, which see the need for positive local government and for co-ordinating activity locally and nationally?

The fact is that the Government are seeking to impose on the people of Scotland without adequate examination or independent assessment a system of government which, as we have seen in the gerrymandering of the proposals for Stirling, Eastwood, Lothian, and even Aberdeen, could have been thought up only by narrow-minded people in Conservative central office. That is not a recipe for success for the future of democracy or local government in Scotland.

The Secretary of State may not wish to be reminded of this, but it was Wheatley himself, who had more experience in these matters than the whole Tory Front Bench put together, who defined local democracy as

"to ensure that the effective power of decision in local matters rests on an elected council directly accountable to the electorate for the exercise of that power."

How can we have that measure of direct accountability over education, the police and the fire service in Strathclyde, not to speak of the assessor's role? How can we have that measure of accountability when sprinkled throughout the document is the Secretary of State's determination to take upon himself even more powers, especially in relation to joint planning, than those he has now?

The Government's proposals are not about reforming local government, but about enfeebling it. It is about the betrayal of Scotland, yes, and Conservative promises to listen to the Scottish people. Above all, the latest in a series of cynical manoeuvres by which the Conservative party has overridden the wishes of local people expressed through the ballot box is the Government's response of removing the ballot box itself.

This is a foolish and dangerous course to follow. I hope that the Secretary of State will not mind if I refer to my local government experience. There are many who have contributed to local government and who in a democracy are entitled to expect their views to be heard. Democracy depends on consent. Consent depends on those in power playing by the rules. By changing the rules to suit itself, the Conservative party is putting democracy itself at risk. That is the reason why we have tabled this motion today.

I call upon the Government today, knowing that we carry the overwhelming support of the Scottish people——

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: No, I will not give way—to recognise the importance of Scotland's deep commitment to these democratic principles and to withdraw their proposals.

Mr. Riddick *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: If they will not do so, I call upon the people of Scotland to resist and oppose them in every way and to stop them in every way possible. In that, they can be assured that they can depend on the support of the Labour party, and in due course of a Scottish Parliament—which the right hon. Gentleman's absurd proposals, happily, have made even more inevitable.

4.23 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move, to leave out from 'House' to the end of the motion, and to add instead thereof:

'welcomes the publication of the White Paper "Shaping the Future-The New Councils"; and considers that its proposals will lead to better and more efficient local government in Scotland, based on a single tier of strong and accountable all-purpose authorities.'.

I welcome the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) back to Parliament—safe back from his little jaunt to Downing street. Last Thursday, he quoted what Oliver Cromwell said to the Rump Parliament in 1653:

"In the name of God, go!"—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 35.]

I thought that it was singularly inapt, but when he picked up his papers and left the Chamber I realised that he was talking to himself. It is a pity that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was not at home. He is back from Tokyo now, if the hon. Gentleman would like to go again. Certainly the cameras were there in plenty. Indeed, the cameras were everywhere.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lang: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman now.

Mr. Clarke *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State appears not to be giving way. Is that correct?

Mr. Lang: That is correct.

One of my hon. Friends at the St. Stephen's entrance was greeted by a cameraman asking, "Is this the entrance for the spontaneous Labour walk-out?" When the hon. Member for Monklands, West got to Downing street, he had his photograph taken with the policeman on the door, just as Harold Wilson once did when he was a boy. When Harold Wilson grew up, he went into politics, and perhaps the hon. Gentleman should do the same.

Mr. Clarke *rose*——

Mr. Lang: No, I will not give way.

I understand that the hon. Gentleman has his troubles at present. After all, we have it on the authority of the *Daily Express* in an article of 14 June headed, "Labour enemy within". It says:

"Militant is on the march again. When Labour's shadow Scottish Secretary, Tom Clarke, turned up to canvas support during the Easterhouse council by-election, he was cheered to the rafters."

It turned out that it was thought that the right hon. Member was the comedian, Andy Cameron. When it turned out to be the comedian, Tom Clarke, the article said:

"Their tears turned to unprintable forms of welcome."

All the comings and goings of the hon. Gentleman remind me of the doggerel by Mr. Hughes Mearns:

"As I was going up the stair
I met a man who wasn't there.
He wasn't there again to-day.
I wish, I wish he'd stay away."

Judging by the hon. Gentleman's speech today, he was not there again today.

I am glad that we have this early opportunity for a debate, but it is a pity that the Opposition thought that it was only worth half a day of debate. *[Interruption.]* It takes half a day to read the motion, which is perhaps why Opposition Members have not bothered to read it.

The motion talks about inadequate consultation. The hon. Member for Monklands, West tried to make much of that. I remind the House that we have had no fewer than four consultation papers over the past two years on different aspects of local government reform. We have had nearly 9,000 replies, some of them immensely thorough and detailed, and we have looked at them carefully. In addition, there have been many newspaper and media articles and surveys.

If one doubted the need for single-tier local government and the advantages of it, and the confusion and difficulty that arises from the two-tier structure, one need look no further than the ICM poll in *The Scotsman* of 9 March. It revealed that one quarter of Scots did not know that cleansing was a district council responsibilty; one third of Scots did not know that housing was a district council responsibility; and no fewer than 40 per cent.—getting on for half the population—did not realise that education, the biggest single local authority service, is a regional authority.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. Perhaps he will now answer the question that he did not answer last week about how he arrived at the conclusion that Westhill should be incorporated into the city of Aberdeen. Since then, there has been outrage in the daily newspapers in Aberdeen—and from many Tory councillors—that he is gerrymandering. Westhill does not want to be part of Aberdeen. Is not that typical of the way in which he has totally ignored the views of ordinary people in every part of Scotland?

Mr. Lang: If the outrage is coming from Tory councillors, I am not quite sure how I can be accused of gerrymandering. The fact is that there are many proposals on aspects of local government reform for which there is support and opposition in different parts of Scotland. We shall have ample opportunity to debate all of those during the passage of the Bill through Parliament, and the hon. Gentleman will have a chance to make his point.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Will the Secretary of State care to comment on the remarks made by one of his Scottish Tory colleagues, Mr. Brian Meek, a former distinguished Tory group leader on Lothian regional council? Writing in *The Herald* on Monday of this week, he said:

"So let us go on to the gerrymandering argument. Did Mr. Lang and his Ministers seek to give their party the best possible chance under the new set-up? Of course they did. Why shouldn't they?"

Is that not a remarkable confession of guilt by one of the Secretary of State's own party colleagues?

Mr. Lang: It is not for me to decide whether the correspondent of *The Herald,* Mr. Meek, is confessing to guilt of anything. He is answerable for what he says in his columns. I am answerable for what I propose to the House.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) *rose*——

Mr. Lang: No, I must make a little more progress. As for the popularity of single-tier local government, the System 3 poll in *The Herald* showed support for single-tier up from 37 to 46 per cent., substantially the most popular option of those addressed.

The Labour party's contribution to the debate during the consultation period was almost zero. It is the party of scaremongers and has made no constructive contribution to the debate. We have had nothing but talk of hidden agendas. It was said that we would create a national police force, but our paper today demonstrates that to be wrong. Not only will there be no national police force, but there will be the same number of police forces as before.

The Labour party said that we would privatise water and sewerage—wrong again. We have established three public water authorities firmly in public ownership, maximising the efficiency gains to be had in the delivery of water and sewerage and benefiting from private sector funds for investment.

The Labour party said that there would be massive spending cuts—wrong again. Local authority spending will continue to rise. Private sector investment in water and sewerage will relieve pressure on our resources by billions of pounds.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): The Secretary of State says that this is a single-tier system. Will he explain to the ordinary person in the street how his water, sewerage, education, police and fire services will be run in a single-tier system?

Mr. Lang: If the hon. Gentleman listens to my speech and subsequently takes part in the debate on the Bill as it goes through Parliament, all those questions will be answered. At the moment, I am dealing with all the scares and alarms raised by the Labour party in the past few months. Labour Members should be hanging their heads in shame at the sort of things they have said to cause scare, alarm and anxiety among the Scottish people.

Labour Members talked of a massive increase in joint boards. We had it again from the hon. Member for Monklands, West today. The fact is that the only major services that will be subject to joint boards will be the police and fire services, as at present. They talked about huge centralisation. Again, we had it today from the hon. Gentleman. Again, that is not so. All the major services, with the exception of water and sewerage, which we had clearly flagged as being subject to unavoidable alternative

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arrangements, will stay with local authorities. The greater integration of services and the decentralisation from the regional level to the single-tier, all-purpose authorities will, in many cases, be the reverse of the centralisation that was proposed.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lang: No, I will not.

Then there was the scare of the great Treasury veto. In *The Herald* on 3 September the hon. Member for Monklands, West said:

"The Scottish Secretary, Ian Lang, will not be able to deliver the changes because of a Treasury veto."

That was around the time that he came forward with three successive forecasts of extra costs ranging from £400 million to £500 million to £600 million—wrong, wrong and wrong. There has been no Treasury veto and no extra costs. Rather, there will be savings of up to £1 billion over 15 years.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Does the Secretary of State intend to transfer all existing water services to the new water boards, or does he intend to write off part or all of that debt? What categories of person will he be nominating for those water boards?

Mr. Lang: Those are precisely the kind of points that it is perfectly proper to raise and which we shall consider when we draw up the proposals that we shall bring forward in due course, when the hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to debate them.

On costs and savings, I was interested to see that Dundee district council estimated that the new arrangements proposed in Tayside would save some £1·8 million per annum. Angus district council, the hon. Gentleman's own authority, estimated a saving of £2·3 million for the same arrangements. In Fife, Dunfermline district council estimated a saving of £8 million per annum from an all-purpose Fife authority, and North-East Fife district council estimated the same. Therefore, there is a cross-party consensus across those authorities on the kind of savings that will be available.

With regard to job losses—another scare raised by the Labour party—it turns out that rather than the substantial number of job losses of which Labour Members spoke, there will be a maximum of some 2,200. If one compares that with the burgeoning employment figures and bureaucracy in local government that I discovered only yesterday—last year alone, employment in local authorities rose by no less than 4,854, a rise of 2 per cent. at a time of recession and public expenditure restraint—one puts into clearer perspective the kind of saving of less than 1 per cent. that it has been suggested will be the result of job losses arising from reform.

Strathclyde's Labour leader surpasses even the hon. Member for Monklands, West when he talks about extra costs and extra job losses and plucks out of the air a figure of 20,000. He might have had some tiny shred of credibility had he argued for one or the other, but he cannot have it both ways. If reform can save 20,000 jobs, local authorities must be inefficient at present, in which case savings—not extra costs—are a certainty.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): If the Secretary of State is so sure that his proposals are right for Scotland, why does not he test them at the ballot box and give Scotland the opportunity of a multi-referendum that could include his proposals for local government? Is not it the case that he will not do that because the proposals would be binned by the people of Scotland?

Mr. Lang: The Government are answerable at the ballot box by elections to this Parliament for everything that we do.

The Opposition have been scaremongering about jobs, costs and other issues that they have raised to create distraction and misunderstanding about the proposals. It is disgraceful that Labour leaders seek only to instill alarm and despondency among local government staff whose interests they claim to protect. Now, as if the palpable failure of all their scares was not enough, the Opposition raise the spectre of gerrymandering. I reject that charge. Our proposals are largely based on the existing building blocks of regions and districts. Four existing regions survive largely intact and many more districts have had their powers enhanced greatly.

By abolishing the two-tier structure and by lifting the baleful socialist shadow which stretches across the central belt of Scotland and far beyond to the outlying areas, we shall enable those areas to break free and assert their own varied political allegiances, whether those may be Liberal, Conservative independent or nationalist. That is not gerrymandering—it is a healthy strengthening of local democracy in all its diversity.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): The Secretary of State's last phrase was about the "healthy strengthening of local democracy". He specifically mentioned many cases from the blueprint of the enhanced powers that are to be given to the districts. Does he recognise that neither description can be applied to the highlands, where all existing districts are to be abolished and one council is to cover the region?

The Secretary of State's statement last week laid great emphasis on the way in which he would require decentralisation within the new authorities. He did not emphasise paragraph 3.5 of page 5 of the White Paper, which concerns decentralisation schemes. The White Paper is, interestingly, coloured blue. It says:

"Guidance will be issued to local authorities on how they might develop these schemes but the initiative will rest with the new councils and schemes will not require the approval of the Secretary of State."

What possible satisfaction or guarantee can constituents across the highlands take from that worthless statement?

Mr. Lang: I have considerable sympathy for some of the circumstances in the highlands. I also note the hon. Gentleman's interest in imposing control over local government. I believe that local government should be allowed as much discretion as possible. I draw comfort from the words of the convener of Highland regional council. He has made it abundantly clear how strongly his local authority, like many others in Scotland, is committed to decentralisation.

I was addressing the baleful influence of socialism across the central belt of Scotland and beyond. I suggest that the Labour party is gerrymandering in reverse. It seeks to keep in place the distorted instruments of its unfair hegemony over central Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. So many hon. Gentleman are rising that no one can hear who wants to intervene.

Mr. Lang: The Opposition do not like the truth—they know how much it hurts.

Under the two-tier structure, Scotland has suffered double jeopardy under Labour. Labour has exercised control, if not through the districts then through the regions, in ways that have smothered local politics and local economies.

Since the Opposition's claims last week—this point was raised by the hon. Member for Monklands, West in his speech—I have checked on some figures. In the regional elections in 1990, the votes cast and seats gained revealed that it took 3,133 votes to elect a Labour councillor, 6,419 to elect a Conservative and even more to elect a Scottish Nationalist. That means that it is more than twice as hard for a Conservative councillor to be elected as it is for a Labour councillor. The picture in district councils is broadly the same, so what we are hearing is not the high tone of principle but the shrill cries of vested interests being dislodged.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way at long last. It was rather unfortunate that he cited personal attacks, probably leaked by the Scottish Office itself to cheap newspapers, in defence of his speech. He said that one should become "adapt" at responding to the facts—I think that he meant "adept". He gave figures on voting at local elections, but will be explain why the Conservative party contests so few seats? Why is it that where it contested seats there seems to be more representation but where it did not field candidates the local authorities seem much larger?

Mr. Lang: I said neither "adept" nor "adapt" when referring to the hon. Gentleman's quotation; I said inept —*[Laughter.]*—inapt, but I could as easily have said "inept". The hon. Gentleman proves it again.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can we make it clear that we all heard the Secretary of State say "inapt", which perfectly describes his speech?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If all sides are agreed on what was said, *Hansard* will have recorded it——

Dr. Reid: Even if there is no such word?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not need any help from the hon. Gentleman. If all sides are not agreed, we shall have to go by what *Hansard* says.

Mr. Lang: I welcome the Labour party's predictions about the Conservative success that it thinks will flow from the proposals, although the Labour party's attitude is strangely defeatist.

Let us consider what the claim of our likely political success under the new system implies: either it means that thousands of Conservative voters have, in effect, been disenfranchised by the present structure and will now be liberated or that our proposals will be popular and will win support in Scotland. I can face either conclusion with complete equanimity.

I will take no lectures on gerrymandering from any Member of Parliament for Monklands, an area in which one group of Labour councillors stands accused by another group of Labour councillors of showing bias in capital allocations. How does that administration explain the fact that for every £1 of capital resources allocated to Airdrie, £10 is allocated to Coatbridge? We will protect the interests of all residents of all parties in Monklands, and under our proposals Monklands district council will be abolished.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lang: No, I will not give way because I have already done so many times.

Where do the Opposition parties stand on our proposals for local government reform? The hon. Member for Monklands, West said on television last week that the Labour party was absolutely committed to reversing our reforms. Yet in the House the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) expressed his

"great satisfaction at the restoration of a single tier authority for . . . Aberdeen".

The hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) said that he had

"always advocated an all-purpose authority for the city of Dundee".

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) welcomed our recognition in the White Paper that

"Cambuslang and Rutherglen are separate communities in their own right."—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 478-82.]

The hon. Member for Monklands, West is committed to blocking, frustrating and sabotaging our proposals, yet only last Friday the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities had a productive and constructive meeting with my hon. Friend and myself at which it asked for a further meeting and agreed to co-operate through a working party on finance in studying costings.

Only today in *The Herald*, under the heading "Labour Councils Smooth Lang's Way", we learn that four councils in the Central region yesterday announced

"that they had signed a management agreement designed to smooth the way for the creation of single tier councils in their area."

The *Daily Record*, which is no friend of the Conservative party, states:

"A giant hole has been blasted in Labour's campaign against Scots local government changes."

Yet it is the chief executives who have made the agreement, although the *Daily Record* states—so I presume it is true —that they were backed by their political leaders, the council leaders, even though Central, Clackmannan and Falkirk are Labour controlled. That is less than 24 hours after Scottish Labour leaders pledged a non-co-operation pact involving Members of Parliament, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and COSLA. The fact is that the Opposition parties are all over the place, but those local authorities are being a great deal more responsible.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Perhaps the Secretary of State has not heard that the chief executives of the four authorities, including Stirling which is Conservative controlled, have today issued a statement saying:

"We reject any implication that our actions in issuing the joint protocol provide either support, co-operation, corroboration or agreement with the Government proposals."

Mr. Lang: That is absolutely fine, but the fact is that they are doing it and are being much more responsible

[Mr. Lang]

than the Opposition, because they care about the delivery of local services in local government. The Labour party's shiny new slogan is "Bring back Strathclyde". If that is how Labour want to fight the next general election, it will be very interesting.

As well as reversing our proposals, Labour has a second policy. It wants to establish a commission, "an independent Labour commission" no less—presumably one which, to quote Harold Wilson, would take minutes and waste years.

We must have some clarification about the commission. Is it the same commission that Labour set up to consider a separate Scottish Parliament, or is it a separate commission? If so, would it not be more sensible to call it a convention to avoid confusion, or is there still a convention in being?

Which will come first—the commission or the legislation to reinstate the two-tier structure? Or will we have both together so that while Labour is legislating to set up the two-tier structure, it will also be setting up a commission to investigate whether it is a good idea to abolish the two-tier structure and, if so, what to put in its place? Perhaps Labour will also tell us how long the commission will take—five, 10, 15 or 20 years. Does it care?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Would a serious discussion of these matters not at least pay tribute to the considerable, although not perfect, achievements of Strathclyde and Lothian? Will the Secretary of State take it from me, in view of my particular political history, that what he is doing is inflicting grave injury on the Union?

Mr. Lang: I can only say that I profoundly disagree with the hon. Member. I am absolutely convinced that our proposals for the reform of local government will greatly strengthen local government, local democracy and good government in Scotland, which can only enhance the Union.

The real significance of the Labour party's pledge to establish a commission is that, beneath all the fumbling and stumbling, it is committing itself to a single-tier local government structure for Scotland. Usually, Labour's U-turns take about four years; this time, it has taken about four days. If the Labour party is serious about local government reform—its proposal for a commission suggests that it is—all that distinguishes us is disagreement over some aspects of the map.

It is time for the Labour party to raise the tone of its involvement in the debate and get away from its narrow party self-interest. Above all, let us hear some concern from the Labour party about the quality of services on which so many local people depend. A single-tier structure will provide a significant opportunity to improve further the quality and delivery of services. The integration of services that are currently divided between two sources clearly promises improved efficiency and co-ordination as well as cost savings. Housing and social work, or trading standards and environmental health, are just two examples of how better co-ordination can lead to better services.

There are also opportunities through proposals for decentralised management to improve the quality of local government. New authorities developing schemes of decentralisation in decision making, consultation, administration and greater access are going with the grain of local authority thinking. Many are already working on such schemes. There is a widely recognised potential that more can be done. Why should one have to go to Dumfries for the replacement of a broken street light if one lives in Stranraer? Why should one have to go to one council for a council house and to another for a home help?

There are new opportunities in local government in Scotland, but a change of philosophy and a flexible approach—things which the Labour party seems unable to comprehend—are needed to enable local services to be delivered in place of the old, rigid empires of direct service providers. I want to see local authorities liberated. I want to see a new era in which local government becomes a watchword for quality and efficiency. I want local authorities to be a source of pride and loyalty in their communities. I want them to provide exciting career opportunities for those who work in them.

That is the future which Conservatives seek to build for local democracy in Scotland—strong, all-purpose authorities that truly reflect the diversity and the qualities of all the varied parts of Scotland. On that positive note, I urge the House to reject this destructive and negative motion and to support the amendment.

4.50 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I agree profoundly with my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that the Secretary of State's is just the kind of speech and that these are just the kind of proposals that bring the Government and the House into disrepute in Scotland. If there had been any genuine consultation about the way in which the review of the structure of Scottish local government should be conducted, the Government could not possibly have come up with proposals such as those that we are contemplating now.

For example, surely they could not have overlooked the obvious distinction between East Lothian and Berwickshire. East Lothian and Berwickshire have always been, and always will be, distinct entities. The only way round that would be to rewrite the history of Scotland and to bulldoze the Lammermuir hills into the sea. The distinctions between the three counties in the Lothians and the four counties of the Borders could not be clearer. That is the message that I have been getting from all sorts of people on both sides of the Lammermuirs ever since these bizarre proposals came to light a couple of weeks ago.

Indeed, the Secretary of State for Scotland has created certain difficulties and embarrassments for his Conservative colleagues on East Lothian district council. They attended a council meeting in Haddington this morning, where their line was that they had no choice but to accept the Secretary of State's proposals although they opposed the idea of dividing East Lothian. That is their problem.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): This is liberating local government.

Mr. Home Robertson: It is debilitating local government. It is an illustration of the crazy situation that the Secretary of State is bringing about.

Perhaps I should quote local papers in East Lothian and the Borders, which traditionally support the Conservative party. Last week's leader in the *East Lothian Courier* said:

"A wedding of the two counties would make nonsense of the word 'reorganisation' in virtually every sense, other than the narrow party political interest. . . . Mr. Lang will hear the beat of the tom-tom and realise that the worst criticisms of the Opposition parties are shared by the man in the street, as well as many of his supporters."

South of the Lammermuirs, the leader in the *Berwickshire News*, which is headed "We must remain in the Borders", said that the proposed amalgamation

"certainly smacks of political opportunism."

Indeed it does.

The Secretary of State is proposing two amazing new local councils to cover my constituency. Both of them would be beyond the political creativity of even the celebrated Governor Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts, the man who cobbled together a district shaped like a salamander and gave us the word "gerrymander". At least his salamander was in one piece, with its head attached to its shoulders. The proposed pseudo-Lothian creation is in two separate parts, detached by the Balerno corridor, with my constituents in Musselburgh and Prestonpans mysteriously tacked on to one of the bits. That mystery can, of course, be resolved by taking into account the fact that those parts of my constituency happen to have elected six Labour councillors, who do not fit into the scheme of things as seen by Professor Ross Harper. The remaining part of East Lothian, served by seven Tory councillors and four non-Tory councillors, is to be floated off to Tory-controlled Berwickshire. I wonder why.

What the Secretary of State for Scotland is proposing could be described as a sort of aggravated shotgun marriage. We can cast the Secretary of State in the role of an evil stepfather who could not care less about the welfare of the couple. All he wants them to do is to conceive a Tory council. This will produce some very curious bedfellows.

Dr. Reid: Bed persons.

Mr. Home Robertson: Yes, bed persons. I think of Cockenzie and Coldstream. What else do they have in common? Not much. Political expediency is not a sound basis for the reform of Scottish local government. Nothing like this has ever been done before, and if the House is, for once, to live up to its responsibilities, it must not be allowed to happen now.

Let us have a quick look at the proposed Berwickshire and East Lothian authority. I represented both those counties from 1978 until 1983, so I am very well aware of the fundamental differences in community interests and identity, economic structure and general outlook, between the two sides of the Lammermuir hills. They have always, but always—right back to mediaeval times—had separate local administrations. The new authority proposed by the Secretary of State would be an administrative farce and a geographical joke. The only all-weather link between the two counties is at Dunglass bridge, and the geographical centre of the proposed composite district would be 1,000 ft up the Lammermuirs, on a hill called the Hungry Snout.

Since the political snout of the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Hungry Snout seem to be the only common denominator between Berwickshire and East Lothian, I suggest that, henceforth, the Secretary of State's proposed area should be described as "Snoutshire". "Snoutshire" would be Scotland's smallest mainland authority. The Secretary of State proposes 25 council areas, with an average population of just over 200,000. This one would have just 76,000 people, despite the fact that it is a large, scattered and incompatibly divided area. So, with well under half the average population and a big area, the costs of running a full range of local services, including education, social work, special education and everything else, would be disproportionately high. Thus, there would be either a high council tax or worse services or—most likely—both.

Mr. Dalyell: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Home Robertson: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not give way. I want to be fair to everybody.

I should love to go into the byways about where the headquarters would be. What about the school whose catchment area will be divided by the proposed boundary? I shall not go into those matters at this stage, except to say that what is proposed would be a complete travesty. It is not surprising that all sorts of people in both counties are amazed and outraged. Yesterday I received from a former chairman of the East Lothian branch of the National Farmers Union for Scotland a letter demanding that East Lothian be kept together. In last week's press we read words of a committed local Conservative. Speaking on behalf of the 60-strong East Lothian business group, he said:

"It's crazy. We don't want to see a very good relationship end in this farcical shake-up."

The clear consensus in my constituency is that East Lothian must remain intact, as it always has been. There may or may not be a case for combining our district with a neighbouring district—it is very unlikely that that would turn out to be Berwickshire—but there is no serious or convincing support for the idea of dividing East Lothian in two. The existing district has a population of 86,000—bigger and more logical than the one proposed by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Dalyell: Will my hon. Friend give way—please?

Mr. Home Robertson: All right.

Mr. Dalyell: On the question of local services, the Secretary of State, within the hearing of us all, said that when street lights in Stranraer were broken, one had to go to Dumfries. I have telephoned Wigtown district council—the office of Mr. Alastair Geddes—and found that this is absolute nonsense, that these things are done by the client services department, Church street, Stranraer. What we have been given is lies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There may be a misunderstanding or misinformation, but the hon. Gentleman may not accuse another hon. Member of lying. Perhaps he would like to rephrase his comment.

Mr. Dalyell: In the case of Westland, I was turned out of the House five times for having said that Lady Thatcher was a liar. That is now generally accepted—by Sir Leon Brittan and everybody else. I do not want to divert my colleagues by being thrown out again, so I shall refer to this as being economical with the truth.

Mr. Home Robertson: My hon. Friend has illustrated the fact that the Secretary of State knows as little about his own constituency as he does about my part of Scotland or the rest of the country.

I am prepared to accept that there may be a case for single-tier authorities, but I am certain that I speak for virtually all my constituents when I say that I reject the plan to split East Lothian between two freakish, artificial authorities. That sort of carve-up and the Secretary of State's proposals for non-accountable, unelected quangos to run the water industry are a disgrace to the office of the Secretary of State for Scotland. He should take his proposals away, set up a proper independent review and start all over again.

4.59 pm

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): On Thursday when the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) replied to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State he said:

"we are being asked to consider a White Paper for which there is no consensus in Scotland, no support, no demand".

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The hon. Gentleman said that clearly, definitely and with all the authority that he was able to muster.

The House will understand my complete astonishment when I found, on the following morning, that the front page of *The Press and Journal* carried an equally unambiguous and bold heading, "Aberdeen achieves goal". Given that this is the close season, the paper was certainly not talking about football. Two contradictory statements were therefore issued about my right hon. Friend's proposals, one from the hon. Member for Monklands, West and one from *The Press and Journal*. With all respect to the hon. Member for Monklands West, I would suggest that *The Press and Journal* is closer than he is to the thinking of the people of Aberdeen. I am sure that he will correct me if I am wrong, but in his time as shadow Secretary of State for Scotland he has yet to visit Aberdeen.

The hon. Gentleman need not take the word of *The Press and Journal* for the support expressed for my right hon. Friend's proposals. It has been voiced by all parties and all quarters in Aberdeen. The day after the original proposals were put to the House, the political parties in Aberdeen were vying with each other to try to outdo each other in clamouring to express their support. Not surprisingly, the support started with the Conservative group leader on the district council, Councillor Mike Hastie, who said:

"I am delighted we are to become a single-tier authority again."

That was not any good for the Scottish National party, because its group leader, Brian Adam, pitched in and said:

"I am in favour of single-tier authorities".

The leader of the Liberal Democrat group, John Reynolds, said:

"We are in favour of Aberdeen being made a unitary authority".

The Labour party's group leader and leader of the council in the city of Aberdeen said:

"We welcome the return to being a single-tier, all-purpose authority, which we have been working towards since 1974".

Even the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) said—I concede that he said it rather grudgingly and through gritted teeth—

"There will certainly be great satisfaction at the restoration of a single-tier authority for the city of Aberdeen."

It was therefore breath-taking arrogance and a display of total contempt for the people of Aberdeen for the hon. Member for Monklands, West and his hon. Friends to ignore such statements of wholehearted support from all sides for my right hon. Friend's proposals.

Mr. Robert Hughes: My acceptance of an all-tier authority was not made through gritted teeth. What I did say through gritted teeth and which was widely echoed by people in Aberdeen, including Tom Paine, the leader of the Labour group, was that I regretted the way in which Westhill had been tacked on to the city of Aberdeen. More important than that, however, it is clear that the Secretary of State's intention is to provide a smokescreen with the boundaries; his real intention is to strip local councils of real control and the real delivery of services.

Mr. Robertson: If the hon. Gentleman can contain himself, I shall discuss Westhill later.

It was breath-taking arrogance on the part of the hon. Member for Monklands, West and his colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench to ignore all shades of political opinion in Aberdeen. Such was the arrogance of the hon. Gentleman when he said that there was

"no consensus . . . no support, no demand"—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 472.]

for the proposals of my right hon. Friend. If the hon. Gentleman can dismiss in a cavalier manner the views of elected councillors of all parties in Aberdeen and those of his hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North, over how many other councillors', hon. Members' and people's opinions has he ridden roughshod in his frantic attempt to fabricate a case to help him deny the popularity of my right hon. Friend's proposals?

If the hon. Member for Monklands, West were still in the Chamber I would ask him to come to the Dispatch Box to apologise to his Labour local government colleagues in Aberdeen and to the wider community in Aberdeen, political and non-political, for misrepresenting them and ignoring their long-held views in order to score a cheap political point. I am sorry that he is not in his place, but perhaps the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), when he replies to the debate, will apologise not only to the Labour party of Aberdeen, but to the wider Aberdonian community.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: I will not give way. Sit down.

Mr. McAllion: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) is not giving way.

Mr. Robertson: As the debate develops in the coming months, the hon. Member for Monklands, West will be forced to eat his words of last Thursday in respect not just of Aberdeen but of communities throughout Scotland.

Much has been said about the decision to include Westhill in the new Aberdeen city council, to which the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North has already referred.

Mr. Graham: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that an awful lot of Labour supporters may want local government to be reorganised, but only when we have in place a Scottish Parliament? Then the debate would be meaningful and services would not be delivered by quangos, which would be running the cities, in accordance with the Tory plan.

Mr. Robertson: When the Scottish people watch this debate and the arrayed masses opposite, is it any wonder that they consistently vote against a Scottish Assembly?

We have been told that the decision to include Westhill in the new Aberdeen city council is all part of some great Tory plot to increase Conservative representation. If only, if only. Those who talk about Westhill seem to forget that it has no elected Conservative councillors at either district or regional level. In the 1988 and 1992 district elections no Conservative candidates even stood for election. That seems to be a rather perverse form of gerrymandering.

Far from a political manoeuvre, my right hon. Friend has responded to the case made by the Labour-controlled City of Aberdeen district council, whose submission to the original consultation document was approved by the full council, after being rammed through by the ruling majority Labour group. On page 53, that submission says:

"A boundary could be drawn quite tight to the west of Elrick, which is part of Westhill, to avoid including Kirkton of Skene, thereafter utilising minor roads and farm access tracks to reconnect with the existing city boundary at the Leuchar Burn in the vicinity of Mid Anguston. This proposal would enable the lands at Cairnie, owned by the City Council, to be incorported within the City's administrative area."

Paragraph 7.20 of the submission states:

"It may be the case that inhabitants of those areas may not choose to regard themselves as part of the 'community' of Aberdeen, and that individual reasons for taking that view are of greater or lesser validity, but if the economic life of such places as Westhill is inextricably bound up with that of the City, and significant levels of use of the City's cultural and recreational facilities are enjoyed by residents of those places, there may well be a sound case for extending the City's boundaries."

I am sure that Labour councillors on Aberdeen district council will be glad to hear that the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland has said that they are narrow-minded.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that Westhill is in my constituency. The hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should take on board the fact that the people of Westhill have not expressed any wish to be included in the city of Aberdeen —quite the reverse. Gordon district has invested heavily in community facilities in Westhill, which the city of Aberdeen may not have done.

Mr. Robertson: The contention that I outlined in the submission from Aberdeen district council suggests that if my right hon. Friend is to be accused of gerrymandering it is Conservative Members who should be complaining.

Mr. Bruce: Answer the question.

Mr. Robertson: I am about to do so. The people of Westhill look to the city and their focus is the city, as I am sure the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) would agree.

The most recent figures produced by Grampian regional council show that, of a resident and economically active population of 3,200, some 2,200 work in Aberdeen. The inclusion of Westhill in the city boundaries is a welcome and long overdue move. It is vital to recognise the role that Westhill and its population play in the life of the city. It is also vital to recognise the corresponding demand placed on city services for which, until now, there has been no recompense.

The including of Westhill also addresses, just as importantly, what Opposition Members would call the democratic deficit, because the people of Westhill have had no say in the affairs of a city that plays such a major and strategic role in their day-to-day lives.

If the hon. Member for Monklands, West had bothered to address such issues as communities and the provision of services rather than playing to the gallery behind him last Thursday, he might have come to some different conclusions. In so doing, he would have spared himself the embarrassment of what followed.

Last Thursday, the House witnessed what the people of Scotland have had to witness for too long: the Secretary of State taking Scotland forward, updating her institutions and preparing her to meet head on the challenges and opportunities of the new century.

Mr. Robert Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We must all be responsible for what we say in the House, but is it in order for an hon. Member deliberately to misquote from a document and not give way to someone who knows something about the matter?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair. Hon. Members are entirely responsible for their speeches and how they quote from documents.

Mr. Robertson: Last Thursday, Labour Members responded, as they are doing now, with gesture politics, showing their inability to grasp the issues of the day or contribute to the debate in a meaningful way. The Scottish people were not persuaded by last Thursday's antics. Unfortunately for the hon. Member for Monklands, West, they laughed at his false rage and were left unmoved by his self-righteous indignation. They saw through the whole thing, as he and his colleagues will soon learn. They resented being used by the hon. Gentleman as a backdrop to allow him to start his re-election campaign to the shadow Cabinet. They resent being used by him in a frantic and grubby attempt to shore up the support of the Scotland United group of Members of Parliament and to win over a few of his, until now, unimpressed colleagues.

Last week had nothing to do with the hon. Member for Monklands, West trying to speak for Scotland or even for the Labour vote, but everything to do with sending a message to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) that he was, even after a year, still one of the boys.

Last week had nothing to do with plans to wipe Strathclyde, Lothian, Tayside or Monklands from Scotland's political map, but everything to do with trying to wipe the smirk from the face of the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish). That smirk appears on the hon. Gentleman's face every time his boss speaks at the Dispatch Box. The Labour party went too far. It treated the people of Scotland with consummate contempt as pawns in its sordid little struggle as it jockeys for positions of power.

Last Thursday my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke for Scotland, which is why the reforms are popular, will work and will last.

5.11 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The voters of Westhill will have noted the patronising terms in which the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) has referred to them. He implied that they should know better and should want to be part of Aberdeen. His argument could be applied to Eastwood's relationship to Glasgow, or even to Portlethen's Stonehaven's or Banchory's relationship with Aberdeen. I doubt whether his logic will go down well in the constituency of the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch).

We also heard the Secretary of State say that, if someone wants a light bulb changed in Stranraer, he must go to Dumfries. As the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said, that is palpably untrue. Under the Secretary of State's proposals, that might happen, because my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) showed that, where existing regions are to remain, it will be up to the regions whether to devolve responsibility. Clearly, the House was seriously misled simply for the sake of cheap jibes and good one-liners, which did not befit the office of Secretary of State.

Given the blatant partisan nature of the proposals, I am not surprised that there has been so much furore about the boundaries. Everyone wants to know what criteria the Government applied when drawing up those boundaries. What is so special about Eastwood or East Renfrewshire that, with a population of 88,000, they can be single-tier authorities, whereas Inverclyde next door, with a district population of 93,500, cannot?

What is so special about Highland, and Dumfries and Galloway, which are both bigger in size and population than Borders, that they should remain intact, while Borders must be butchered to create a council in Berwick and East Lothian to suit the Conservative party's wishes? People might legitimately want a straight answer to those questions, but may not think that they will ever get one.

More important, what is local government all about? We play into the Government's hands if we spend all our time in the next 18 months debating the Balerno corridor or the Eastwood enclave. In his introduction to last autumn's consultation paper, the Secretary of State said:

"The exercise is, after all, not only about redrawing maps. It is ultimately about organising local government to enable it to fulfil its potential as a legitimate and powerful part of our democracy."

I quote those words because the point is succinctly made, not because I attach significance to the fact that it was made by the Secretary of State. It is the kind of phrase that one expects Secretaries of State to put in such a document. One can envisage the Secretary of State writing it, the pen oozing with sincerity, but one knows full well that, when Tory Ministers talk about power and local democracy, they are as genuinely concerned about them as the big bad wolf was when he expressed concern about Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother. They have no concept of what local democracy is about, because 14 years of Conservative government have seen more than 150 measures designed to take powers from local democracy.

When the Secretary of State says that he wants to liberate local democracy, he should own up to the fact that the Government have emasculated local democracy and that the measure is a smokescreen to continue that course.

Even when we find in the document a germ of hope that might mean more power being given to local government, we must wait and see what happens. We are told that there will be statutory confirmation of a local authority's right to become involved in industrial development activities, yet the same paragraph tells us that the Secretary of State will reserve to himself power

"to make regulations imposing conditions or restriction on the way in which local authorities carry out this function."

Even when the Secretary of State is giving with one hand, he is taking away with the other.

If this had been a genuine exercise in promoting local democracy, a general competence power would have been given to local authorities, and the Government would have ensured that councils were elected by a fair voting system.

I was delighted to hear the Secretary of State accept that the present system was rubbish, and that it took twice as many Conservative votes to elect a Conservative councillor as it did to elect a Labour councillor. Proportional representation is the fair way to deal with that, not gerrymandering councils. We want a system in which the electorate will judge local authorities' performance, and financial responsibility is enforced through the ballot box, not through ministerial fiat. We want not so much the glossy pages of the citizens charter as a statute setting down minimum standards that are enforceable by the citizen in law courts.

The Government stand most condemned when we consider their case for reform and see what they are saying compared to what they are doing. Today the Secretary of State quoted opinion polls, saying that there was an overwhelming popular demand for unitary authorities.

Let us be fair: having regard to popular opinion in Scotland is a novel approach for the Government. We are not told why public opinion on this issue must be heeded and why popular opinion expressed at the ballot box about the need for a Scottish Parliament is ignored. I suspect that many of the people who responded to the first consultation document in 1991, saying that they wanted a single-tier authority, understood that it would be a single-tier authority with a Scottish Parliament. That is the proper context in which to consider single-tier authorities.

The 1991 consultation document said that the people rejected the present system because

"The risk of confusion, which was always inherent in a two tier structure, is therefore increasingly emerging as a serious weakness."

It also spoke of the need to end the "clouding of accountability" and

"the potential for duplication, waste, delay and friction."

But surely the largest contribution to the clouding of accountability has come from the Government's interference in local government. How can a local authority be held to account when so many of the criticisms can be met with the response that inefficiency, nonsense or unpopularity has been imposed by central Government?

I doubt whether the friction between region and district has ever been as great as the friction that Tory Governments have generated between central Government and local government. Which local authority —islands, district or region—has managed to compare with central Government in producing the level of wasteful expenditure associated with the poll tax?

The Secretary of State has found an easy way to ensure that there will be no more clouding of accountability in the case of water: he will end accountability. Yet another quango will spring into life, which will make it easier to transfer the water industry into the private sector when the Treasury demands that that should be done.

The Secretary of State's lack of an answer to a question posed by the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) was illuminating. Will there be another consultation paper to tell us what the three areas are, how the boards will be constituted, what the financial arrangements will be, and whether debts will be written off? In relation to water and sewerage services, the White Paper leaves more questions unanswered than even the original consultation document.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Quayle-Munro will prepare the report.

Mr. Wallace: Quayle-Munro will no doubt be paid a substantial amount to provide another report, which is meaningless.

When the Government were preparing their consultation document, they told us that, although regional councils all decentralise decision-making to some extent, inevitably it is difficult for individuals to find their way around those unavoidably large organisations.

In an open letter to the Secretary of State, Councillor Ross Finnie, the leader of the Liberal Democrat group on Inverclyde district council, has underlined how difficult it has been for Inverclyde residents in the Paisley-based Renfrew sub-region of Strathclyde. However, ignoring local opinion in Inverclyde and community links, the Secretary of State proposes that Inverclyde should form part of the existing unitary sub-region of Strathclyde. Therefore, Inverclyde will experience the problems which he has identified, and which he said in the White Paper would be eliminated.

Citizens in Caithness and in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) will be reassured that, since the publication of the consultation paper last year, when the difficulties were highlighted, Ministers have been persuaded that decentralised decision-making in a large region, if it happens, will no longer pose any problems for the individuals involved.

I am sure that people in Skye, Caithness and Stranraer will conveniently forget, as Ministers will want them to, that the document also stated:

"The individual may consider that the presence of a local office or existence of an area committee will not always be an effective substitute for being able to attend a full council or council committee meeting. In general, therefore, the links with the community seem likely to be closer, and the accountability of elected members more obvious and direct, in an authority which is relatively small."

The one silver lining in the matter is that we might save the north of Scotland railway lines, because councillors and members of the public will have to travel the hundred miles by train to attend the local council meetings.

I shall continue to illustrate the mismatch between promises and outcome. The Secretary of State has done whatever he wants to be done, particularly if it helps to promote the Conservative cause. We have heard the figures quoted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel).

An analysis of the responses to the consultation document showed that, of 108 responses from south-east Scotland, 105 wanted the continuation of the Borders region or two units which would maintain the present integrity of the Borders region. Three were against: the Conservative group of Lothian region, the Conservative group of Berwickshire district council and one Conservative councillor.

The prospectus published last year stated:

"We will consider carefully all the comments we receive before making decisions about the shape, size and number of the new authorities."

The prospectus failed to mention the existence of the golden share, which is usually in the hands of the chairman of the local Conservative association.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Govan): We are debating an extremely important issue. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government are making no attempt to justify the boundaries that they are proposing, safe in the knowledge that they have a parliamentary majority behind them? Does he agree that the Government intend to drive through these politically partisan proposals, which have no support in Scotland, except among their own ranks? Does he agree that that process will threaten the Union in the way described by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)?

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman puts his finger on the spot. The Government's proposals go beyond the conventions of an unwritten constitution. I would rather have a written constitution, but we have an unwritten constitution which is bound by conventions. Those conventions have been broken.

It may be argued that constitutional changes have taken place in the past—the Chamber has been the scene of many battles—but history will show that those battles were usually fought over the progress of people's democracy, not shabby little pieces of political manipulation such as those with which the House has been presented today.

Perhaps hope for us all lies in the words of the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), who told the Select Committee on Defence earlier this week that, in two or three years, there might well be a different Government. It would be the ultimate irony if those who seek to defeat democracy are, in turn, defeated by democracy.

5.24 pm

Mr. George Kynoch (Kincardine and Deeside): I shall try not to detain the House longer than necessary, as I am aware that many Opposition Members want to speak.

The motion refers to "unnecessary changes", and talks of the lack of general support for the introduction of single-tier authorities. In my district of Scotland, there is a strong wish to have single-tier local authorities, and for a good reason. People want a single-tier local authority which is as near the people as possible and provides services at the best possible cost.

That is not to say that local authorities which have run services to date have not been doing a good job, but circumstances have changed and it is time to evolve. For too long, constituents have been at sea as to whether functions are carried out by regional or district councils. When they encounter a problem, it is passed from councillor to councillor or from department to department —it is not known who is responsible for the service involved.

In the short time that I have been a Member of Parliament, I have realised that, when I hold surgeries and constituents visit me, many of the problems they bring should be addressed to their local councillors. The reason my constituents come to me is because they do not know to whom they should turn, and they cannot be bothered to waste time as the buck is passed from person to person.

[Mr. George Kynoch]

They would rather achieve some action by going straight to the right place initially. Surely that is not what local government is about. Local councils should be accountable, local and flexible, and they should have clear responsibilities.

I represent a largely rural constituency. The problems and requirements of rural constituencies and districts are different from those which obtain in cities. One obvious sector of concern in my rural district is primary school education. In cities, it is possible to rationalise schools and ensure that funds are used in the best way in a new primary school which provides education for as many children as possible. Children may have to travel a distance which seems relatively far in city terms, but which is, in rural terms, a small distance. In rural constituencies, the primary school is often the hub of a local community—educating smaller numbers of children and providing the necessary education to the children of that district. If there is rationalisation, those children will have to travel greater distances.

Constituents in rural districts sometimes wonder whether a regional education authority which includes a city places too much emphasis on the easy option of providing primary schools in cities. It is all too easy to neglect primary schools in rural areas. I have seen that happen in my constituency, where numerous smaller schools suffer from lack of attention, because too much attention is paid to city education.

It would be useful to move towards city single-tier local authorities that are separate from rural districts, so that the problems of the rural outlying districts could be addressed by council members who understand the rural problems and do not have to battle with problems related to the city.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Does the hon. Gentleman believe that city suburbs should be included in cities, as the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) argued? If he does believe in that principle, why should it not be extended to Glasgow as well as Aberdeen?

Mr. Kynoch: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I do not want to argue about Glasgow. I would rather discuss the district of Scotland that I know much better —my constituency.

There is always a grey area about whether a suburb is part of the city or rural, but a line must be drawn. I appreciate the difficulties that my right hon. Friend must have encountered in drawing some of those lines.

Single-tier authorities will be welcomed by people in cities and in rural areas in which size is important. Rural authorities should be small enough to be local and large enough to be economically viable. We could debate for many hours what is viable and what is not, but, whatever the size of the unit, it must deliver services locally, effectively, efficiently and competitively.

As with any business, the larger the unit, the easier it is to spread overheads and reduce overall cost. That seems to be a better way than subcontracting to provide services, but the obvious risk in doing it that way is that the local touch and the flexibility to provide services with local needs at heart may be lost.

The proposed Aberdeenshire will have an area of about 2,300 square miles and a population of almost 200,000 spread over a diverse geographical area. The White Paper refers to decentralised management and administration about which my right hon. Friend spoke. How will that ensure that decisions are taken at the most local level?

My right hon. Friend spoke commendably about people not having to make long journeys to visit council headquarters. I welcome that, because it embraces the idea of bringing local government to the people. How could that objective be achieved in single-tier local authorities in large rural areas without going halfway to a two-tier system?

When the detail of the Bill is debated, I shall listen carefully to the Secretary of State's explanations. The larger areas must not become dinosaurian, to use the term employed earlier in the week by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), so that the head does not know what the tail is doing. It is a long way from north to south in the proposed Aberdeenshire.

As the Secretary of State knows, I am concerned about the splitting of a local government area that has not been split for at least 170 years. In the 1970s, there was a strong fight in Kincardineshire to keep the area intact so that the Mearns was not separated from Kincardineshire. During the consultation period, nobody from that area who spoke to me favoured being separated from the north and attached to the south.

One of my constituents who lives in Stonehaven wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. She sent me a covering letter and a copy of the letter sent to my right hon. Friend. The covering letter states:

"I am afraid my letter may have been dictated more by my heart than my head. I am, however, Kincardine born, bred and educated. My birthplace was Laurencekirk and my maternal roots are in what is termed the Mearns. I cannot let that area come under the jurisdiction of another authority, where there would be no real interest in caring for what I naturally feel is my heritage.

Since the beginning of local government last century, the county of Kincardine has been responsible for the area stretching from the Dee to the North Esk and over the Slug up Deeside to Kincardine O'Neil. As I have said to Mr. Lang, Kincardine is a family area. It must not be split."

In determining the proposed local authorities my right hon. Friend wants to keep together people who are naturally together. It is fortunate that the White Paper has been presented before the summer recess, because during that time we can ascertain what the people of that area really want. I shall return to the split in Committee.

While I warmly welcome the main thrust of single-tier local authorities, I neither applaud nor condemn the detailed proposal for my area. I seek from my right hon. Friend the reassurances that I have outlined, and I have flagged some areas of concern.

I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's proposals on water. The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) said that water was a gift of God. He failed to tell us that to get it from God to the human body entails a good deal of capital expenditure on equipment for treating it. When the human body has finished with it and before it passes to the sea, it has to undergo further treatment.

It has been said that capital of about £5 billion will be required over the next 10 to 15 years for Scottish water. My right hon. Friend's proposal will not affect other services, and he has recognised the strong opinion from, I am sure, all constituencies that the people of Scotland do not at this time welcome the prospect of full-blown

privatisation. However, those who face facts and appreciate the need to raise funds recognise that private capital must be raised if other services such as health, education and roads are not to suffer.

The proposal for three public boards is sensible. The Government have grasped the local government nettle, and I look forward to the autumn, when we can debate the fine details of the Bill.

5.37 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): The White Paper and the Secretary of State's speech were sad efforts —an exercise in brute force and ignorance, with the stress on ignorance. That was made obvious by an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). The Secretary of State's theme was taken up by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), who has now left the Chamber. *[Interruption.]* He has moved from where he was sitting. The debate was not improved by the speech by the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch).

I have no fear of the Government succeeding in whatever they set out to do in Scotland. The aim of their hidden agenda is to make the Scottish people lose faith in local democracy. The Government tried to do that through manipulation in England and Wales and they are about to try it in Scotland. Local government elections in Scotland have always had a much higher turnout than those in any other part of the United Kingdom. That is because people take an interest and have faith in local democracy and in the publicly spirited people who seek to represent them.

Who will stop the Government carrying out their purpose? It will be the people of Scotland who will continue to vote in elections because their service aspirations have not been dimmed by past happenings. The Government will also be stopped by local authorities staff in Scotland whose high standards of professionalism and dedication in delivering services have been untouched by Government manipulation and attacks. That will continue to be the case regardless of the attempts to stymie their aspirations by any Government, even Labour Governments in the past, for which we should be rightly ashamed. The individuals who are public spirited enough to stand for local government seek to represent their communities in a public spirited way and that will continue regardless of the Government's manipulations.

I have every confidence that the non-Conservative council will fight on to optimise the services, but not necessarily to maximise them and try to make them as responsive as possible, as it has in the past.

Some of the things that the Secretary of State said are not just a shame and a distortion of democracy, but undermine the very fabric of the Scottish people. They are a genuine threat to the Union, if the Secretary of State thinks that he is defending it.

Local government is not and should never be a matter of geography or based on historic settlements. Some people jump up and down about such issues, but we should not look at them in that way. We need to consider communities as they can generate energy, create self-help initiatives and aspirations and reach out in an articulate way for the services that local authorities should provide.

Whatever local government structure applies under the future Scottish Parliament, and it is consistent that there should be a Scottish Parliament before we have single-tier or any other new authority, it must be judged against objective criteria.

The Labour party is accused of not looking at the future, but I chaired the local government committee of the Labour party in Scotland and we tried to look for those criteria. We did not look at geography but at criteria that would produce a positive result. It is quite clear that we studied the issues more deeply and intelligently than the civil servants have as we produced certain criteria for a Scottish Parliament and beyond.

The criteria are, first, that the local authorities can be properly resourced and achieve the necessary benefits of scale—not necessarily the largest scale but the optimum one. Secondly, they should be able to guarantee a standard and level of service capable of creating an acceptable quality of life and improving the quality of life for those within the council area. Thirdly, local authorities should be accountable and, more importantly, responsive to the needs of local communities and individuals within the council area. The fourth criterion—on which the Government trip up most often—is that those priorities should be applied consistently throughout Scotland. That has not been done in the Government's exercise.

The proposals resulting from the Government's supposed consultation do not reflect any of those criteria. The Government simply fail to do the right thing. The Secretary of State's rubbishing of an objective commission shows how unbelievably patronising to the Scottish people and how parochial and influenced by his party's interests rather than those of the Scottish people he has become. That is a sad fall for someone who I was told was an intelligent person with Scotland's future at heart.

None of the proposals is based on consultation. They are totally inconsistent with the responses to the consultation exercise. Consultation is devalued by asking people what they want and then ignoring what they say.

I want to focus on the bizarre manipulations and the contortions which resulted in what the Government hoped would be Tory enclaves. The image I had was Dickensian. I had Mr. Bumble the beadle, the hon. Member for Eastwood, and Mr. Scrooge, the hon. Member for Stirling, getting together to draw up something more like Dickensian local government than anything that could take us into the future.

As a former leader of Stirling district council for 10 years, I make no apology for focusing on the potential damage that the proposals could do to the quality of life and the services available to people in that district and to future generations there. Stirling district had high-quality services, so we had to have a high tax level to provide district council services, but I suspect that the other mini-councils have the same problem: they do not have the economic base to give them an adequate income to provide the services that are provided at the moment by Central regional council.

I shall not be tempted to draw boundary or geographical conclusions, but after 13 years in local government in Central region and three years outside, I can say that Central regional council delivers a higher level of service in education, social work, roads and economic development, not just absolutely but in terms of pound-for-pound spending and value for money than any predecessor authority and any alternative that has been suggested to date.

[Mr. Michael Connarty]

The spectre of the Tory future which haunts the proposals for new Torylands, as I shall call them, has a particular form. In education, I suggest that there will be either higher local taxes—it is quite clear that the Conservative philosophy will not allow that—or massive service reductions with poorer staff training in education and fewer support staff. If a child in Stirling, Dunblane or Balfron needs educational psychology, he is less likely to get it under the proposed boundaries. Speech therapy and other support services for education such as libraries cannot be provided by small councils such as Stirling without raising the tax base, and that is not likely to be on the cards.

The new Stirling philosophy is likely to offer an alternative. I am told that Stirling district council put a 53-page submission to the Secretary of State. We have seen some of the things that are already happening in Stirling. There will be proposals on opt out. Schools in Dunblane, Balfron, St. Modans and Stirling will be told that, if they opt out of the local authority, they will get a one-off bribe, as they did in England and Wales. They cannot come back to local authorities once they have opted out, so if services start to break down they will be on their own.

The Tory alternative is already known. Community care policies in Stirling and Forth valley have been signalled by the unholy alliance between the ex-Tory councillor, Mrs. Iris Isbister, who chairs Forth Valley health board, and the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth). She thinks that the private sector can provide all the community care necessary for the elderly in my constituency and the others within the Forth valley. They will push those most in need out of the local authorities and force them into the profit-motivated private sector where services will be lower and shoddier and in many cases the cheap, shoddy private sector will be the only option.

I left Stirling in 1990 and moved to my new constituency. Recently, I went back to attend a function in that area and visited some friends in the estate where I used to live. The grass was a foot high. Stirling used to be a shining example of a tourist town. It now has a shoddy, shambolic council. It was so bad that the Conservative councillors were calling for special meetings to force the contractors to cut the grass to the standard that the people expected. There have been cuts in services; recently the solicitor service went out to the private sector with the sacking of solicitors who had given the council loyal service. That spectre haunts people in the Torylands.

I am tempted to encourage the Government in this way as that would be the end of the Conservatives in Scotland. In Stirling they will get rid of the hon. Member for Stirling and they will get rid of the council. The present Conservative Member for Stirling will have a weaker base when people realise that they not only have to put up with him down here but with his philosophies in local services.

I am proud of the fact that, in a constructed constituency, where they took out three mining villages that were recommended by the commission and put in Dunblane and Bridge of Allan, and where there should have been a massive Tory majority, the hon. Gentleman's majority went down to 548 when I challenged him in 1987 and he is hanging on by 700 at the moment. This proposal makes sure that another party will take that seat.

I do not want to be so partisan. I want to recommend to the Government that they do the honest thing, not because I do not want rid of them in Scotland, but because I want the Scottish people to have decent local government. I ask them to turn back, change their minds and bring in a structure that is responsive to people's needs and not about trying to save one or two silly Tory councils.

5.49 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): The Opposition motion would be a joke if it were not in the names of members of the Labour Front Bench. It makes charges of "inadequate consultation", but the fact that 3,500 people were consulted disproves that accusation. The motion criticises also the shortness of time allowed, but there were four months of consultation and five months of consideration—and no doubt there will be 12 months of further debate in this Chamber and in Committee. How much time is needed?

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gallie: It is typical of Labour Members to seek more time, because it is easier to talk. They are not used to making decisions. After 14 years, they do not need to worry about making decisions.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman did not hear me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's voice was very clear. I am sure that the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) heard the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) earlier and that he does not intend to give way.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) said that he would approve single-tier government after the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. Labour has talked about establishing a Scottish Parliament ever since it was last in government in the 1970s. It failed to provide one then and it will still be talking about one well into the next century. A Scottish Parliament is not on the agenda, but single-tier government is—and I approve of that.

I have consistently welcomed single-tier government and that approach was reflected in my comments during the run-up to the last general election. I stated that my aim was the abolition of Strathclyde regional council. At a meeting of Ayrshire chamber of commerce, my political opponents stressed that that was their aim, too. Scottish National, Liberal and Labour opponents wanted to get rid of Strathclyde regional council.

Dr. Reid: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I know that he is a fair-minded man. He mentioned his opposition to Strathclyde regional council. I will not ask him the hard question, which is what it did wrong. As the Secretary of State made disparaging remarks earlier about Strathclyde regional council, I will ask the hon. Gentleman the easy question. Will he name any Secretary of State for Scotland since 1945, Labour or Tory, who had the broad support, democratic legitimacy and backing of more people than any leader of Strathclyde council—from Dick Stewart and Charlie Gray to Bob Goud today? Even though the hon. Gentleman may not

agree with them, they had and have more democratic backing than any Secretary of State of any party. Will the hon. Gentleman answer without the advice of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), who is briefing him?

Mr. Gallie: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind initial comment. I accept that there has been strong backing for the conveners of Strathclyde regional council, but the boundaries do not reflect in any way local wishes or aspirations of people outside central Glasgow. That is the opinion also of many constituents to whom I have spoken recently.

Mr. Foulkes: I am one of the hon Gentleman's constituents.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Did my hon. Friend vote for him?

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend's question requires no reply.

The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) spoke of the legitimacy and popularity of Strathclyde regional council. Earlier, he implied that the Government had paid no attention to the results of consultations. Will he confirm that the vast majority of people consulted in Ayrshire—including the chamber of commerce and Enterprise Ayrshire—were in favour of an all-Ayrshire authority? Few people, and only Tories, were in favour of Kyle and Carrick and no one supported an authority comprising Cumnock and Doon Valley, Cunninghame, and Kilmarnock and Loudoun. That is an invention of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Gallie: I will respond to that point later.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Opposition Members should show a little patience. I will respond.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State listened to the wishes of the hon. Members for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe), for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) and for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) in trying to bring their areas together. He listened also to voices in my constituency and to me and I applaud that. It is democracy in action.

Nevertheless, we should seek to establish local authorities that recognise local needs and aspirations, whose elected councillors can be seen to be accountable to the electorate and whose administration will be judged on the performance of those councils. We do not want local authorities established on the basis of a state-given right to operate according to ideology and habit. In the central belt of Scotland, that is precisely the situation now.

We heard much from Opposition Members today about democracy and involvement. In the majority of cases across central Scotland, councillors are selected not by the choice of voters but by small cabals within the Labour party—by constituency organisations with, no doubt, considerable trade union input. I am sure that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) is well aware of that.

It is not just council candidates who are selected by such cabals, because they select also committee conveners——

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): The hon. Gentleman suggests that local authority candidates are selected by cabals. Perhaps he will explain how the proposals will change that. Also, what kind of cabal selected the hon. Gentleman as a parliamentary candidate?

Mr. Gallie: The party organisation in constituencies such as that which I serve presents a candidate to the electorate, but ultimately the electorate do not vote according to ideology and habit but on the case that is presented to them. They are offered alternatives. My right hon. Friend's proposals address that important option.

Labour wants to protect party interests. It is not interested in democracy but in the power of the party—a truly socialist tradition. The local government debate has for a long time concentrated on that aspect and it is time for change. That change is reflected by my right hon. Friend's proposals, which recognise that local interests must at all times be to the fore.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley referred to the representations made by Ayrshire. I remind him of his own previous comments—particularly those about Enterprise Ayrshire, which he accused of concentrating mainly on Irvine and Kilmarnock interests. If we opted for an all-Ayrshire authority, it would be dominated by Irvine, Kilmarnock and—probably—Cumnock influences. That would not be good for my constituents in Kyle and Carrick.

Most of those consulted about the proposals have stressed the need to consider the local aspects. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has taken that on board in Ayrshire's case. Let me, however, raise three specific points with him. First, I received a letter today from a group purporting to represent the interests of children's education in Glasgow. That group fears that nursery education will cease to exist following the demise of Strathclyde regional council. In Kyle and Carrick, one nursery school must serve 80 per cent. of my constituents. If that represents good service from Strathclyde region, I look forward to the day when we in Kyle and Carrick can take on our own responsibilities.

I have some sympathy for my former colleagues in Cunninghame, North. The north coast of Cunninghame was always alienated from Strathclyde and, to some extent, from Irvine. I know that my right hon. Friend intends to meet local councillors in the not-too-distant future; I hope that he will accommodate them, but I fear that, if he does, Opposition Members will simply accuse him of gerrymandering.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I am puzzled by the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Is he seriously suggesting that, when the Secretary of State meets Tories from the north of my constituency, he will reach an accommodation that will satisfy their specific wishes without taking account of the wider concerns of all north Ayrshire—and, indeed, of all those who are to be lumped in with the crazy authority of that name, which will stretch all the way to Auchinleck and other areas? Will the hon. Gentleman adopt a less parochial outlook and recommend an all-Ayrshire solution, based either on a single council or the existing districts? He cannot make sensible pleas for Tories in the north of my constituency without presenting a more general format. In saying that, I speak for people across the political board in my constituency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Such long interventions prevent other Opposition Members from speaking.

Mr. Gallie: I speak for my constituents and their right to a voice in local government. They need to be able to influence their councillors and to take account of their actions. It is up to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) to decide how best to represent the interests of his constituents. I understand that he has argued for an all-Ayrshire authority in the past, but perhaps I am wrong: perhaps he has argued for the retention of Strathclyde region. I leave him to look after his own interests, but I am aware of anxieties in a part of his constituency with which I have a great affiliation.

My third point involves community councils. *[Interruption.]* I have given way on a number of occasions, allowing my own time to be used by others in lengthy interventions. Hon. Members will just have to listen to the rest of my speech.

The Government are considering extending the involvement of community councils in planning and licensing. That is a great step forward for local democracy. Members of community councils do a grand job in looking after local interests and their voices should be heard. The need for funds for such councils should also be considered.

I believe that the Secretary of State's proposal for three public authorities to deal with water is well worth implementing. It will fulfil all our requirements, providing high quality, constant volume and lower costs in the long term. In recent years, Strathclyde region has ignored Ayrshire's sewerage needs time and again; I trust that, following the establishment of the new public authorities, those needs will be given appropriate priority and Ayrshire will have a proper sewerage system.

Many of my constituents have complained about the link between water charges and the new council tax banding valuations. I hope that, with the new structure, different charging arrangements will be introduced.

6.5 pm

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): I promised my hon. Friends to speak for no longer than five mintues. The fact that I have had to listen to 20 minutes of drivel from the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) reflects the current imbalance in the House: 11 Conservative Members can take up all the time, while 62 Opposition Members must scramble for the few minutes that remain.

The Government's proposals do not surprise me. After all, at the last election they asked the Scottish people to vote for them if they supported the status quo. Only 25 per cent. of Scottish voters did so; 75 per cent. said, "No—we do not support the status quo."

The Government chose to ignore that 75 per cent., just as they ignore everything else that matters. They do so at their peril: they are now endangering democracy in Scotland. Their manifesto contained no proposals for water privatisation, but it was the first thing they mentioned when they returned to power. The Scottish people will not be fooled by the way in which privatisation is being introduced through the back door.

I defend Strathclyde regional council. It irked the Government because it got it right. The Government should ask people in the former Tory counties—in the old Renfrewshire and Argyllshire areas—about the condition of their roads before Strathclyde region was invented. They should go up to the islands, and ask people in Colonsay what social service provision was like when Argyll controlled the council. Strathclyde has been efficient and successful; it has given services to areas that never had them before. The Government have opposed the council because it was democratically elected.

My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) asked about the power of the Secretary of State. A Tory Secretary of State for Scotland was last elected with a majority in 1955. Strathclyde convenors have all been elected with vast majorities, as have those of Renfrew district council.

Apparently, Renfrew district council is not big enough to be the sole authority, although the area contains 206,000 people. Down the road, Greenock—in the Inverclyde district—contains 93,000, but apparently it is not big enough either. A new council representing 88,000 people is now being proposed for Eastwood: apparently Eastwood is big enough. The other council represents a population of 256,000, including—funnily enough—four elected Labour Members of Parliament. The proposed Eastwood council has one Tory Member of Parliament. What has the Secretary of State for Scotland done to justify that? He has taken poor old Barrhead, which has never voted for the Tories, and lumped it into Tory Eastwood.

The Secretary of State has also taken the only Tory ward—Ralston—from my constituency and put it into Eastwood. He will have a job on his hands when he tries to justify to the people of Ralston why their children will no longer be able to go to Paisley grammar school.

When the grammar school issue last raised its ugly head the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), was there, right out in front, telling people that he had the right to speak because children from his constituency went to Paisley grammar school. But it will be in a different council authority. Paisley grammar school will have to take children from Greenock, Wemyss Bay, Gourock and Erskine before it is allowed to take children from Ralston.

If that is not the case, can the Under-Secretary tell us what new financial arrangements will be made to allow council boundaries to be crossed so that children from Ralston can go to Paisley grammar school? The people of Paisley, Greenock and the surrounding areas pay for these services. Is the Under-Secretary telling us that they will have to pay for children from Eastwood to go to the grammar school, while children from Ralston, who live not half a mile away from Paisley grammar school, have to go to school in Barrhead? There is no direct bus link from Barrhead to Ralston.

According to the Secretary of State's proposals, the people of Ralston will have to look to Eastwood for all their services. If a street light is broken, they will have to go six miles to Eastwood and ask the council to fix it. But there is no direct bus service from Ralston to Eastwood.

There is no geographical or historic reasons for setting up the Renfrewshire councils. Half the areas that have been taken in were part of the old Renfrewshire county council, but so was Renfrew. Renfrew, though, votes Labour, so it is not going into the new Eastwood council. It is staying with the other council. The only reason for all this is political gerrymandering—setting up a Tory safe haven in Eastwood to protect the hon. Member for Eastwood.

6.12 pm

Mr. Brian Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): I am absolutely opposed to the Secretary of State for Scotland's proposal to reform Scottish local government, as outlined in "Shaping the Future—The New Councils." This is the latest episode in a systematic and concerted attack on the powers of Scottish local government which began when the Tories first came to power in 1979.

It must have been a surprise to anyone reading the document to find that the Secretary of State had committed himself to setting up effective and efficient local authorities. For any council to be effective and efficient, it requires, first, powers to initiate change that have not been emasculated by central Government. Secondly, it requires money so that it can provide efficient services to the public whom it is meant to serve. After 14 years of Tory Government, Scottish local authorities are neither effective nor efficient.

Despite the Secretary of State's assurances in the White Paper, Scottish councils will see their powers further eroded by any reform of local government that is initiated by a Tory document and presided over by a Tory Secretary of State with a hidden agenda which still, even after all his announcements, includes water privatisation and the extension of compulsory competitive tendering. The Tories' hidden agenda is still very much in being. Nothing that was said last week takes away from the fact that the Tories still intend to privatise Scottish water.

The major criticism of the Government concerns the wholly undemocratic way in which the reorganisation has been carried out—not by a commission, as in England and Wales, but by the Secretary of State and his cronies on the Treasury Bench. He has ignored the repeatedly expressed demand of the Scottish people for an assembly. He has compounded that error by denying the Scottish people at least a quasi-independent commission to determine the structure of Scotland's local government. The only area of change allowed for in the document is to be found in paragraph 1·4 which states that the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland will be able to review the boundaries if an anomaly arises.

I urge the Government to look at Ayrshire, for a start. How is it possible, according to that document, to have a north Ayrshire and a south Ayrshire when Skelmorlie in the north is in the same authority as Loch Doon? It is utter nonsense. It is hardly surprising that my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) spoke as he did earlier.

The financial implications of the Secretary of State's reforms are so highly subjective as to be meaningless in any serious analysis of the proposed changes. Any reform of local government, even the abolition of Strathclyde regional council, which the Secretary of State has decided on, will result in the additional expenditure of hundreds of millions of pounds of Scottish taxpayers' money in the midst of an economic recession.

In the House the other night, Tory Members of Parliament said that the Government are bankrupt. The White Paper makes it clear that the Scottish Office, too, is bankrupt of ideas.

The implications of the proposals are that there will be job losses in areas where jobs are already in short supply. It is wrong to use local authority employees as political footballs. Any reform of local government based on the Secretary of State's proposals will, by its very nature, create democratic deficits in the accountability of many existing local government functions. A reduction in the number of local authority units will result in decisions being taken further away from, not closer to, the people.

That unaccountability will be made worse by the inevitable introduction of joint boards and quangos, whose members will be appointed by the Secretary of State, who has announced that the police, fire and water authorities in Strathclyde are to cover the same geographical area. Why does he not consider setting up a second tier of local government to cover those functions, which would then be the responsibility of directly elected representatives? What is wrong with that?

Those who are appointed will not be democratically elected councillors. They will be given only the power that the Secretary of State decides that they ought to have, according to his vision of Scottish local government. The proposals will further erode the already limited powers that Scottish local authorities have used to protect their people from the worst excesses of successive Tory Governments.

My reasons for opposing any change in the structure of Scottish local government are clear. The cost and the disruption that will be caused cannot be justified. The face of local government in Scotland will be changed for ever.

To be more specific, what will happen to the wind-up programme for the new towns in the area that I represent? In my case, that factor is critical to the well-being of Irvine new town. When will the Secretary of State answer that important question? Why is that subject not addressed in the consultative document? It is not in the White Paper at all and that is wrong.

Any reforms will simply be perceived by the Scottish people as political navel-watching at a time when the real problems in the country should be addressed. There are 300,000 unemployed in Scotland and thousands of homeless, yet the Government have decided to review local authorities.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Donohoe: The hon. Gentleman had 20 minutes—I have only 10 minutes.

Any review of Scottish local government must be undertaken in conjunction with the establishment of a local Scottish Parliament. Without that underlying principle, any reform of Scottish local government will certainly be temporary. The Secretary of State should understand that.

The Scottish people have repeatedly voted yes for reform and how we are governed. However, in voting yes, they reject the Tory philosophy completely. I reject the proposals, as do the majority of those who responded to the consultation. I reject the need for any reform in Scotland at present.

6.20 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The Secretary of State for Scotland has attacked the Strathclyde region on several occasions. He should remember that there are many dedicated men and women who have served Strathclyde region since it was created by a Tory Government. He did not complain too much about Strathclyde regional council when he used it to gather the

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

poll tax. He let that local authority take the brunt of the abusive attacks caused by the Government. At the end of the day, they had to do a U-turn.

The Secretary of State should also remember that welfare rights officers were appointed in Strathclyde region to protect the poor and those who needed protection. Many men and women in my constituency got a great deal of benefit from the advice given by those officers. Some of them were former soldiers who gave six years of their lives and did not see their friends come back. They were denied their right to services of Government Departments until Strathclyde stepped in. *[Interruption.]* I wish the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) would shut up. I listened to his speech—he said absolutely nothing. His constituents would be ashamed of what he said. The more he opens his mouth, the more he puts his big foot in it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) made a good point about Argyll. I was a full-time union officer in Argyll when Strathclyde took over. It was clear to me that the workers in Argyll had had to suffer at the hands of Argyll council, which was a penny-pinching authority and denied the workers their basic rights. Some of the workers had no protective clothing. The road men had no bothies in which to store their tools—they had to store them in their homes. Many of the workers said that they were glad that a Strathclyde union was coming in because they would at least get national wages and conditions and many were able to go on and be promoted. Under Strathclyde, people who worked in Dunoon were able to get promotions in places such as Greenock, Paisley and Glasgow.

It is easy for me to have a go at Strathclyde region. But if—God forbid—these proposals get through the House, some people will say, "I wish that Strathclyde was back again".

Reference was made to Tories objecting to these proposals. I am proud that I served on Glasgow district council before I came here. John Young was a councillor on that council. He was a leading Tory—no one could say that he did not defend the Tory party on that council. Lo and behold—John Young is a Glaswegian who has a great love for the city of Glasgow, and the Secretary of State cannot deny that as soon as the Tory proposals came out, John Young was one of the first to say that they are absolute rubbish.

Let us examine the accusation of gerrymandering. No matter what we call it, it is ludicrous when people who live in the Toryglen area will have to go to Hamilton for their services, although some of them live nearer the city chambers than I do. The Secretary of State will say that I am wrong about that because at one time Toryglen was not in the city of Glasgow.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Martin: I will not give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. McAvoy: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to give way to an hon. Member who has knowledge of his own constituency, of which the other hon. Member has no knowledge?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): The hon. Gentleman is well aware that it is for the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) to decide whether to give way.

Mr. Martin: This is not simply another hon. Member's constituency. The White Paper says that the proposal is for the city of Glasgow. I am entitled to comment on a proposal that will take a place that has been part of Glasgow for a long time—Toryglen—and put it into south Lanarkshire. The logic of the Minister's argument is that at one time Toryglen did not belong to Glasgow. Springburn, Keppochhill and Maryhill did not belong to Glasgow at one time. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) does not belong to Glasgow—he stays outside it. Perhaps if he came in, we would get more population. We need a decent population in the city of Glasgow if we are to stay in a city that gives employment to most of the constituents of my hon. Friend.

6.26 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I well understand the strength of feeling of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) because of his experience in local government. When we look at the empty Conservative Benches, there are few Tories because the Scottish electorate rejected them.

As we heard in an earlier ruling from the Speaker, at the end of the day the customs and conventions of the House and the English majority will force the proposals through against the wishes of the Scottish people. The Tories cannot get the democratic mandate of the Scottish people, so they use this manoeuvre to force through their policies, which the Scottish people vote against, and deny Scottish democracy. We should be trying to restore that democracy.

Local government provides a wide range of essential daily services through its councillors and elected officials. It fulfils a highly democratic function in our society by allowing people to participate in local decisions. It also provides a vast pool of expertise and professional, trained, qualified and experienced staff giving a proven service to our local communities.

Scottish local government has a proud record over the centuries for supplying services to our local communities and that is precisely what is at stake in the White Paper. The Secretary of State for Scotland has served his country well and, undoubtedly, England will be suitably pleased with him. However, Scotland has nothing to be pleased about.

This short debate is only one small protest in what will surely be an ongoing debate for days and years against the Government's political chicanery. I will be brief but my anger goes deeper than this debate will allow. From the poll tax fiasco to Rosyth and Ravenscraig, the Tory roll of shame in Scotland is long and the Government have the gall to add this political deceit to it.

The Government's plans are irretrievably rushed. There has been no real consultation on these fundamental changes. *[Interruption.]* If this rabble would shut up, they might learn about the Labour party's record in Government. There is an obvious contrast between the royal commission in 1969, followed by legislation in 1973, and the condensed timetable offered by this Government. In fact, the previous review of local government started in

1963. It took a total of 10 years from the commencement of the review to the final enactment of legislation. The Scottish Office published its present consultation paper in October 1992 and invited submissions up to January 1993.

Wheatley undertook visits, held meetings and seminars with academics and experts, and placed public notices in the press inviting both oral and written evidence. He commissioned studies and even had an intelligence unit aiding the previous reform of local government. All that suggests that that remit was taken very seriously. If the previous reform took over 10 years to gestate and then failed, what serious chance has the present rushed reform of lasting anything like the 20 years of the previous reorganisation?

There has been no attempt to match communities to the new local government units, which are merely political conveniences for the discredited Tory party. The English get a commission, the Scots get gerrymandering. Like the poll tax, Scotland once more will be the Government's guinea pig. There has been no attempt truly to involve local government officials or the public or councillors before the structure of the proposed change was decided by central Government.

The Government's proposals are fundamentally flawed. There has been no community of interest locally between Kincardine and Angus, or between Perthshire and Angus. There has been no community of interest through employment or through local government practice. The proposals have been introduced irrespective of past and present work, or social and historical patterns. That approach is being mirrored throughout the country; the proposals are for the pure political convenience of the Tory party and not the result of the will or wish of the people.

The previous Scottish local government reform, which was given all the promises that we have heard from the Government tonight, lasted less than 20 years. Before that, reforms lasted for 50 or even 100 years. The new reform looks as though it will last even less time than the 1973 reform, because of the way in which it has been introduced and because of its substance.

The rush to legislate simply guarantees a period of instability, unemployment and the disruption of daily services. The Government have clearly forgotten the cost of chaos and the reality of running parallel authorities from the past local government reform. Why should the reform occur through silly gerrymandering and an effort to govern by deceit?

The Scottish people clearly rejected the Tories at previous elections, yet the Government are now inflicting those rejected policies and philosophy through a series of unelected and publicly unaccountable quangos. There has been an attempt to bypass the democratic process in Scotland. The boundaries have not been agreed and discussed with local communities, but are simply a civil service solution produced under the direction of the Tory party.

The local service proposals are the ultimate sell-out. They represent privatisation through the back door with stealth, through the creation of an unelected, unaccountable quango. The Tories who were rejected by the electorate are now ruling Scotland by a whole series of such unelected and unaccountable quangos—the opposite of democracy.

The process by which the Government issue a consultative document, only then promptly to ignore the results, is also the opposite of democracy. They prefer proposals that are overwhelmingly rejected by the Scottish people. Public pressure has forced a retreat from outright privatisation of water, as the Government originally wanted, but that has resulted in privatisation by two sips rather than one gulp. Scots want local-government-run water services, not the quango-controlled system nominated by and under the direction of the Secretary of State.

I noticed that the Secretary of State was careful to give us absolutely no details of what the legislation will entail. I hope that he changes that by telling us what was in the Quayle-Munro report and exactly what the Government have in mind.

Every customer in Scotland will await price rises, existing staff can expect disruption and redundancies, and we shall get all that is unnecessary and unwanted in both local government and water services.

The local government restructuring is different in kind and nature. There has been no real consultation, no royal commission, and no cross-party consensus, except among the people who opposed it. I reject with disgust the gerrymandered boundary reorganisation and the theft of Scotland's water resources. I seek in its place a strong, autonomous local government system, based on true local communities and founded after close consultation with those communities.

Any review must meet three important criteria. Scotland must receive equal treatment. If there is a commission in England, there must be something similar in Scotland. There must be maximum consultation that reflects the views of the Scottish people, and there must be democratic control over education, police and fire which must not be switched to central Government quangos.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Welsh: No. The hon. Gentleman's Front-Bench spokesman wishes to wind up.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is winding us all up.

Mr. Welsh: It is a pity that the hon. Member is not wound up by what I am saying.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am finding great difficulty in hearing the hon. Member for Angus, East.

Mr. Welsh: May I say to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) who is trying to intervene, and to all the hon. Members making a racket behind me, that it is no use going through the motions of having photo calls outside 10 Downing street. Scotland expects more than that. That technique failed for Rosyth, it failed for Ravenscraig, and it will fail again because of the nature of the House. It is time that the Labour party joined others to ensure that Scottish views prevail.

Scotland has every right to feel betrayed by the Government's botched, unfair and undemocratic proposals. It is time that Scots united to ensure that the proposals are defeated.

6.38 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): We do not need any lectures from the Scottish National party about defending Scotland's interest in the Chamber. May I

[Mr. Henry McLeish]

remind the hon. Gentleman that the Labour party has 49 Scottish seats and the SNP has a miserable three seats, and its work rate is nothing to commend it?

The Secretary of State today treated local government in Scotland with maximum contempt. It was a disgraceful speech that did not address the key issues. It was a knockabout speech, at a time when we deserve to know why some of the decisions in the White Paper were made. More importantly, why is the Secretary of State willing to ride on the back of the rantings of his Back Benchers over Monklands? He knows that he has the power to set up an inquiry. He should either put up or shut up on that issue.

The debate has exposed the organised hypocrisy masquerading as government in Scotland, and it has explained why the Conservatives are so deeply unpopular there. Only a rump of Tory Members, led by a ragbag of Tory Ministers, could have produced such a dog's breakfast and called it a reform. The reform of local government is irrelevant to the needs of Scottish people, damaging to the people who depend on its services and dismissive of democracy.

The Secretary of State must shoulder much of the responsibility for the mess. Why is he plumbing new depths of political dishonesty? Why is he unwilling to distinguish between the interests of the Conservative party and the interests of the country? The democratic credentials of the Secretary of State now lie in tatters. He failed in Rosyth, he has failed in local government and he has failed on the issue of water. How many failures does he need to have before he reconsiders his position?

Much of the debate has concentrated on the Tories and their gerrymandering of boundaries. We have heard pathetic excuses that the proposed action is not gerrymandering, but good government. We know that, if there is an Operation Safe Haven and the only real people who are consulted are Tory Members, one ends up with a gerrymandered map of Scotland, which carries with it all the responsibility of the governing party.

The key question is what criteria were used to gerrymander the boundaries of East Renfrewshire, Berwickshire, East Lothian and Stirling. Did they use history, geography, culture or a bit of economics? The criterion was simply the vested interests of the crew on the Government Benches, who could not care about the wishes of Scottish people and who will now do everything from that base position of 16 per cent. to win any credibility they can.

We hear the Government lecture us about the vested interests in local government. They mean the 300,000 employees who, every day of the week, provide some of the best services in Europe. If that is a vested interest, I and my colleagues will speak up for them. If our councillors, who do such sterling work, are another vested interest, I have no doubt that I and my colleagues will be willing to stand up and be counted. What is utterly disgraceful is that the Tory party stands up for its own vested interest and is unconcerned about what is happening around it.

This debate is a watershed in Scottish politics since 1929, because we have never in that period had a major reform of local government which has smacked of contempt and of a lack of concern for those who are the beneficiaries of the service. We know that there is no case.

What is the justification for this massive upheaval? There is no consensus. How on earth can the reforms endure? My hon. Friends have made the point that one cannot sustain the reforms without a consensus in which every political party and every section of Scotland is committed to them. No one will be committed to the proposals. They will not endure, because the Government have ignored the basic tenet of democratic politics, which is to arrive at a consensus. If there is no consensus, my hon. Friends will not be committed to the proposals. The proposals will have no credibility, and the people of Scotland will have little confidence in proposals that do not have that consensus.

My hon. Friends have raised the question of a commission. Even the English have a commission. Why has the Secretary of State declined to give the Scots a commission? Why will the Government not put the matter to an independent test—to an independent commission? We should be happy to contribute proposals to such a commission. Why does the Secretary of State not do the same? We know the reason. The proposals will introduce a corrupted map of local government. The proposals are all about the Conservative party, and if they were exposed to the light of an independent commission, they would simply be shown up for what they are.

The other key issue raised by the proposals is constitutional change. If we had a Scottish Parliament sitting in Scotland——

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: You will not have.

Mr. McLeish: We will.

If we had a Scottish Parliament, Scots would be allowed to look at their own boundaries sensibly and sensitively, and they would be able to draw up a future that they wanted—not a future that satisfied the Conservative party, but a future that would take local government into the next century and would carry on the proud tradition of the previous 100 years.

If there is one part of the proposals that smacks not only of gerrymandering but of manipulation, it is the section dealing with costs. The Government have brought comic farce to financial accounting in the proposals. The Government took on Touche Ross. The National Audit Office in Scotland is now interested in carrying out a study into why £50,000 of taxpayers' money was spent on such a flawed exercise. The first exercise came up with transitional costs and on-going costs over five years, but the Government did not allow that. It was suggested that there might not be any savings, but that there would be substantial costs.

What did the Government do? They went back to Touche Ross and the civil servants, and came up not with a five-year period, but with a 15-year period. They paraded around at the weekend saying that they would save £1 billion up to the year 2010. Why not 3010, in which case the figure would be £6 billion? Why not 4010, in which case the figure would be £12 billion? What an utter absurdity. The fact that we have been asked to participate in discussions on the White Paper on the basis of those bogus figures is a scandal of massive proportions. We dispute the figures for savings, because there will be none.

There is no disguising the fact that, in the next three years, £200 million of costs will be incurred. Where will the money come from? It will not come from the Treasury. The money will come from services being cut and from the

council tax being increased. Will the Minister tell Scotland that our present council tax levels will be safe in Tory hands when the reforms take place? They will not be, because the council tax and cuts in service will pay for this collective madness.

A lobby is here today. We want the Secretary of State and his Ministers to reassure the 300,000 Scots who work in the service about their future. We want those workers to know, unlike the workers at Rosyth, that they have a future, that they will not simply be disregarded. Who on earth believes that only 2,200 people will leave the service over the next few years? Again I ask the Secretary of State for a reassurance for servants who have made a valuable contribution to the quality of life in Scotland. All the proposals add up to no case at all.

What about services? We have heard much talk about all-purpose authorities. Those all-purpose authorities will be multi-purpose authorities, because there will be a degree of centralisation unprecedented in Scottish politics. There will be commercialisation and then joint committees. Struggling beneath that will be the so-called "all-purpose" authorities. That is astonishing. They certainly will not be all-purpose authorities as the Government pretend.

If there is one issue above all others on which contempt has been heaped, it is the discussion about water. Many of my hon. Friends have made the point that we are at a halfway house towards ultimate privatisation. That is clear. We shall have three boards. Why three? No one has given us a reason why there should be three. Why not have six, or one? No details are given in the three paragraphs out of the 30 pages.

We are being softened up for the privatisation of water. The first step is centralisation, which will be followed by privatisation. No Conservative Member will mention the F-word—franchising. The word does not appear in the White Paper. Why not? There is no escaping the conclusion that the Government are moving surely and steadily towards the sell-off of Scottish water. It may not happen next year, but that is their intention. Scotland will not be fooled by the utterances and bogus reassurances it has received from Ministers.

If all of that was not bad enough, there is the point, which many of my hon. Friends have made, about the democratic deficit. Deep down in the debate is the question of costs and the question of consensus, but there is also the fundamental question of democracy. Democracy is being undermined by services being transferred to the marketplace and to the Scottish Office.

We are seeing an attack on the balance between local and central Government which is essential to the constitution. We are seeing a system being corrupted, and being made more unstable and more vulnerable to commercialisation and privatisation. We in Scotland are proud of our deep sense of security and our deep sense of collective provision, which are in danger of being abandoned irreversibly by the Government.

The proposals are unwanted, unnecessary, undemocratic and uniquely irrelevant to the people of Scotland. They deserve no support in the House, and we will certainly not support them. We will oppose them at every opportunity.

6.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): We have had a most enjoyable debate. The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish)—I shall come to his more serious points later —continued his customary rant and scaremongering. I shall deal at the outset with his point about local authority staff. We estimate that reorganisation could lead to a reduction in total staff numbers of 1 per cent. That is against a background in which local authority staff in Scotland last year increased by 2 per cent., which puts the matter into context.

A number of positive points have been made in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) pointed out that every group leader in the city wanted a single-tier system and wanted the city of Aberdeen to be a single-tier authority. My hon. Friend asked the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) for an apology to the city of Aberdeen; an apology has not been received.

Mr. McLeish: Will the Minister accept the challenge that I offered the Secretary of State? He keeps referring to Monklands. He has the power to set up an independent inquiry. Will he put up or shut up?

Mr. Stewart: I thought I was talking about Aberdeen, but I can express some hope for the hon. Member's interest in Monklands. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) is interested in serving on the Standing Committee, and no doubt his extensive researches on Scottish local government will be available to hon. Members.

Several hon. Members: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: Not at the moment.

My hon. Friend rightly pointed out that the accusation of gerrymandering in relation to——

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It seems to me that the Minister has sought to pre-empt the work of the Committee of Selection, and has done so by referring to matters that are clearly extraneous to the contents of any Bill. I hope that you will draw the matter to the attention of the Committee of Selection.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister is responsible for his own speech, and no Standing Committee is involved in this debate. *[Interruption.]* Order. So far, I have had great difficulty hearing what the Minister has had to say.

Mr. Stewart: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that Opposition Members will give me the chance to develop my speech. I repeat that I said that I understood that my hon. Friend the Member for Dover might be interested in serving on the Committee. That does not pre-empt any decision of the Committee of Selection or of anyone else.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South rightly answered the charge that the Government are somehow gerrymandering through the proposal to bring Westhill into the city of Aberdeen. He rightly pointed out that Westhill does not have a single Conservative councillor at either regional or district level, so that accusation cannot be sustained.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) reminded us of the importance of

[Mr. Stewart]

rural areas. He underlined the common sense of the proposals in the White Paper that city authorities should be surrounded by strong rural authorities where the interests were quite different.

My hon. Friend expressed his concern about particular boundaries, as did a number of Opposition Members. Frankly, it would be surprising if the Government produced a set of proposals on boundaries which received immediate and universal acclaim, because people differ.

Mr. Wallace: I think the Minister accepted that there has not been exactly total acclaim for all the boundaries that he has proposed. What level of opposition will he take account of in amending boundaries? What size of petition and what kind of opposition will he take as evidence that what he is proposing is unacceptable to a local community?

Mr. Stewart: First, we have had a period of consultation. Secondly, that will be a matter for Parliament to decide. I assure the hon. Gentleman that there can be legitimate differences of view on boundaries, but my right hon. Friend and I will take seriously the points that are made to us in the Committee.

Mr. McAvoy: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Does he accept that the regional ward of Kings Park Toryglen, which it is recommended should be included in south Lanarkshire, is more than 50 per cent. Rutherglen and Lanarkshire area and more than 50 per cent. Rutherglen and Lanarkshire population? Bearing in mind his last statement, will the Minister also assure me that he will accept it from me, as the Member of Parliament for Toryglen, that I want that area to remain part of the city of Glasgow, where it has always been and should stay?

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to the hon. Member. I assure him that we shall listen to people such as himself when there is a constituency question. Then we will consider whether appropriate changes need to be made during the passage of the Bill——

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: No. I have given way a number of times, and I have to sit down in a few minutes.

I welcome the excellent speech that my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) made on behalf of his constituents, in which he pointed out the importance and relevance of the Government's proposals for the best interests of his constituents. I had hoped that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) would pay a tribute to the council that he represents, which is generally recognised to be——

Mr. Graham: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My colleagues and I wish to object that we have not been able to put our point of view to the Secretary of State about our objection to the inclusion of Toryglen in our area.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that as many hon. Members as possible have been called in the time available.

Mr. Stewart: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps the Committee of Selection will choose the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) for the Committee, and he will doubtless have many hours to put forward his point of view.

I had hoped that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland would say that—on the basis of his experience as a constituency Member—although he might disagree with some of the boundaries proposed by the Government, there was a strong case for single-tier authorities.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): No.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) is remonstrating. I will give way to her if she wishes. She walked out of the Chamber last Thursday, throwing the White Paper back to the Secretary of State—I am grateful for that, because we are running low on copies. The White Paper implements the views of Argyll and Bute for a single-tier authority based on Argyll and Bute.

Mrs. Michie: The Minister should know from our submissions to the Secretary of State that the Scottish Liberal Democrats have always been in favour of single-tier local authorities, but with a Scottish Parliament. *[Laughter.]* If Conservative Members care to read the submission, they will understand why.

While the Minister is talking about Argyll and Bute, I welcome the fact that it is to be a single-tier local authority, but it will be interesting to see the result of putting Helensburgh, which has no historical link with Argyll, into that area.

Mr. Stewart: The independent council and polls in the Helensburgh area are overwhelmingly in favour of that.

We turn next——

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: I regret that I cannot give way. I have only three or four minutes left.

I turn next to the Scottish National party. The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) says that there is no support for the Government's proposals. I refer him to the following statement in *The Press and Journal* of 30 June:

"I will be very pleased if, as the information available indicates, the council will be retained."

His hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) made that statement. She clearly supports what the White Paper proposes.

Mr. Welsh *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: I cannot give way.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Stewart: I have given way on several occasions. The hon. Member for Monklands, West refused to give way.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central is normally meticulous in his research on such matters, and he mentioned costs. I was surprised that he did not refer to the submission from his regional council. Perhaps I should remind him of what that submission said.

Mr. McLeish *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Stewart: Has the hon. Gentleman not read the submission of his own council? Dear me, that is not very good. It strongly supported the retention of the kingdom of Fife, and that Labour regional council argued that a single-tier Fife council would produce annual savings of £4·9 million, as opposed to transitional costs of £5·5 million. It argued that the total savings over a longer period would be more than £42 million at net present value.

Those are not the Government's figures, but figures produced by a Labour authority which is going to continue in the single-tier system. That is a good example of how much nonsense has been talked by Opposition Members. When they consult their local councillors in a number of areas, they will find that many Labour councillors, such as the convener of Fife, support what the Government are saying. Does the hon. Member want to hear what he said? The hon. Gentleman will find a constructive response from the councils in Central region, as my right hon. Friend pointed out, in marked contrast to the slogans that we have heard from hon. Members today. We do not know whether the Labour party wants a commission or whether it will reverse the proposals, if elected. The Labour party has no policy; we have the policies. I commend the Government amendment to the House.

Mr. Tom Clarke: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister says that he does not know whether the Opposition support a commission. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am having great difficulty hearing what hon. Members have to say. If we cannot hear in this Chair, we cannot conduct the business properly. I call Mr. Tom Clarke, and I hope that it is a point of order.

Mr. Clarke: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister said that he was not aware whether the Opposition supported a commission. May I through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, point out that it is clear in the motion before the House that we do indeed support a commission?

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 272, Noes 316.

Division No. 333] **[7 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom

Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Alan Meale.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard

Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and Mr. Derek Conway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the publication of the White Paper "Shaping the Future—The New Councils"; and considers that its proposals will lead to better and more efficient local government in Scotland, based on a single tier of strong and accountable all-purpose authorities.

Debt, Trade and Development

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.14 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That this House, noting that the indebtedness of the Southern world now exceeds £1,000 billion, which both cripples their development and holds back economic growth in the Northern world, and noting the failure of the G7 Summit to agree any new significant programme of debt relief or to ensure any adequate place for developing countries in future world trading patterns via the GATT Uruguay Round, calls upon the Government to prepare a new British and international initiative for debt write-off for the poorest countries, and also to take the lead in setting out a trading framework which will ensure that developing countries can play their full share in the world trading system and will promote environmentally sound development.

For the developing countries throughout the world, the G7 summit in Tokyo last week was not merely a disappointment; it was a cause for real despair. The situation in most of the third world, and certainly the poorest parts of it, is extremely serious and getting worse, not better. The G7 summit merely washed its hands of it.

It is not simply that indebtedness in the southern world now exceeds the astronomic level of £1 trillion—£1,000 billion; it is rather that debt levels are not falling, but increasing at an accelerating rate. According to the World bank, the increase in indebtedness in the past two years alone has been nearly £300 billion, which is equal to almost half Britain's entire gross national product.

It is not simply that the share in world trade of the poorest continent, Africa, has been falling over the past decade; it is rather that the protracted depression in world commodity prices, on which the poorest countries absolutely depend, makes their economic recovery impossible.

It is not simply that aid-flows from western nations—most notably Britain—have fallen sharply over the past decade and are continuing to fall, with overall resource flows to sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the poorest part of the world, estimated at 8 per cent. lower last year than in 1989; it is much rather that the flow of funds has gone into reverse. The southern world now pays Britain more in debt repayments than it receives in aid, with a net inflow into the United Kingdom in 1990 of £2·5 billion.

On all three counts—debt, trade and aid—the situation of the third world is clearly rapidly deteriorating and must now be a priority for international action. However, the indifference of the G7 summit to the steadily evolving disaster in the south, despite the fact that it also holds back recovery in the north, is matched only by the unreadiness of the British Government to deal effectively with any of those looming disasters.

I take debt first and foremost as it is the most important. I make it clear that I commend the Prime Minister on his initiative as Chancellor in 1989 in proposing the Trinidad terms for a two thirds write-off of debts for some of the poorest countries. I say that without qualification. It was a very useful initiative. But we must put that in perspective. It has applied to only 14 countries.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): It applies to 17 countries. I shall clarify that later.

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful for the correction. That is a marginal and welcome improvement.

The £1 billion write-off that it has secured, of which the United Kingdom's share is just £65 million, represents less than 0·1 per cent. of total third world debt. That puts it into perspective. Since the Prime Minister originally proposed it, £1 billion has been written off, but the total debt burden has increased by some £400 billion. The effect of the Prime Minister's initiative has, therefore, been extremely limited. No one could deny that. Some might say it has been infinitesimal. Indeed, the British Government have been far more concerned with paying money to British banks to protect them against possible default on their world debt than they have been to provide debt relief to third world countries. According to the Government's figures, between 1987 and 1992 the Government handed out £2·25 billion—more than the entire annual aid budget—in tax relief to United Kingdom banks against the possibility that debtor countries might default on their debt service obligations, although in fact they have not done so.

As a result of the Finance Act 1986, British taxpayers have been forced to pay huge sums to bail the banks out of a crisis which, frankly, was partly of the banks own making, when not a penny of that money has been passed to third world countries to relieve their debt. We now have the totally indefensible situation in which the Government are heavily subsidising United Kingdom banks against possible debt default, and none of that money is helping the poverty-stricken indebted countries. Yet, as the Minister said in answer to one of my questions on 15 February, from 1987 to 1991

"net payments to United Kingdom banks from developing countries over the last five years"—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 5-6.]

totalled £4·8 billion. That is an absolutely stunning figure. How can the Minister and the Government conceivably justify it? I do not know whether the Minister wishes to intervene to answer that. I do not want to go through what happened the other night, but I shall give him the opportunity to respond if he wishes to do so. He obviously does not wish to respond, but we will expect an answer later.

Although the Trinidad terms make a tiny contribution, they do not begin to match the enormity of the problem. Over the past decade, Africa's debt has more than tripled from 28 per cent. of GNP to 109 per cent. In other words, Africa now owes more than its entire annual income. Many sub-Saharan countries, the poorest of all, and including those now embarking on post-war reconstruction and which need assistance, such as Mozambique, Ethiopia and Eritrea, owe three times their national incomes, or more. Zambia, for example, where the average wage is $300 a year, owes $1,000 in debt for every man, woman and child.

When debt reaches those astronomical levels—and they are astronomical—it is patently unrepayable. Yet for the G7, including Britain, to ignore that not only snuffs out indefinitely the prospects for recovery for much of the southern world but undermines growth prospects and job opportunities for the northern world.

For the past four years—I do not think that this statement needs qualification—the Government have done nothing new to deal with the mounting debt catastrophe. In trade, the G7, including Britain, is scarcely serving the third world any better. The protection of northern markets by northern countries costs third-world countries an estimated £100 billion a year. That, of course, does not count the damage caused by common agricultural policy food exports being offloaded on to world markets. The sums for trade greatly exceed the total of official aid.

Of course, I am the first to accept that the Uruguay round of GATT will bring benefits to the third world, but the poorest countries under the existing arrangements are still likely to be worse off. They will often be unable to take advantage of new market opportunities, yet they have to open up to foreign competition. The relative value of their current trade preferences will be reduced, and fledgling service sectors in the third world may be wiped out. New rules on intellectual property will make technology transfer and economic development more difficult.

Above all, I emphasise the fact that GATT will not tackle the commodity crisis, which is at the heart of the developing countries' problems. Their indebtedness escalated in the late 1980s because they were caught in the trap between plummeting commodity prices and soaring interest rates. What is unforgivable is that Government policy, like that, I admit, of other donor countries, makes the problem a great deal worse by supporting structural adjustment programmes which hinge on making poor countries export more. When, under pressure, they export more, they of course contribute to oversupply and thus drive prices down still further. How can the Government continue to support trade policies which reinforce the vicious spiral of poverty and decline, which is what has been happening for several years?

On aid, the G7 summit agreed that development assistance should be enhanced. I welcome that conclusion, but the Government have made no commitments to respond. I do not think it is difficult to see why. Britain's record on aid—to put it no finer—is thoroughly depressing. Since 1979, Britain's official development assistance has fallen from 0·5 per cent. to 0·3 per cent. of GNP. Last year, the Government spent less than the Development Assistance Committee average and less than half the United Nations target of 0·7 per cent. of GNP. I am well aware that the Government insist that they will hit that target as, I suppose, the English cricket team does, although the latter are more honest about their likelihood of reaching the target.

The Government's aid budget is still being cut, and it fell last year. I can give the Minister the figures if he is in any doubt. These are Government figures. Last year, the aid budget fell 4 per cent. in real terms and is now only three-quarters of the level of aid spending in 1979. Worse still, of course, is that the Government are proposing a two-year freeze on aid which even the Overseas Development Administration admits will knock a further £150 million off the aid budget. When the lower purchasing power of the pound after the black Wednesday devaluation is taken into account, it is more probable that the cut will be nearer to £250 million.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am always amazed by some of the statistics with which the hon. Gentleman is briefed, because they are always at complete variance with my figures. I wish to make two points. The aid programme has risen in real terms by 10 per cent. since 1987-88.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): What about the past 14 years?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I said since 1987-88.

Mr. Meacher: What about last year?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman says last year, but I am talking about the previous six years. Let me answer. The budget for the financial year 1993-94 has risen 1 per cent. in real terms when compared with last year.

Mr. Meacher: Listening to the Minister's weasel words, one might assume that the Government came to power in pieces and that the ODA only gained power in 1987. I remind him that the Government came to power in 1979. Since then there has been a large fall in aid levels of about 17 per cent. in real terms. The Government have done just about everything in the book to downgrade the aid programme. They have pensioned off the Minister with responsibility for aid to another place and have left the hon. Gentleman in charge in this House. After his performance in the debate two evenings ago, I will forbear to comment further as it is all there to read in the record.

The aid programme has been almost halved. It is now being frozen. In the next decade, up to 40 per cent. of it will be passed to the European Community's aid programme, which the Government have always said is inferior in quality. Much of the rest is now being transferred from the dirt-poor south to the much better-off eastern Europeon and former Soviet Union countries, and the remainder is subject to an increasingly restrictive political and economic conditionality, which is often counter-productive. Short of demanding that, in future, aid be given only in exchange for donations to the Tory party, I do not see what more the Government could do to downgrade their aid programme.

If the Tories were really concerned about aid and development, if they really cared about a vision of one world, there is a very great deal that they could and should do now.

On debt, they should prepare a new debt relief package for the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World bank and for the meeting of Commonwealth Finance Ministers. This should propose debt write-off of 80 to 100 per cent. for the very poorest countries, whose debt, in any case, is manifestly unrepayable. The Trinidad terms should be revised to grant debt relief on the whole stock of debt—not just, as at present, on the debt falling in the next three years or incurred before a cut-off date. The Government should come forward with a strategy to reduce multilateral debt. I might add that 91 per cent., I think, of the indebtedness of sub-Saharan Africa is multilateral, not bilateral. Thus, this is a very important area, in respect of which we need a new strategy. We need a strategy to halt what is now a net transfer of resources to the IMF—either through a new issue of special drawing rights or through the sale of IMF gold stocks.

On trade, the Government certainly should, and could, be much more helpful in the renegotiation of international commodity agreements in order to tackle what I have described as the worst aspects of the commodity crisis. They should, and could, explore ways of helping to compensate the developing countries for the losses that they face under the GATT agreement, and they should support the African diversification fund, as proposed under the United Nations programme of action for African recovery, with a view to promoting the desperately needed switch into processing.

On aid, the Government should support the demand of the non-governmental organisations that official development aid to sub-Saharan Africa in 1994-95 be increased by at least £100 million. If the Minister is concerned about where the money might come from, I suggest that the aid could well be paid for by reducing the subsidy to the banks against non-existing default. The Government should also give a commitment that United Kingdom aid to sub-Saharan Africa—the poorest part of the world—will continue to increase, in real terms, during the life of this Parliament.

Finally, if the Government are really concerned about aid and development, as the Labour party is, they will drop this dog's breakfast in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and set up a Cabinet-level department of international development, as Labour is pledged to do. That would give the handling of these issues the political clout and the administrative weight that they urgently need. It is on those grounds that I strongly commend the motion to the House.

7.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): I beg to move, to leave out from 'House' to the end of the motion, and to add instead thereof:

'noting the problems of indebtedness and restricted trade access in hampering the growth of developing countries, welcomes the agreement by the G7 countries in Tokyo to consider improved debt reduction terms for the poorest and most indebted countries, including the possibility of earlier action on reducing the stock of debt on a case by case basis in accordance with the Prime Minister's Trinidad Terms initiative, to make all efforts to enhance development assistance, and to seek to achieve a successful Uruguay Round before the end of the year.'.

I try to take the comments of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) seriously, but so often I find that his gift for exaggeration and his thrashing about in so many directions completely destroy the impact of any point he might be trying to make. I shall make a few overall comments, during the course of which I hope to give some reply to the hon. Gentleman's words. As he said, I am the Minister responsible for defending the Government in respect of aid matters. However, as hon. Members know, this debate is not just about aid; it is very much about trade and debt and about sensible policies in the developing world as well. As it is about trade as well as aid, my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade, who is responsible for these matters, will reply to the debate. He will be able to give the House some enlightenment in addition to my comments about the recent Tokyo summit and the prospects for the GATT round.

The Tokyo summit paid very close attention to the problems of the developing world. Quite contrary to the emphasis that the hon. Gentleman sought to attribute, the fruits are contained in the economic declaration. I strongly advise the hon. Gentleman to read that declaration more carefully than he can have done so far, so that he may recognise the force of what I am saying. In any case, I shall illustrate the point by further argument in the course of my remarks. First, I should like to say a few words about the Tokyo breakthrough on trade liberalisation, which is also of great importance to the developing world.

For the past four years the G7 summits, in their communiqúes, have called on the international community to work for the early completion of the Uruguay round.

[Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd]

In previous years that call had gone unanswered. This year the situation was different: the summit acted as a catalyst for the consensus on market access in certain key areas reached by the trade negotiators in the four areas known as the Quad—the United States, Canada, Japan and the European Community. This was a great sticking point in the whole process of the GATT round. To have overcome it means that the prospects for agreement on the GATT round by the end of the year are greatly enhanced. That will be enormously to the benefit of the developing world.

This is a crucial building block of the elements that will need to be put in place in Geneva by all the participants to ensure a successful conclusion to the Uruguay round. As I have indicated, that success is crucial to the developing world. The reason—and this is the context in which the debate should be placed—is that developing countries earn three times as much income from trade flows as from aid. Trade is essential to the developing world. [HON. MEMBERS: "Of course."] Hon. Members say, "Of course." They too are stating the obvious. Let me say what I think is very important, even if they find it obvious.

Success would give a terrific boost to the world economy. There would be renewed confidence in investment overseas. In specific terms for the third world, the restrictions placed on subsidised agricultural exports would give developing countries a better chance to compete at home and abroad. Such a prize will be within our grasp in Geneva in the coming months, and we intend to keep up the momentum until there is a successful resolution.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall give way very briefly, but I am conscious of the fact that many hon. Members want to speak.

Mr. Battle: The truth, which did not come out at the summit, is that the GATT round will leave the poorest countries worse off. As the relative value of their trade preferences declines, they will be forced to open up their markets to foreign competition, but they will not be in a position to enjoy the advantages. Therefore, their trade flows will be in the opposite direction. Why was that not appreciated at the G7 summit?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: If Opposition Members truly believe that, it is clear that there is a fundamental divide between us. I utterly reject that sort of thinking. Let me explain why. *[Interruption.]* I do not simply assert that. If I am given a chance, I will explain why.

I reject that thinking because the annual volume of world aid to the developing world is $60 billion. The annual volume of world trade to the developing world is worth three times that amount, $180 billion. The GATT round will increase world trade benefit to the developing world by $90 billion. That is half the trade figure that I just quoted and it represents a gigantic boost to the trading and economic prospects of the third world.

If we pursue that point any further we shall end up arguing about matters that we shall unable to resolve and all that we shall be able to do is to identify that there is a disagreement between us.

Mr. Worthington: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes, but for the last time.

Mr. Worthington: This is a crucial point. Can the Minister tell us whether the manufactured or processed products of the third world will now be allowed into our markets without any problems? At present, tariffs must be paid on processed goods from the third world. Have those restrictions been swept away by the G7?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The G7 is not an implementing body, but a debating one. We have, however, carried the argument about trade restrictions a stage further. The hon. Gentleman must accept that Britain, and the Conservative Government in particular, cannot be faulted in wanting to relieve the world of restrictions in trade. At every forum and at every opportunity, we seek to reduce the restrictions on world trade.

The multi-fibre arrangement was discussed at the Tokyo summit. We are arguing for further liberalisation of that arrangement, which will help the third world. I will say more about that if I can get on with my speech.

Mr. Worthington: So the answer to my question is no.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question could not be yes. Of course all restrictions were not removed by that meeting in Tokyo. As I said, the G7 is not a decision-implementing body, but one in which matters are debated and arguments taken further forward.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): May I recommend to Opposition Members that they read the book prepared by the Overseas Development Institute, which provides detailed information about the GATT round and is extremely careful in its assessment of the impact of that round? It came to the conclusion that the third world would benefit from the GATT round.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that extremely helpful intervention, which will enable some Opposition Members to learn rather more about the subject. Even if they do not agree with the judgment given, they will come to appreciate that a large body of extremely respectable opinion shares my view—a view that my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) has also confirmed.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am not frightened of giving way, because I have given way every time I have been requested to do so, but if I continue to do that I shall deprive hon. Members of sufficient time for debate. I will give way just once more.

Mr. Enright: Which commodities coming from the least developed countries will benefit from GATT?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I intend to say something about the multi-fibre arrangement in a moment.

It is the view of the Government and of many thinkers on the subject that increased trade is the central key to development. It enables developing countries to increase their own living standards. Development involves a partnership between the developed and the developing world and a comprehensive approach is needed.

Four essential elements are required to help the poor of the world. As the hon. Member for Oldham, West highlighted, it is important that aid is well targeted. A debt

strategy is also important. I hope that I shall be able to demonstrate to the House that that strategy was taken a stage further by discussion at Tokyo. The other overwhelmingly important element is trade and investment by other countries in the poor countries. *[Interruption.]* The figures demonstrate how important that is. That is not my blind assertion—it is backed up by the figures that I gave the House just a few moments ago.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West could have tabled a question at any stage to find out how many countries had benefited from the Trinidad terms. He asserted that 14 countries had benefited, but, so far, 17 countries have. I believe that the hon. Gentleman also said that $1 billion of debt had been written off, but in fact $2 billion has been written off.

Mr. Meacher: About £500 million quid.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Member for Oldham, West was kind enough to congratulate the Prime Minister, and I am grateful to receive the compliment on my right hon. Friend's behalf. I should like to go further, because without a shadow of doubt Britain has led the way in promoting international agreement on debt relief for the poorest developing countries. That debt relief was at the personal initiative of the British Prime Minister and, as a result, $2 billion of debt has been written off. What was significant at Tokyo, however——

Mr. Worthington: What about commercial debt?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall come on to that, but give me a chance. I shall not shirk the questions that I have been asked, but, as always in such debates, there is an awful lot of chuntering coming from those on the Opposition Front Bench. I am hardly being given a chance to answer the questions that I am asked.

We have long argued that more needed to be done and we are therefore delighted that the Tokyo summit called on the Paris Club of Government creditors to reconsider the issue. I am especially pleased to note that, for the first time, the possibility of action, case by case, on reducing the stock of debt was raised, again in line with the Prime Minister's original proposal at Trinidad in 1990. The stage is therefore set for building on the consensus of the seven participants at the summit for further concrete proposals within the Paris Club.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Oldham, West has been reasonably patient because I am about to discuss two issues that he raised—net flows and commercial debt. The figures from the OECD—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are always grinning. If only they would get some facts—listen and get some facts.

The figures from the OECD, which are much more comprehensive than those from any other source, for net resource transfers show that developing countries received £31·4 billion more in 1991 than they paid out. That figure confirms the encouraging recovery of recent years in resource transfers to developing countries.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West referred to the southern world. I do not know whether he was referring to sub-Saharan Africa or to the more general region. Sub-Saharan Africa is repaying the IMF more than it receives in new money at the moment. The IMF is not withdrawing from Africa, however, because it plays a vital part in catalysing financial flows from elsewhere. It is anxious to help the countries of sub-Sahara to meet their technical and financial needs. The IMF flows are only a small part of the total aid.

Sub-Saharan Africa has consistently received more than it pays out when aid, foreign direct investment and other sources are included. In 1991 it received £6·95 billion, nearly £7 billion, according to World bank figures.

Mr. Worthington: They cannot be true.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the references so that he can check the figures in the relevant publications. If he does not have a copy of them, they are, of course, in the Library.

Some developing countries, particularly in Latin America, owe a significant proportion of their debt to commercial banks. It is not for our Government, or any other Government, to encourage, much less force, banks to cancel debt. That would deter them from lending to developing countries ever again in the future.

Nevertheless, a tremendous amount of progress has been made multilaterally in reducing those debts. Some 90 per cent. of major debtor nations' bad debt is now covered by a commercial debt relief deal. The hon. Member for Oldham, West will be aware of the Brady plan, for which the United Kingdom has provided its share of finances, which helps debtor countries and banks to reach voluntary agreements on commercial debt reduction.

The International Development Association also helps low-income countries to reach agreements with banks on commercial debt reduction. We are an important contributor to the IDA, which also gives concessional loans and uses IDA reflow to meet debt service obligations on old World bank loans. I am happy to have answered the hon. Gentleman's points in that regard.

Mr. Meacher: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No, I shall not give way again. I have given way four times in this short debate. Not only Opposition Members but several Conservative Members want to contribute to the debate and I do not see why I should prevent them from doing so.

The summit considered measures to help eastern and central Europe and the former Soviet Union in their transformation from command to market economies. That matter is of great importance for world stability, which is affected by any instability in the former Soviet Union and eastern and central Europe. The summit welcomed Russia's renewed commitment to economic reform, which has made possible a $1·5 billion drawing facility from the IMF's new arrangement, called the Systemic Transformation Facility. A new programme worth $3 billion to promote privatisation and restructuring was also put in place.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), who takes an interest in population, is in the Chamber, I register the importance of population. It should be registered on every occasion, but not dwelt on as I have already debated it with him. That issue was raised in Tokyo and I am pleased that the importance of helping developing countries to deal with the problems of population growth was recognised. The international conference on population and development taking place in Cairo next year will provide an opportunity to address those issues again.

[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]

The hon. Member for Oldham, West made much of the need to help the poorest in the world and I appreciate his concern. In our efforts to promote development, the poorest have been the focus of our attention. Action on trade and debt is essential for developing countries' prospects but many of them, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, will continue to need access to concessional finance for the foreseeable future.

Our aid is part of an overall international effort and has helped to bring about progress—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Oldham, West must look at the facts, not simply assert what he wishes or believes to be true. No one wants to be complacent about the matter, but let us get some facts clear. In the past 25 years, many developing countries such as Korea, Malaysia and Sri Lanka have seen a substantial rise in their per capita income. We do not give aid to Korea or Malaysia, but the aid that we give to Indonesia always irritates the Labour party. Those countries have improved the lot of their people. Life expectancy has risen and adult literacy has increased.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West described the Tokyo summit as an event not of disappointment but of despair, which overlooks the progress that has been made and should be recognised, even though the picture is not completely bright.

The problem of sub-Saharan Africa is a cause for concern. The hopes of many African countries have not been realised, but even there progress has been made with countries such as Botswana, Mauritius and Ghana, which reap the benefits of the right policies. I am pleased that Africa's problems were fully recognised at the summit. We now look ahead to the international conference on African development taking place in Tokyo in October, which will consider the problems and solutions in more detail. Africa is a priority in our aid programme and nearly 50 per cent. of our bilateral aid goes there.

It is important that developing countries should have the right policies to combine with the liberalisation of trade and the aid that we give them. To be effective, aid must be properly targeted and used in the right context, which means that developing countries must get their policies right. Those policies must support economic growth, encourage enterprise and allow their citizens to play a full part in economic and political life. That is why the focus of UNCED in Rio last year, on a national commitment to sustainable development, was so important.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West mentioned the problem of commodity prices. Of course a problem exists in commodity prices, but I support the Government's opposition to commodity price support stabilisation measures, which set artificially high prices, or in other cases distort market trends. There is no easy solution to commodity prices in developing countries, but the solution must remain diversification and not continued over-reliance on volatile commodities.

The effectiveness of our aid programme has been widely recognised, even if the hon. Member for Oldham, West is not prepared to give it that credit. Elements of quality include its focus on the poorest: 80 per cent. of bilateral aid goes to countries with per capita incomes of less than $700 a year—*[Interruption.]* I cannot take sedentary interventions the whole time. I have responded to many of them——

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No, I cannot allow any more interventions. I have given way four or five times and I shall not do so again.

Our programme is highly concessional. All new aid to the poorest is on grant terms, which avoids adding to their debt burden. We have the most rigorous criteria—economic, technical and environmental—to ensure the quality of the programmes and projects that we support. Our aid is well targeted on areas of key relevance to the central aim of sustainable development, as was recognised at UNCED.

Long-term aid has helped some developing countries to create the right climate for economic growth and investment by providing incentives and support for reforms. Aid cannot do it all, however. It is enormously important to accept the argument that a comprehensive approach to the problems is needed—an argument that was stressed at the summit. A comprehensive approach bringing together trade, debt relief and well-targeted bilateral and multilateral aid is the way to help the developing world.

I was deeply disappointed with the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West. I was also deeply disappointed with the terms of his motion. So far as I am aware, the motion was received only very late last night, but it looked as though it had been written long before anyone went to Tokyo. It is remarkable that the objectives that the motion complains were not achieved in Tokyo were in fact achieved in Tokyo.

Mr. Meacher: Such as?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I will tell the hon. Gentleman. As I said, the economic summit is not a decision-making organisation, but the Prime Minister secured agreement on the call to the Paris Club to reconsider introducing improved debt reduction terms for those countries in greatest need. The hon. Member for Oldham, West states in his motion that the G7 summit failed

"to agree any new significant programme of debt relief".

He is wrong. He goes on to state that the G7 summit failed

"to ensure any adequate place for developing countries in future world trading patterns via the GATT Uruguay Round".

Developing countries stand to gain from increased and fairer flows of trade, which will result from the Uruguay round. The hon. Member further states that the Government should

"prepare a new British and international initiative for debt write-off for the poorest countries".

We have no need for new initiatives as we have the Trinidad terms—the initiative launched by the Prime Minister. The rest of the world is beginning to accept the arguments that we have deployed over the years for an extension of the Trinidad terms. We are taking the initiative. We have pressed for that initiative. The hon. Member's motion is absurd.

Mr. Meacher: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Do not spoil my speech. I shall not give way as I have given way to the hon. Member several times.

The hon. Gentleman said that the Government should take the lead in setting out a trading framework which will ensure that developing countries can play a full part in the world trading system. The key to achieving that aim is to pursue with vigour the chance to conclude the GATT process and to increase the trade of the poor world by $90 billion per year.

The British Government have pushed for some time for the phasing out of the multi-fibre arrangement, and the incorporation of trade in textiles into the general agreement on tariffs and trade as part of the Uruguay round. That will improve developing countries' access to our textile markets.

I urge the House to consider those matters. It should consider the context of the aid in the correct dimension of a wider context which contains all the factors involved, and reject the motion.

8 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I shall start by confessing to the House that during my long time here I have never discovered how to be in two places at once. I have an engagement which will prevent me from listening to the entire debate, but my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has kindly offered to do so. Therefore, I owe the House the courtesy of being brief. I shall deal with the issues of aid, trade and debt in that order.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs is one of the most exasperating Ministers to follow in any debate. I have listened for 38 minutes to a speech which had, at the most, 18 minutes' worth of content. The Minister is so nice that he keeps interrupting himself—the asides and diversions prolonged his speech. He asked Opposition Members to stop asking questions, to stop chuntering and to stop grinning. He stopped short of asking them to stop breathing. Everything that the Opposition did appeared to prolong the speech. The Minister's most revealing aside was when he confided in us that he agreed with Government policy. That fact is worth highlighting in yellow in *Hansard*.

There was an exchange of statistics on aid and, as so often happens in this place when the Government and the Opposition exchange statistics, both were correct, but they were trading different ones. Sadly, in 1992 our official development assistance fell from 0·32 per cent. to 0·31 per cent. of gross domestic product. We moved away from the United Nations target, instead of moving towards half the United Nations target. That fact is incontrovertible.

As the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said, since 1991 our overseas development aid budget relay assistance budget has fallen by 4 per cent. The Minister countered that by saying that the budget for 1993-94 shows an increase of 1 per cent., which is splendid, and if we add the two together there is a net decrease of 3 per cent. He asked the Opposition if they would at least agree on the basic figure. Even my elemental arithmetic allows me to work out that one plus minus four equals minus three. The Minister produced a figure for 1987.

The Government's record on overseas aid since they came to power in 1979 has been lamentable and the fault for that lies with the previous Prime Minister. It has to be said in favour of the present Prime Minister that he has changed the record so that it is no longer totally disgraceful, but rather poor. That is all that can be said about it.

I am glad that the Minister for Trade is present and is to sum up the debate—I shall be back to hear what he has to say. I want to ask him a specific question on the future aid budget. It is a question raised by the House of Lords in the report published last month by the Select Committee on European Communities. We are committed to an increase in the European Community's aid programme. The Lords report makes interesting reading as it commends the European Community's aid programme. On page 22, paragraph (b), it states:

> "We are concerned about the potential serious effect on the United Kingdom's own bilateral programme because of the decision to increase EC aid without knowing whether there will be a corresponding increase in the ODA budget which finances both our share of the EC's programme and also our own bilateral programme. There is a risk of an unacceptable squeeze on our bilateral programme."

I hope that we can be told what the effect will be of our commitment to join in the share of the increased EC budget as well as enduring the current public expenditure squeeze on our budget.

It remains my party's firm view that we should not just make a general commitment—as the Government have—to the United Nations target on overseas aid without setting a date, but have a specific programme. No political party, even one which has been out of power as long as mine, can promise to do that tomorrow, but we should have a committed programme over a full Parliament to reach the United Nations target of 0·7 per cent., which is attainable and reasonable and should be met.

Two propositions were made, one by the Government and one by the Opposition, on which no agreement was reached across the Floor of the House. As the Minister said, there is no doubt that the developing world as a whole will benefit from increased liberalisation of trade. However, it is equally true, as one or two Opposition Members said, that the very poorest countries do not stand to benefit. Both propositions are correct. We are entitled to ask the Government what approach they take to future GATT talks—that is a direct question for the Minister for Trade. It seems that the GATT will not tackle the commodity crisis. The poorest countries naturally have to rely heavily for income on their own primary products, but the price of those products has been falling—it fell 30 per cent. in the 1980s.

The EC tariff on cocoa beans is 3 per cent., but if the beans are processed into cocoa butter in the country of origin the duty is 12 per cent. If they are further processed into chocolate it rises to 16 per cent. Such a policy discriminates against the economic development of primary products in the developing world. We are entitled to ask what the Government will do about such issues in future trade negotiations because such policies operate against countries that have few resources other than primary products that they wish to develop.

The Government must pay special attention to the commodity problem. They should consider compensation for the losses that the poorer countries would face under GATT agreements. They must consider some support to enable such countries to continue to benefit from some of their current trade preferences.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman appreciates that GATT trade negotiations are conducted through the Commission. Given the right hon. Gentleman's federalist tendencies, I am sure that he is happy for that to remain the case. There is a limit to what the Government can do, but we shall take account of the commodity issue and press for a solution.

Sir David Steel: If that is a form of commitment, I welcome it. Of course, the decisions are made by the Community as a whole. I said that we are entitled to ask what the Government are doing in the Community to have those policies changed. Inasmuch as my party has any influence with Ministers and similar parties elsewhere, I assure the Minister that we shall press exactly the same issues. We do not speak with two voices on this matter.

Debt is the most serious of the three issues facing the developing world. I accept that the G7 leaders had a healthy debate on the debt burden, especially that of Africa, but the figures given by the hon. Member for Oldham, West are correct and show the huge increase in debt in the past half dozen years. Although my figure on Zambia's debt is different from that of the hon. Gentleman, it shows that every man, woman and child in that country owes more than twice the national income. That is intolerable.

The fact that some of us were a bit disappointed by what happened in Tokyo is illustrated by the text that I read in the Library of the detailed communiqué and the Prime Minister's statement. I shall contrast what he said about the aid to Russia with what he said about aid to the poorest countries. He said that the Group of Seven had put together an unprecedented set of measures to help Russia. He went on:

"We set out a programme worth some $3 billion to help privatisation and restructuring."

I am not in any way against those firm and specific proposals. However, later in the statement when the Prime Minister dealt with debt reduction, he said:

"I secured agreement that improved debt reduction terms should be considered for the poorest and most indebted countries. I hope this will carry implementation of the Trinidad terms further."

The Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), the hon. Member for Oldham, West and I went to see the Prime Minister before he left for Tokyo. Therefore, I am aware of that hope. However, the G7 summit did not produce the firm commitment to relieve debt in the poorest countries that it produced on the issue of aid to Russia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I think that the right hon. Gentleman gives us credit for trying. Success will be achieved by taking consensus forward. The alternative might be to have some sort of unilateral concession by the United Kingdom on some debt, but that would be nothing like as effective for the poor world as one that had the agreement of the other parties to the Paris Club.

Sir David Steel: When the Minister reads *Hansard* he will see that I thanked the Prime Minister for his efforts. We should not get carried away simply because G7 countries are considering the matter. As democratic politicians we are entitled to press for more specific action. The Minister tempts me to digress a little.

In the House and privately to us, the Prime Minister said that the Japanese Government, who are one of the major players, are philosophically reluctant to engage in debt write-off. I raised that with a Japanese Government representative a few days ago. He said that that was true, but that they would compensate for that by greatly increasing grants to the developing world so that it could pay off debt. I do not know the scale of that, but if the Japanese Government are pursuing that policy, at least they are not proving an obstacle to greater agreement among the G7 countries on the debt question.

Pressure on the commercial banks should not be passed over as lightly as the Minister did. If my memory serves me right, there was a measure in last year's Finance Bill to help the banks to write off debt. I am not a Treasury expert and someone from the Treasury would be needed to speak about that. Moreover, many commercial banks have made provision in their accounts for writing off debt but have not written it off. Surely the Government should have a word with the commercial banks to persuade them to do more on this issue.

Secondly, what is the Government's strategy towards the multilateral agencies on debt? The IMF and World bank meeting will be held in September. What stance will the Government take at that meeting to try to get the agencies to do more? As we have heard, the Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting and the international conference on African debt will be held in October. All those meetings are scheduled to be held shortly and there is scope for the Government to continue to take a high profile on debt relief. Yes, we shall thank them for trying, but we shall thank them even more when they succeed.

8.16 pm

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on his achievements at the G7 summit in Tokyo. He has returned from all three recent summit meetings—in Copenhagen, Edinburgh and Tokyo—with the consistent message that he wishes to see measures that will encourage economic development in the industrial world and in the third world.

At the Tokyo summit, there was major progress on debt, on the GATT talks and on world trade and unemployment. Those are the problems that will beset the world and we must try to deal with them in the third world, Russia, Asia, Europe and the Americas. The theme of the Prime Minister's message to the House on Monday was that he believed that more trade produced more jobs and that economic development was the way to deal with debt issues and the alleviation of poverty, to which we are all devoted.

One of the major issues in economic development in Africa and the third world is debt. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) rightly said that African debt is largely to the international financial institutions and not to the commercial banks or to Governments.

Therefore, the debt problem in Africa, and especially in Zambia about which the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was concerned, is a matter for the international financial institutions. To clear that debt, we must consider complete debt forgiveness. In that context, the Japanese example is important, but without debt forgiveness interest continues to mount. Debt forgiveness is needed from the Japanese and I am afraid that we shall

have to press them still further, because just giving grants to repay debt will not be sufficient to pay the capital let alone the interest that has accrued on much African debt. That is especially true of the highly indebted Zambia.

Therefore, there has to be bilateral action by the member states of the G7 and others to write off debt in the Trinidad terms to which every hon. Member has referred. It was pioneered by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer and he has continued to press it throughout all the international conferences he has attended.

We have to take further initiatives and consider all the debts in each country—private debts, commercial debts, trading debts and debts to international financial institutions—make an overall settlement with each country and arrange for repayments to be made over an extended period. Some 35 years or more may be necessary for those countries to be able to afford to repay the debts on a controlled basis without taking too much of their export earnings or their gross domestic product which in some countries in Africa is entirely hypothecated to the repayment of debt.

Considerable progress has been made in debt repayment. One can point immediately to Mexico which was one of the major indebted countries when we were considering these matters in the early 1980s and when the Brady plan came into existence. A great deal of effort has gone into Mexico, and Mexican debt has now been stabilised. We are seeing inward investment into Mexico and the stopping of capital flight from Mexico which is becoming a focus for inward investment. That represents a great international success in dealing with debt worldwide. The same story applies to many countries in South America.

The international community, with Britain playing a leading role, has had considerable success which we should not underestimate or denigrate. However, we have to go further; it is never enough—but that always applies to all aid issues.

Our own aid budget, of course, is not, and never will be, enough to deal with all the problems, but I should like to make one or two suggestions. Our aid programme now, which is of high quality, is probably stretched too tightly over too many objectives to become as purposeful and effective as we should like.

The objectives for overseas aid in Command Paper 2202, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's departmental report, list a whole set of aims, which include

"the adoption of economic policies that reduce price distortions and rely more on the market; encouragement of the private sector as a source of wealth creation; investment in economic and social infrastructure; improvements in women's status; higher standards in political systems, public administration and the legal sector; projects and programmes which have a positive impact on the lives of the poorest people; and investment and planning to help protect the economy from natural disasters."

That is not a full summary of what the Overseas Development Adminstration does, but it is a considerable programme to try to implement in any country, particularly in the large number of countries to which our aid budget is devoted.

I do not believe that we should cut out aid to any particular country except those with a hostile economic and governmental structure which makes economic development impossible. To use President Reagan's expression, we must concentrate more on developing measures by which we can give people in these countries the means to cure their economic problems. We should give them more of the fishing rod and less of the fish.

For example, we must reduce our concentration on health matters, education matters and technical assistance, which involves sending executives and civil servants to help with administration or central banking functions. We have to reduce those activities and concentrate more on economic development and encouraging those countries to adopt economic policies and introduce Government measures to encourage economic development. That means that we have to encourage the private sector to develop in those countries and help them to take out public sector mismanagement. For example, appalling waste can be seen in many of the Zambian parastatals which are inefficient and corrupt. We need to take them out of that inefficient management and help them get back into prosperous and efficient operations in the private sector.

The Overseas Development Administration is to be congratulated as it has started to develop some of its programme towards that end, but it must be taken very much further forward. One of the ways in which the Overseas Development Administration is immensely successful is through the Commonwealth Development Corporation and I shall say a few words about the problems that now face that corporation which I had the honour to serve in a junior capacity before I entered the House.

At present, as a result of the public expenditure survey settlement, the corporation has been left without access to the aid programme's budget and therefore to low-interest loans. If that programme continues, the Commonwealth Development Corporation will have to come out of the very places that we need to support, such as Africa. Those countries are the most difficult places in which to get economic development started. It will become exceedingly difficult for the CDC to invest in those countries, repay the loans with interest to the Government and pay tax on those loans, which are its current terms of reference and method of operation.

If, on the other hand, the Government renew their support for the Commonwealth Development Corporation, the CDC can get beneath Government level, into the wealth-creating sectors of the economy and invest in profitable operations, including, of course, those producing commodities.

We have heard about the problem of prices. We have to recognise that GATT is a very important issue for the third world countries and begin to address the problem of low and falling commodity prices which have created many problems in the third world over the past decade.

If we begin to eliminate agricultural surpluses by the elimination of subsidy in our over-subsidised northern agriculture arenas in commodities such as sugar, we will stop exporting to the world markets. The European Community exports more than 3 million tonnes of sugar to world markets with what effect? Of course, it reduces the world price of sugar and third world countries are exporting their sugar at world prices.

If we stop subsidised sugar and other commodities coming on to the world market, we will raise the prices that third world countries get for their commodities and begin the process of enriching those countries and enabling them to buy products from our countries, thus benefiting from world trade. That would benefit third world countries and enable them to help themselves. Quite frankly, that is the

[Mr. Bowen Wells]

only way in which those countries will begin to be able to repay debt and improve their standards of living. I am forced to conclude that we must concentrate on third world countries' wealth-creating sectors, support them through aid, and reduce or write off their debts—or at least make them capable of repaying them, so that further investment by private banks and international financial institutions is not inhibited.

Those institutions have a problem in Africa, and I hope that my hon. Friends will ensure that it is raised at the World bank meeting in September. I am concerned particularly about repaying international financial institution debt without reducing the inward flow of moneys from those institutions and investment in the economic cycle of which I have spoken.

Further progress has been made in finding a way in which the world economy can begin to work to the benefit of countries in not only the north—which we desperately need, if we are to be able to employ more people—but the third world. Only a beneficial relationship between the two will bring success in addressing world poverty problems.

8.30 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): I did not intend to refer specifically to aid agencies—which are always helpful in providing up-to-date information on their activities and advice for the purposes of such debates. However, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs reacted like a wounded animal to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on the success or otherwise of the Tokyo summit, and the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) also seems to think that the summit was a success and that the G7 ought to be congratulated.

I will quote briefly from comments by professional agencies in the field which put aid programmes into effect, and which have regular contact with many of the countries in question. ActionAid stated:

"The tariff cuts agreed at the summit last week are unlikely to provide many benefits for developing countries. It is disappointing that the failure to include tariffs on agricultural products may postpone agreement at the GATT talks on areas (such as agriculture) essential for the future of developing countries."

Christian Aid commenteed:

"The G7 Tokyo Summit Economic Declaration . . . does little to promote debt relief for the Third World; it merely reaffirms the status quo."

Oxfam stated:

"Following the failure of the G7 meeting yet again to address the problem of debt, HMG must redouble its efforts to get the issue firmly on the international agenda."

Those comments counter the claims made by the Minister and Conservative Members in tonight's debate. I know which side I am on in reaching my conclusions.

I am in no doubt that, not for the first time, the G7 summit promised little and delivered even less to the developing world. The declaration does little more than maintain the status quo, while the Prime Minister's performance did not enhance his poor aid record, or that of this country over the past decade.

In 1989, when the Prime Minister was Chancellor of the Exchequer, he told the G7 summit that the Trinidad terms ought to be introduced with a view to easing the third world's crippling debt burden. We sought to support that initiative, and we continue to do so. I would have preferred a 66 per cent. write-off rather than the 50 per cent. for which the Toronto terms provided.

Four years later, even that modest improvement has not been delivered. That write-off would not itself be sufficient to counter the crippling effects of debt repayment, yet the Prime Minister—despite the fine words of Conservative Members—was unable to deliver even that pledge, far less his new proposal for 80 per cent. write-off.

Only last month, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, addressing the One World Action conference on debt, claimed that Britain would press for improved debt reduction terms for poor and heavily indebted countries. He said:

"for some of them, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, much more needs to be done. . . We in the UK would like to see the Trinidad terms improve so that they conform more closely to the proposals John Major put forward in Trinidad in 1990."

I am sorry that the Under-Secretary of State has left the Chamber, presumably to take his evening meal—although he has every right to do so. I wanted to put to him a question, of which his advisers will no doubt inform him when he returns to reply to the debate.

Where is the evidence that the good intentions espoused by the Prime Minister, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and other Ministers were vigorously pursued at Tokyo? It is no use the Under-Secretary praising the Prime Minister. What did the British initiatives at Tokyo actually produce for the poor?

Mr. Needham: I shall be winding up the debate.

Mr. Watson: Then I hope that the Minister for Trade will answer that question.

The summit at least acknowledged the particular needs of sub-Saharan Africa, but the Under-Secretary of State made no commitment to respond to those needs. One way would be to announce additional assistance from the current public spending round. Without such a commitment, this country's already poor record of aid spending will at best remain at current levels. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West spelt out that the freeze will amount to a 4 per cent. reduction in real terms. ODA funding is already in reverse, at 0·31 per cent. of gross domestic product this year, compared with 0·32 per cent. last year, which is well short of the United Nations figure.

I wholly endorse the view of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), that that should be an achievable target of a Parliament. Labour made a commitment to the United Nations target in its aid proposals at the last general election, and the United Nations figure is clearly endorsed by the Liberal Democrats. If the Government had a clear commitment to aid, they would at least announce a timetable to implement the United Nations target.

How do the Minister and the Government expect us to take them seriously when they are back-peddling and making no real attempts to acknowledge or to deal with the mountain of debt that is weighing down and stunting the growth potential of the third world?

The Minister for Overseas Development, Lady Chalker, constantly talks up her Department's relatively modest aid to countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. The briefings that emanate from the ODA refer to

£20 million of food aid here or £20 million of humanitarian assistance there. I do not mean to belittle those valuable efforts, which I commend if they meet their objectives, but they pale into insignificance alongside the crippling debt burden of many African countries.

This ought to be a time of hope for Africa. Things are looking better in terms of developing democracies in a number of countries. Ethiopia, Eritrea and Mozambique —which are populated by some of the world's most vulnerable people—have seen peace established and maintained after decades of armed conflict. However, of necessity, they remain fragile and are seriously undermined by lack of support from the international community, which allows their debt burden to rise.

Nowhere is the legacy of accumulated debt more threatening than in Ethiopia. It is estimated that its economy shrunk 6 per cent. last year, and that it will need to find £1 billion annually over the next three years just to cover debt service payments. It is surely important that such a sum should be used to develop Ethiopia's economy, feed its people in the short term, and ensure that it can sustain itself in the long term. That is more important than servicing debts which, no matter how much is repaid, seem to grow ever larger.

From the threadbare section on aid that emerged from the Tokyo declaration, it is clear that the world's richest nations failed to grasp the fundamental point. That statement was vague and complacent:

"We will continue to strengthen our support for their self-help efforts based on the principles of good governance. We will also encourage them"—

the developing countries, that is—

"to follow sound and open economic policies to create a solid base for sustainable economic growth."

"Encourage" is the key word. Many of the countries concerned have been effectively strangled by structural adjustment programmes, mainly through the World bank.

The declaration continues:

"we will make all efforts"—

there is nothing more precise than that—

"to enhance development assistance in order to respond to ongoing needs as well as new requirements."

Although the Prime Minister and the other G7 leaders may have achieved some successes, I venture to suggest that tackling the issues of aid, trade and debt in the developing world was not one of them.

The massive wave of debt repayment that washes over the poorest countries every year hits Africa hardest. Between 1985 and 1992, the continent repaid more than £80 billion in servicing its debt, diverting Government spending from desperate social need and choking at birth any real chance of recovery. To concentrate on Africa—in which I have taken a particular interest—is not to ignore the need to assist other developing countries; I accept that need exists much further afield. It merely reflects the priorities at a time of scarce economic resources throughout the world.

Of course, everything is relative. In Latin America, external debt amounts to an average of 37 per cent. of gross domestic product; in the United Kingdom, the figure is about 6 per cent. In Africa, the average exceeds 100 per cent., and is much higher than that in many of the poorest nations. Zambia has already been mentioned.

The stark fact that must be spelt out repeatedly until it is both grasped and acted on is that sub-Saharan Africa owes more than it earns, and cannot hope to repay that debt in the foreseeable future. The only way in which those countries can be enabled to recover and build up their economies is the writing off of debt. The sole question should be what percentage is written off.

It could be argued that the write-off should be total, although in the past the Government have argued that full write-offs encourage debtor countries to ignore their repayment requirements. That is all very well, but to apply such a stricture to the poorest countries while applying different criteria to assistance to Russia—or the writing off of most of what Egypt and Poland owed—is to employ double standards that invite cynicism when issuing from the mouths that call for the implementation of the Trinidad terms while failing to deliver.

That tendency to cyncism is hardly diminished when we consider the performance of British banks in regard to third world lending. Most shy away from Africa, concentrating instead on Latin America—but not Lloyds and the Midland, which have done very well out of the debt built up by the developing world. Over the past three years, the developing countries have propped up the Midland, subsidising its United Kingdom operations. In 1991, without profits from third world debt, the bank would have recorded a loss of about £50 million rather than a profit of £36 million. Last year, £82 million of its operating income came from developing countries' activities.

Recently, Ben Jackson of the World Development Movement said:

"It is unacceptable for the banks to enjoy tax holidays at the expense of British taxpayers without passing a penny of that relief onto the world's poor and then, when it suits them, to write those debts back into their accounts".

For the Midland, third world debt has turned into a nice little money earner. Its shareholders may be satisfied, but the world's poor certainly are not. Debt repayments continue to flood out of the third world. I invite the Minister to condemn the banks' self-seeking approach, and to endeavour to close any loopholes that permit such an approach.

There are two main reasons why the world's poorest countries should have been offered a major programme of assistance last week. First, they have generally done their best to repay their debts, but have simply been unable to do so. For instance, 10 years ago, the total external third world debt amounted to about £550 billion; in the intervening decade, debtor countries have paid back nearly £1,000 billion more, but they now owe £1,100 billion. They are not merely running fast to stand still; they are being propelled backwards at a rate of knots. That cannot be allowed to continue.

Secondly, the crisis is not of the debtor countries' own making. I do not deny that there are examples of economic mismanagement, largely because Governments are running economies for the first time; but a cocktail of plummeting commodity prices and soaring interest rates has caused Africa's debt burden to spiral out of all control. As a result of the diversion of scarce resources, Africa now spends four times as much on debt repayments as it spends on health care. The House has already debated the dreadful health problems on that continent.

I agree with the Minister about the need to use trade as a means of assisting such countries. Certainly, there is far more to be gained from trading with them than from simply doling out aid. Trade links provide a potential lifeline for developing countries. I think the Minister said that trade with the developing world amounted to three

[Mr. Watson]

times the value of aid; I believe that the figure is higher, but I will not quibble. The point is that most developing countries rely on a small number of primary commodities. The World bank's commodity price index has plummeted by some 30 per cent., with all-too-predictable results for the poorest countries.

As has been pointed out, the tariff cuts agreed at last week's summit are unlikely to provide many benefits for developing countries. None of the aid agencies considers that anything meaningful has emerged from Tokyo. It was a lost opportunity for the G7 nations. Of course we in the developed world have our own problems, but it is simply not good enough to pass up the opportunity to help the developing countries, instead producing a few bland paragraphs in a subsequent announcement.

Oxfam is one of the aid agencies that called for full implementation of the Trinidad terms. It was supported by a recently formed all-party parliamentary group called Africa Caucus, whose members include the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)—who was present earlier—and myself. We urged the G7 leaders to give serious consideration to debt write-off at the summit: it would allow developing countries to gain the breathing space necessary to enable their economies to recover and begin the inevitably slow climb towards sustainable recovery.

Although that approach proved ineffective, Africa Caucus will continue to campaign for at least a year to highlight the serious plight of African countries, and to seek the support of the developed nations.

ActionAid, not being content with dwelling on the past, has targeted the future, referring to the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World bank in the autumn and the international conference on African development which will take place in October. Although the declaration refers to that, and also to the population conference to be held in Cairo in 1994, it does not suggest a link between those events to help the poor. As things stand, they will prove no more significant than the Tokyo summit—perhaps even less significant.

The Government must play a much more vigorous role in ensuring that the plight of the debt-burdened nations is treated seriously at such fora, and that that consideration is translated into meaningful action. So far, that has not happened.

If both the Ministers present today—and the Prime Minister—expect to be taken seriously in regard to aid, trade and debt, I suggest that they make firm commitments. First, although it stresses the need to alleviate poverty, the ODA does not measure the amount that it spends for that purpose; it is impossible to obtain a figure showing the effects of that spending. I understand that no benchmarks are available to assess the ODA's performance. That gap ought to be filled. I ask the Minister to make attempts to get the ODA quickly to introduce indicators and benchmarks so that its record can be evaluated.

I mentioned earlier that the Government should also revoke the decision to freeze between now and 1996 the official aid figure that has already been announced. I referred to the effect that that will have. It amounts to de facto cuts, which represent a further betrayal of the developing world. Those cuts should not be forced on them after the empty hand that was shown to them at Tokyo.

The Minister should also commit additional assistance from the current public spending round to the poorest nations. Apart from increasing the assistance given to them, it might also act as an incentive to Britain's G7 partners, who are clearly in need of, shall we say, a vigorous prod in that direction. If that is not done, nothing will change.

Can the Minister assure us that the British Government will match their good intentions with tangible evidence of their determination to bring about the implementation of the Trinidad terms? They are taken along to the G7 and other summits, but nothing really meaningful seems to emerge. If the Government do not do that, I fear that, for the world's poor, it will be a case yet again—and I am sick and tired of this—of jam tomorrow. Many of those people do not have the ability to get the bread on which any jam, whatever form it might take, could be spread at any future time. It is time to act. We really must provide something more tangible than what was produced at last week's G7 summit.

8.50 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson), whose views and expertise we recognise. However, the motion on the Order Paper amounts to shadow boxing by the shadow Cabinet. Most people realised that this G7 summit was perhaps the least fortuitous for a long time. The world is faced with many economic problems. The Japanese in particular were in difficulties, due to their elections. It was wrong to imagine, therefore, that one could go along to the G7 and find that people were prepared to find a way of resolving the problems faced by developing countries.

As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central said, we saw the Prime Minister before he went to the G7 summit. His commitment is as strong as it was when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. His recognition of the debt problem is still as complete as it was when he made those voluntary moves. He did not make them for any other reason than his own interest in the subject and his commitment to it. I suspect that if it were not for the Prime Minister, this issue would not have been raised at the G7 summit, that it would not have featured in the communiqué and that there would have been no commitment to follow it up.

Furthermore, no one should underestimate the views of the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was also in Tokyo and with whom I have had the opportunity to discuss briefly what happened. His commitment to international order equals that of the Prime Minister. I am sure that at future international meetings the Chancellor of the Exchequer will use his influence to cajole, persuade or, dare I say it, bully other nations which do not hold the same view about some of the poorest parts of the world, or about debt that can never be repaid.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) referred to the fact that the Japanese do not believe in forging debt. My research work in Tanzania showed me that when that country borrowed money from the Intenational Monetary Fund about 15 years ago it borrowed a basket of currencies, most of which consisted of Japanese yen. Tanzania borrowed that money at a time when interest rates were low. Nobody told

Tanzania that 10 years later, when it would have to repay the debt, it would be obliged to go on to the world market and buy yen when the interest rate was something like 350 per cent.

No one should doubt, either, the commitment of the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for Overseas Development to finding a solution to the problems that we are debating. They have shown consistent concern and they have immense practical experience of those problems. They understand the need to provide high levels of support through a combination of debt relief, better trade terms and multilateral and bilateral aid programmes.

Many of the G7 countries are concerned about the overall gap in aid levels, which continues to widen. More and more countries, under economic pressure, are reducing and redirecting their aid programmes—for example, Canada, the United States and Sweden—at a time when the needs of sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world have never been greater. We should be concerned about the whole international aid effort and the way in which it is moving against the incredible demands for aid, in particular from sub-Saharan Africa.

I am sure that all hon. Members who are now in the Chamber have signed my early-day motion 2099, which calls on Her Majesty's Government to find an extra £100 million for sub-Saharan Africa. I think that 124 hon. Members have already signed it. This country has particular knowledge of Africa. If we are not to the fore in arguing the case for Africa, no one else will. We must encourage the positive changes that we see taking place in southern Africa, Mozambique and Ethiopia.

Those of us who take a close interest in Africa, however, are always worried about Africa taking three steps forward and three steps back. Recent events in Angola, Nigeria and Zaire are very unwelcome. It is nevertheless in the long-term interests of those countries to know that the support of this country and of this Administration, and, I hope, more encouraging support from the Opposition than has been shown hitherto, is one way to get the richer nations of the world to recognise their plight.

I recognise how committed the non-governmental organisations are to finding the solution to these problems. It is easy to say that the G7 was a write-off if one does not appreciate how hard the negotiations can be. I have negotiated with NGOs at various international meetings and I cannot say that they are always brilliant when it comes to producing results. When I say that, I have to declare an interest. I am a member of the overseas committee of the Save the Children Fund. I am also on the board of Christian Aid—unpaid, of course.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Central referred to Poverty Focus. I was at the conference at which Action Aid initiated Poverty Focus. Those of us who have experience of overseas development find it difficult to be exact about precisely what it is that relieves poverty. I could take hon. Members to a place in Kenya where a road has done more to relieve poverty than any seemingly positive Poverty Focus programme. It led to a large number of villages having access to the market and has lifted the burden of poverty from those places. One would not necessarily say, though, that a road programme was a Poverty Focus issue. One must be careful about trying to define the criteria too closely.

I support the ODA programme, 80 per cent. of which goes to the 50 poorest countries. It is the right one. We should keep a constant eye on that sort of programme to ensure that it goes a long way to relieving poverty. I am not as convinced as others that one can define a "poverty-related programme"—one cannot say that a programme is poverty related and that is where we should be targeting our bilateral aid.

I have always supported the Government's commitment to quality aid. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), I have always argued that it should be more. In the present circumstances, I recognise that the Prime Minister is pursuing the uprating of the debt terms from what are now accepted universally and known as the enhanced Toronto terms to get to the original Trinidad terms. That would be a major step forward. I do not understand why we should go beyond the Trinidad terms in terms of international acceptance until we have the Trinidad terms. That is what the Prime Minister is pushing for and it is the direction in which we should be going.

I shall raise some concerns that are important in terms of examining the way in which aid programmes are developing. One of those concerns is the incredible pressure that the state of the world is putting on emergency relief. I am sure that not everyone recognises that emergency relief in the ODA budget has increased five-fold since 1987—it was £34 million in 1987 and is £171 million in 1992-93.

Many of us recognise that that is essential humanitarian aid. It repairs damage caused by civil wars and breakdowns in society. It is for refugees, food and immediate relief of disaster situations. If we look at what that money could do and if we look at some of the people who are causing the problems for others in their countries, there is a significant increase in development and sustainable aid if that is where it should be targeted.

I recognise that ODA has a special reputation for disaster relief. It has done that successfully for as long as I have been in the House—it goes back further than 1987 when we had the original famines in Ethiopia and other parts of Africa. We should draw more attention to the fact that the money is being diverted from sustainable developmental aid. It is not being wasted, because it is essential to protect human life, but it is being used for the opposite to what the ODA programme should be about. It is the opposite to what we believe long-term sustainable development and the money that we vote for that head should be used for.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I share the hon. Gentleman's view entirely. When there is a disaster at home, we find money from a contingency fund which we do not otherwise call on and which is not under that budget head for the year. Does he agree that the money that has often been diverted for international relief operations, which comes out of the ODA budget pocket, should be regarded as a separate head, a contingency, when we come to the rescue of fellow human beings in the world? If we did that, the ODA budget could be geared to and directed at the sustainable, long-term progressive work for which the hon. Gentleman is arguing.

Mr. Lester: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is greatly to the credit of the Prime Minister that, for the first time, the Government's contingency fund has been used to restore to ODA money that has been used for humanitarian relief. It was not true of the previous Prime

[Mr. Lester]

Minister, but it is certainly true of this one. I know that that recommendation will be supported by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, which is currently drafting a report on the expenditure of the Foreign Office and the ODA.

Another pressure on the ODA budget that we should understand is the proportion of multilateral aid that is taken for peacekeeping and the proportion that goes to the European Development Fund. Like the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, I support that principle. It has always seemed to be absolutely right that the strength of the European Community can do far more for developmental assistance than individual countries picking off a little bit here and a little bit there, however important that is.

As we see an increasing proportion of our aid budget going through multilateral agencies and the European Development Fund, we need a keen evaluation of the schemes that are taken at that level. We must take seriously the fact that that is where our aid programme is increasingly being used. We should be ensuring that everything that we do through those multilateral agencies is every bit as good as the bilateral programmes for which we are responsible.

Another concern is the increased assistance to the former Soviet Union. In the case of this Government, that is in addition to the moneys originally voted for overseas assistance. That is not true of many other countries in the European Community.

When considering overall percentages of aid, it must be remembered that aid given to the Soviet Union and to central Europe does not appear as overseas development. It comes on top of and is no part of the overseas development assistance, yet it is included under that budget.

The balance between multilateral and bilateral aid is changing fundamentally and it will not be many years before multilateral aid will be greater than our bilateral aid programme. It is therefore important that the Government and all of us who take an interest in such matters should ensure that we first look for quality and effectiveness of those multilateral programmes and, when there is an increase in the ODA budget, that we also ensure that it goes to our bilateral programme to achieve the sustainable development to which we are committed.

The Government—especially the Prime Minister and the Chancellor—must remain acutely conscious of all the concerns that are expressed internationally and nationally and by the NGOs. I am sure that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor will follow the progress made at the G7 summit in all the areas about which we are concerned and in all the places where it is most effective—debt, trade and development.

9.7 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I shall begin by agreeing with my namesake, the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester). He commented on the major crisis among the main aid donors and the reductions in aid given. That does not let this country off the hook. For a long time, we have ranked as one of the lowest main donors of aid. That is a tragedy for the developing countries and the world as a whole.

It is unfortunate that a Minister is not present for such a debate as this—not because I doubt the competence of those who are present, but simply because it downgrades the whole stature and nature of such a debate and rather gives the impression that we regard overseas aid as second class, which of course we do not.

Most of us who have fought elections—I have fought and won more than most—know that one of the biggest meetings held during election campaigns is on aid, development and peace, and is usually organised by the church. There is no question but that the general public want to support more aid, development and trade in the developing world. Surveys have shown that over half the people in the country are prepared to pay higher taxes if it would help to alleviate the poverty and the terrible problems of the third-world countries that they have seen depicted on their television screens.

Even though it is obvious, it needs to be restated that the examples of famine and starvation in developing countries and the pictures of floods and drought that we have all seen are much more to do with wars, with arms sales, and with debt and trade restrictions than with the indigenous problems.

Trade restrictions especially lock countries into a vicious circle of growing and unending misery. For every £1 given in aid, £2 is taken back as interest repayments on debt. The third world loses more through the trade policies of the rich north and war, often sadly fuelled by arms sales —and we seem to be at it again—which robs those countries of the resources they need, robs the children of their future and leaves behind a trail of misery.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe referred in passing to the briefing of other hon. Members by overseas aid agencies. I am not implying that he was disparaging about it, but he certainly questioned it. I do not believe that all the agencies can be wrong in their briefing or on what they have said about the recent summit and about GATT. Indeed, I pay tribute to those agencies, and to all those who work in aid and development. They often work under appalling conditions and some of them lose their lives, as we have recently seen.

Those workers obviously brief hon. Members. They want more aid and are concerned about what is happening. We have to listen to them because, although we may have an opportunity from time to time to go to those countries to see the problems for ourselves, we can never have the breadth of vision, understanding and experience that the people working there have.

Much attention has been paid to the Trinidad terms and to the whole question of trade. Those terms were welcomed by all in the House. I remember writing at the time that I was pleased that the Government had made a move in that direction. However, the matter does not end there. That is where it began, and things should have developed from there and have gone on apace.

The Prime Minister told the world leaders in Rio—no one would disagree—

> "No one who has come here can plead ignorance. More people than ever before, one billion, live in abject poverty."

In the same year, our aid budget for developing countries was frozen until 1996-97. That is disgraceful for a country that is still as rich as ours is.

One of the big problems which has already been mentioned is debt. That problem enormously undermines the development and growth of third-world countries. The difficulty about debt is that, unless there is a thorough and

fundamental shift from the way in which we look at it and what we do about it, the position of third-world and developing countries will not change very much.

It is estimated that as much as 42 per cent. of the developing world's debt is a result of the deteriorating terms of trade, and that the servicing of that debt accounts for as much as one third of the foreign exports won by African and Latin American countries. The Minister was right to stress the importance of trade, but as long as those countries have to pay off the debt burden at the present level, the benefits of trade are swallowed up and many of them will never be able to repay those debts. That is a tragedy.

One of the comments made by my hon. Friends was challenged by Conservative Members. The Government were right in 1991 to switch aid so that 81 per cent. of United Kingdom bilateral aid went to the poorest 50 countries, after a great deal of pressure from many agencies and others. Yet focusing on poor countries does not go hand in hand with targeting the poorest communities.

The United Nations Children's Fund has pointed out that just 9·1 per cent. of bilateral aid was spent on basic needs in 1989. I welcome the shift to the poorest countries, but I believe that we must have a means of monitoring where the aid goes and its effectiveness if we are to reach the world's poorest people. Sadly, we are not reaching them.

We all agree that trade is vital, but I do not think that we can say that, because we have cut aid, we can now go to trade as an alternative. Debt, trade and aid all hang together. Trade produces six times more income for poor countries than aid does. We all want to reach a position where aid is not necessary because trade is doing the trick for developing countries.

Sadly, since the early 1970s, the prices paid for developing countries' primary exports have declined by more than 20 per cent., which is a tremendous decline. Over the past two decades, the share of trade of sub-Saharan Africa, about which we are all concerned, has shrunk by almost three quarters to a mere 1 per cent. of world trade. That compares to 19·3 per cent. for developing countries as a whole. Yes, we want to see trade, but we want it to be in a context beneficial to the countries involved.

The tariff cuts agreed at the G7 summit last week are unlikely, as has been said, to provide many benefits for developing countries. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) said, it is disappointing that the failure to include tariffs on agricultural products may postpone agreement at the GATT talks on such areas, which are vital for the development of many countries.

We all agree that trade is important, and the recent Uruguay round will bring some benefits for developing countries. In agriculture, some protectionism and some subsidies will fall, but the poorest countries are likely to be worse off. They will be unable to take advantage of new market opportunities, yet they will have to open up to foreign competition. They will see the relative value of their current trade preferences being undermined.

Developing service sectors in the third world could be wiped out, and new rules on property will make technology transfer and economic development more difficult. In other words, the poorest countries will be unable to benefit from the good results of many of the recent talks.

GATT will have a very limited impact on the common agricultural policy, which has been mentioned in the House again, and again because it discriminates against third-world products. The dumping of European subsidised agricultural products pulls down world prices, creates instability and wipes out markets for poor farmers. It creates dependence on food imports and develops tastes for goods that people can ill afford. The Trinidad terms were welcome, but what took place at the summit recently did very little for the world's poorest people.

The short and longer-term outlooks for Africa are very bleak. The proportion of debt has increased from the equivalent of 28 per cent. in 1982 to 108 per cent. in 1992. In effect, Britain's bilateral aid and development resources are being diverted back to donor countries through the International Monetary Fund and the World bank in the form of debt repayments. Africa's attempts to extricate itself from that burden are having terrible consequences for the world economy, and are bankrupting low-income families.

Most of Africa faces a debt service to export ratio of more than 30 per cent., and for some it is more than 100 per cent. Debt servicing is leading to investment starvation, the flight of foreign capital, mounting trade deficits and mass unemployment, and is undermining Africa's ability to repay. The continent avoids defaulting on its debt obligations only by continually rescheduling them, which often undermines the very things and services for which the debt was incurred in the first place. That is the tragedy.

The Minister referred to population. Of course population control is important. I support it because it liberalises women, who should have the right to liberalise themselves from one pregnancy after another from the time they are 15 until they are 50. But do not let us kid ourselves that population is the cause of poverty in the third world. When we have our dinner tonight, we shall eat more in one meal than many a village in parts of Africa will have in a week. We should not allow it to be said that the third world is consuming too much of the world's resources. It is not true.

Although population is important from other points of view, I remind all hon. Members that children represent some security for the future. Although population control and family planning can be introduced and should be made available, it will be difficult to persuade people to reduce their families until they are sure that their children will survive and grow up and that they will have some security, and until one deals with the economic problems in developing countries. We consume more in the Tea Room every day than a family in a developing country does in a week, and we should never forget that. The world's resources are very unfairly distributed.

I wonder whether HIV and AIDS in developing countries have been discussed in any depth, but I do not believe that it was appropriate for them to be discussed at the summit, and therefore make no complaint. What is taking place, in Africa particularly, is heart-breaking and worrying, not only because of the AIDS epidemic among adults, but because thousands of children are being born, and will be born, with the HIV virus. They will be orphaned, and what is to become of them?

The Government underestimate the effect of AIDS in this country, and have cut the grant to some charities—but that is another story. At some time, however, the developing nations must consider what is happening to

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AIDS in developing and third-world countries and take it seriously. I am pleased that some organisations, backed by the Rockefeller Foundation, have co-operated to develop a programme, working with non-governmental organisations in those countries to give them the benefit of the information that we and others have on HIV in order to tackle that grave and frightening problem.

Anyone who has seen a country in that situation knows that any discussion about third-world development, especially in relation to Africa, cannot go on without taking into consideration what is happening in this respect.

Finally, I was glad to get some information today to show that my friends in the Baby Milk Action Campaign disrupted the annual general meeting of Nestlé to point out its disgraceful campaign to persuade mothers in developing countries not to breast-feed their children, but to feed them Nestlé products. We used to call it "Nessels" when I was a child, but I believe that it is "Nessleys" these days.

Yes, there has been some progress through the World Health Organisation to stop the advertising. We were all sickened to see healthy, beautiful black women with babies sucking a bottle when those babies should be breast-fed because it is better for babies anyway. I am delighted that my friends disrupted the meeting and tried to get Nestlé —it is not the only company, but it is the main one—to explain why it continues to provide and promote its milk products in developing countries. It is an absolute scandal that that should take place.

How can UNICEF and all the organisations that are doing so much to immunise and protect children against disease possibly work against that background? They are trying to persuade mothers to breast-feed because of the protection it gives, yet as a result of advertising, babies are dying. It is estimated that hundreds of babies are dying because they are not being breast-fed, but instead are being put on milk products when there is no clean water, and water and even bottles cannot be sterilised. It is a disgrace, and I hope that all hon. Members condemn it.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on raising this subject today. We cannot separate one item from another. We cannot say that it does not matter so much about aid, that yes, we have cut it, but look what we are doing on trade, and that we have done a little to reduce debt, so let us congratulate ourselves. Congratulation does not come into it. All these items hang together. Unless those of use who are fortunate enough to live in rich countries look at it in that way, one item will be set off against another. I welcome the debate, but I hope that in future we recognise that we are slipping badly in the aid stakes, and that we do something about it.

9.21 pm

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): I start by expressing my appreciation to the Opposition for choosing this matter for debate this evening. The subject cannot arise too often. I regret the slight slant in the motion. It should not be forgotten that, in the late 1980s, this Government and the noble Lord Lawson, as he now is, led the way on debt repayment. This country wrote off more than £1 billion-worth of debt and raised the profile of debt write-off with the rest of the industrial world. That should not be forgotten in the House or the country.

I am aware of the time, and the fact that others wish to speak, so my contribution will be much shorter than I should have liked it to be. I welcome the wording of the Government amendment. It puts the truth of the position. It does no harm to see it put firmly on the record that the Government

"welcomes the agreements by the G7 countries in Tokyo to consider improved debt reduction terms for the poorest and more indebted countries, including the possibility of earlier action on reducing the stock of debt on a case by case basis in accordance with the Prime Minister's Trinidad Terms initiative."

In the past, this country and others have given money on various repayment terms to countries that have mishandled it. We have wasted our money in trying to help. It has gone to people and into accounts that it should not have got near. I should like to think that today we are much more careful in giving taxpayers' money to help bridge the gap between the industrial world and third-world countries.

Far too often, industrial countries muddle the differentiation between support for home industry and overseas aid. We need a vigorous debate to differentiate between grant support for third-world countries and boosts that are necessary from time to time to help home industry engaged in exporting or in need of some inducement to expand.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) spoke most tellingly about the difference between the industrial world and the third world, and the way in which that gap is expanding. In military terms, it is almost like people with bows and arrows trying to compete with those with machine guns. It is the duty of the industrial world to try to ensure that that gap does not become an unreasonable and unacceptable difference.

We have a duty to decide when our help is to be a grant, and when it is to be a loan. We should not muddle that. We should not give loans and then decide that they should be grants. We must make that decision right at the start. We must be far more caring and differentiating about where we give that support, and in that way show an example to other countries. We have heard quotations already this evening about how some of them operate. We must lead the way in the third world countries by giving the money as a grant. We should not expect to get the money back at a later stage.

I should mention again the slight confusion that has emerged over the Commonwealth Development Corporation. It developed substantial funds over the years. It has a capital base of nearly £800 million, and can recycle its surpluses every single year. It does not require net new capital every year to sustain its programme. It should be able to sustain gross new lending of some £200 million a year.

I suggest that it is misleading to give the impression that the Government have somehow cut its support. It will provide new loans in the years to come, and while its lending will not exceed the levels of past loan repayments, it will certainly help us go on into the future.

As a moment of mild chiding, I should like to take up the point made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson), who made various comments about the banks. Some of those written-off debts have come back,

but I suggest that many of our banks have loaned considerable sums of money on an ill-advised basis to the third world and have written off billions of pounds, which is paid for today by many British account holders and taxpayers. Should we dismiss that lightly? The banks are getting some money back, but they have had to bear tremendous pain in writing off ill-advised debts in the past.

Those who have had the forbearance to listen to me in the past on trade and industry will know that I believe that we should help our exporters and our various industrial activities. However, to come back to my original point, we should not muddle the difference between the giving of aid and our support for our exporting and internal industries. If we make that division clearer, we shall benefit the whole world.

9.27 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): It is appropriate that this debate on the G7 summit, on which I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), should follow yesterday's debate. Within the past 24 hours we have debated clause 42 of the Finance Bill, which would force through VAT on fuel and thus create real poverty in Britain. What concerns me is that there are real connections to be made between the economic, social and political projects undertaken by the Government here and what is happening throughout the third world as a result of the economic and political policies pursued by the industrial nations.

I refer particularly to the pursuit of economic policies worldwide that have deliberately generated high levels of unemployment, lowered wages levels and undermined collective trade union rights. There has also been the build-up of massive public and private debt, pressure to reduce direct taxation, switches to regressive indirect taxation, drastic reductions in welfare state provision and the privatisation of essential common services.

I do not have much time in which to speak in the debate. However, I once had the privilege of meeting the Economics Minister for Benin, who was invited to go to the Paris Club meeting to renegotiate IMF terms on behalf of his country. He expressed surprise to me that at that meeting people from the western world, people from Britain, should ask why Benin did not do as Britain had done and privatise the water supply. Benin did not have a water supply, so it was a most inappropriate policy. In other words, the free market economic agenda is wrapped up by the IMF and the World bank in the language of structural adjustment, but it is the same ideological model superimposed at home and internationally.

Others have spoken about the needs of Africa and they should be high on our agenda. I shall not repeat what has been said about the needs of Africa, but we need some fresh, new, imaginative strategic thinking. I simply quote the President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, who, at her press conference at the end of her visit to Somalia last October, said:

"There needs to be a great deal more urgency about the situation. It is not acceptable that human beings are in the degrading, humiliating situation in which they find themselves, because we really have to stand back and say: 'it diminishes all of us as human beings'. I felt shamed by what I saw. Shamed. Shamed. On behalf of the European world, and the American world, and the developed world generally. What are we doing that we have not got greater conscience for it?"

She went on:

"Not only Somalis, but also the Horn of Africa in general, need new strategies, need new lateral thinking about our relationship with the continent of Africa. They need not just the United Nations and their international organisations and governments to be engaged, but women's groups, business associations, and others, to have a direct linkage of accepting responsibility."

I reiterate that plea for lateral thinking and for an injection of imagination and urgency.

Recently, a small African country, Eritrea, became independent. There was and still is great international pressure for good governance. But weeks after that country's independence a conference on the programme for the reintegration of refugees and the rehabilitation of the resettlement areas of Eritrea was held in Geneva on 6 July under the auspices of the United Nations. Apart from support for food aid and repatriation, Eritrea received pledges of only $16 million towards the $77 million requested for development.

In other words, if the promising movement towards peace and democracy now being developed in several African countries is to be supported and sustained, the flow of aid for development must be maintained and we must not move in the opposite direction. The British Government have been one of those pushing hardest for good government and democracy and are, accordingly, under a moral obligation to back the pressure with positive development aid.

9.32 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): It is a particular pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle). His reference to the words of Mary Robinson reminds us that the fact that 1 billion people in the world simply do not have the means to exist from day to day diminishes us all.

It is impossible to explain Somalia without remembering who armed that country. It is impossible to explain the problems of Brazil without bearing in mind the demands for tropical hardwoods. It is wrong of us to think that our actions are simply benign. It is wrong for us simply to say that, because the IMF and the World bank were set up with good intentions, they automatically have a good impact now.

During the past year, the idea that has struck me most comes from the writings of Susan George on the debt boomerang. She says that if we do not tackle these problems we may think that we are just casting off part of the world, but it will come back and hit us. It will come back and hit us on the population, the migration, the debt and the drugs fronts. If we do not turn our minds more consistently to the problems of the third world, we shall live to regret it.

What is Britain's record in this area? I want first to consider our aid record. We cannot ignore the most tangible fault, which is that there was a public commitment to 0·7 per cent. of GDP from which we are retreating year by year. The level is now 0·31 per cent. compared with 0·1 per cent. when Labour was in power. The fact that the Government have the worst growth record of any Government since the war means that the developing world is even worse off. In fact, I suspect that there is a cunning plan by the Government to attain the 0·7 per cent. target by shrinking the economy.

The developing world is threatened even more by the presence of the needy in the east of Europe. It is clear from

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the Foreign Secretary's choice of budget that he prefers to increase the contribution to eastern and central Europe and to cut the contribution to the developing world during the next three years. The Foreign Secretary must defend that.

The Government's defence of their aid record is extraordinary—it is that this country's aid is good. Therefore, apparently, the Government are to cut it. I could understand the defence being that they did not want to put good money after bad. But to cut aid because this country does it well is a strange defence indeed. That is especially true as the Government now distribute a higher and higher proportion of aid in a less and less efficient way. A higher proportion goes to the World bank and the IMF.

We have heard much about the damage that is done by the debt policies of those institutions, with more going through the EC. There is widespread concern that directorate-general VIII of the EC under Mr. Marin is less than efficient—even perverse—in its distribution.

Why is more and more of our aid to be deployed in a less and less efficient way? We have heard, if not convincingly, from the Prime Minister that the most vulnerable in this country will be protected from the public expenditure cuts that are on their way. We need to know from the Minister whether the poorest people in the world will be protected, or will they suffer from the dreadful hole which the Government is in?

What else have the Government done in terms of aid and development? They have disappointed many people by their failure to take the lead in many areas. The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) reminded us of that. Africa regards this country as the pre-eminent European power, and the people of Africa look to us for guidance, certainly with regard to the World bank and IMF. The British director of that organisation holds enormous power over development policies in Africa. It is in Africa, however, that the World bank and IMF policies have failed the most. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) pointed out that more money comes out of Africa now than is put in.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe valuably pointed out, as he usually does, the amount of money that is spent on emergency relief. The reason for that is that we failed in many cases to take preventive steps early enough by diplomatic initiatives. *[Interruption.]* Well, I went to Somalia last year and they had plenty of water and plenty of problems. The world was deaf to Somalia for a whole year because our diplomats in Nairobi did not go to Somalia. They were forbidden to go by the Foreign Office.

If we cannot get accurate information, how can we take preventive action? The tragic situation in Somalia today, with the military intervention going wrong, has resulted from our failure to act in time. We failed to encourage the UN to take the necessary diplomatic initiatives, and we must look to the United Kingdom to take the lead in the matter.

As the Minister knows, I am also fearful about the situation in Sudan, where there is a 10-year-old civil war. I compliment the action of the Foreign Office in that case, and also the action by our ambassador in Sudan. But we should take preventive action by taking the issue to the United Nations Security Council. I am pleased that the Minister who has responsibility for foreign trade is to answer the debate, as it gives the House a chance to bring some of the issues together. He will be able to explain what the poorest of the world have gained or will gain from the G7 and GATT.

There are several major worries. Very painfully, a series of Lomé conventions—we are now up to Lomé 4—negotiated trade concessions for the poorer countries, but there are fears that GATT will wipe them out. I hope that the Minister will tell us that it is this country's objective to stop putting higher tariffs on value added goods from the third world.

Perhaps the Minister will also tell us what GATT will do about the present shameful situation whereby, through the World bank, we demand that developing countries stop subsidising their food, but we then dump subsidised EC food on them, which is what happens with beef in west Africa. The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) mentioned the destruction of the sugar cane industry in that way.

If we agree that trade is more important than aid, why, under the British presidency, was an EC development policy produced which did not mention the common agricultural policy or trade policy in general?

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Is it not a fact that successive Ministers have, through our aid budget, committed us step by step to EC programmes which lead to long-term reductions in available resources for bilateral programmes? We are being locked in incrementally so that we may not even be able to reverse the process unless there is a drastic change in the near future.

Mr. Worthington: Indeed, and that point has already been made. The reason we are locked in is that our aid is shrinking. It would be possible to increase our contribution to other organisations if we were expanding the overall amount of aid.

It has been generally agreed that debt is a matter of the utmost importance. I, too, compliment the Prime Minister on the Trinidad terms which we agree is a valuable initiative. However, as was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West and confirmed by the hon. Member for Broxtowe, 91 per cent. of the debt of sub-Saharan Africa is to the international financial institutions, to the World bank and the International Monetary Fund. What can we do about that, when the constitution of those bodies forbids them to cancel debt? All that they can do is to roll over the debt from year to year. We have to ask what is going to happen to the great burden of debt which is owed to the IMF and the World bank, which now take out far more than they put in.

The World bank and the IMF are in a crisis. What can we do to make their policies more transparent? Why can we not know how our director at the World bank has voted? The Americans can. Why should an unknown civil servant and the International Development Association, which we debated on Monday evening, be allowed to spend £620 million of taxpayers' money without accounting for it? Why can we not know what is being done to increase accountability in the World bank? Why can we not know how the British director is voting on issues concerning where sustainable development is being damaged by World bank projects? What safeguards are being put in place?

The Government must surely learn from the recent scandal surrounding the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. It was an organisation

which went out of control, ran amok and became self-serving. How do we know that that is not happening in the World bank or the IMF? The World bank has admitted that an increasing proportion of its projects are failing. What are we going to do to put that right?

Perhaps the Minister will tell us the World bank's philosophy, which we are supporting. It is clear that a struggle is going on in the World bank. I should like to refer to two points that have been made recently. One of them came from Larry Summers, who was previously the chief economist at the World bank—obviously a very influential person. What he said contradicted a point made by the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford. Summers said that investment in the education of girls provides far the best possible economic return through World bank activities.

The ironic thing is that the World bank and the IMF, because of their programmes, are seen as having so substantially damaged the education and health of people in the third world. Are we supporting that, or are we supporting the structural adjustment programmes?

Which side does the Minister take on the question of the struggle within the World bank with regard to debt? Does he take the side of Mr. Edward Jaycox, the vice-president for Africa, who said that the policies of the bank have been

"disastrous in terms of building up the capacity of Africa to solve its own problems"?

The bank, he said, had completely failed to build up Africa's trained and skilled manpower and its institutions. The amount going into the salaries of expatriate advisers, of whom there are 100,000 in sub-Saharan Africa, was $4 billion. Do the Government agree with Mr. Jaycox?

What is the World bank policy that the Minister supports? Why cannot we be told what philosophy the Government adopt when they go to the World bank? Debt is by far the most crushing problem facing sub-Saharan Africa.

Unless the Government can give us some optimism about new thinking—lateral or of whatever other type—on how the debt burden on sub-Saharan Africa might be lifted, we will have wasted our words in this Chamber today.

9.46 pm

The Minister of Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): I do not intend to go into the debate that took place on Monday night, the report of which I read with great interest. I have a short time to wind up for the Government, but if I am unable to cover particular points that have been raised I shall write to the hon. Members concerned.

As this is an Opposition Supply day, the Government are entitled not only to defend their position but to look into some of the polices behind the Opposition's attitude to the whole question of debt, trade and development. I say to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) that we have taken the lead on debt relief for the poorest, most heavily indebted countries. I am glad that Opposition Members have given the Prime Minister credit and support for what he has done. We are taking a lead with our targeted aid programme and we have taken the lead on expanding world trade—a matter to which I shall come in a moment. In all these areas, our strategy is the same: to give developing countries as much of a stake as possible in the world economy. This matter was well referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells).

I accept that the debt crisis is not over—not least for many countries in Africa. We recognise this, as did the Tokyo summit. It is clear that there will be further financial assistance to help these countries. However, the Government have a good story to tell about debt relief for the poorest, most heavily indebted countries. We have constantly led the way in promoting international agreement on debt relief—through Toronto terms in 1988, through Trinidad terms in 1991, and now in our push for improved Trinidad terms. As my hon. Friend said, the current terms have so far benefited 17 of the poorest countries, to the tune of nearly $2 billion. I am glad that, on the question of the number of countries, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is getting his arithmetic corrected.

Mr. Meacher: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Needham: No. I did not put any question to the hon. Gentleman, but I should like to put one to Opposition Members generally.

We are constantly asked about the 0·7 per cent. of GNP contribution to aid. It was referred to today by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). It is the aim of all of us to reach that contribution level, but how do we get to it? It is easy to call for more aid, as the hon. Member for Oldham, West did, but it is much less easy to balance that against calls for more spending on health, education, social services, transport and every other area of public expenditure. The hon. Member for Oldham, West and his hon. Friends must face up to that difficulty.

How does the hon. Member for Oldham, West envisage that that contribution will be made in the light of the remarks of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)? He has said that the Labour party is not proposing to raise income tax, national insurance, VAT or current borrowing. How does the hon. Member for Oldham, West square his call for an increased aid budget with the Leader of the Opposition? He has said that the Labour party will oppose the tax increases that are being imposed by the Government. He has also made it clear that the Opposition are not in favour of cuts in public expenditure when public services are in straitened circumstances.

Where is the hon. Member for Oldham, West going to find the extra £2 billion for his aid budget over the course of a Parliament if he intends to follow the advice given by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East and the Leader of the Opposition? As the hon. Gentleman knows, the figures do not add up. However important we may say the aid budget is, the hon. Gentleman cannot stand at the Dispatch Box and pretend to us that his policy is credible.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the Uruguay round and the Tokyo summit and how they had failed the developing world. He said that they were a disaster. The hon. Gentleman acknowledged, however, that ActionAid has said that trade produces six times more income for the poor countries than aid. What would the hon. Gentleman have said if the Tokyo summit had failed to reach an agreement on GATT? That would have been a true disaster.

[Mr. Needham]

I do not underestimate the importance of the problems of Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, but did the hon. Member for Oldham, West ever mention China? No. Indonesia was mentioned only by one of my hon. Friends. Vietnam, India, Pakistan, the Philippines—some of the poorest countries in the world, which stand to benefit most from improved trade—were never mentioned by Opposition Members.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Does my hon. Friend agree that, on top of restructuring debt to assist the poorest nations, Great Britain is the first to respond to famine, drought and disease all over the world? Our Hercules are in the air with surplus supplies straightaway. We can be very proud of our overseas aid. We lead the world.

Mr. Needham: I agree with my hon. Friend. Wherever disasters occur, British support and British service personnel are there.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) asked whether all tariffs will be abolished under the Uruguay round. He referred specifically to commodities. The hon. Gentleman knows full well, however, that not all tariffs will be abolished through negotiations under the Uruguay round. The important point is that those tariffs will be slashed and that will do a great deal to benefit the poorer countries of the world.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me about the effect of the GATT round on the developing world. The OECD study for 1992 estimated that the increase in developing countries' annual income from a successful Uruguay round could be more than $90 billion per year. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is more than the total aid budgets of the OECD countries. We do not underestimate the importance of aid, but we agree with the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) that trade is much more important than aid.

The Opposition's policy on that will have exactly the opposite effect to what they intend because, although the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie talks about the need to open markets and ensure that goods from developing countries can be freely traded in this country, a short time later some Opposition Members come to see me, leading delegations of people who want to stop goods coming here from developing countries on the basis of social dumping. I could give the hon. Gentleman a list —I shall not do so tonight—of delegations led by his hon. Friends saying that they do not want goods from China, the Philippines, or the poorer parts of north Africa because it is social dumping. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Worthington: Which of the countries with structural adjustment programmes still have tariff barriers? Apart from the multi-fibre arrangement—eventually—will any EC barriers come down as a consequence of the Tokyo summit?

Mr. Needham: Of course EC barriers will come down as a consequence of the GATT round. They will come down across the whole range. Once we achieve an agreement on GATT, there will be massive tariff reductions.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the multi-fibre arrangement. We agree that textiles, as a commodity, should be phased out. Naturally, that should be done over a reasonable time, but it is one way to remove barriers to developing countries' exports. We would not deny them the opportunities to compete in that sector, which is why the United Kingdom supports the phasing out of textiles as a commodity and better access to our markets.

However, that was not always the view of Opposition Members. I have articles, admittedly from 1985, entitled

"Labour's plan to save the textile makers"

and

"Labour aims to curtail flood of textile imports"—

[Interruption.] The hon. Gentleman asked about the multi-fibre arrangement and I am saying what the Leader of the Opposition's view was on that. The Labour party will find themselves in a muddle when trying to devise a policy to help developing countries because of their economic policy at home.

The Government believe that we must assist companies to invest in the third world. British companies know better than Opposition Members about the benefits of United Kingdom investment in the developing world. Direct investment by United Kingdom companies in the developing world is very large. In 1991, our companies invested £1·4 billion in developing countries, representing some 16 per cent. of foreign direct investment. That is how to create jobs, develop the industrial base, transfer technology and enhance economic capacity.

Opposition Members still prefer to talk about handouts instead of persuading British companies to provide long-term jobs because the effect of the Opposition's economic policy at home is to increase costs and deny developing countries the opportunity to send their products here. Last Monday the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) showed the true colours of his party. He said that we should

"reintroduce exchange controls and introduce import controls".—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 681.]

The hon. Member for Oldham, West laughs. He may disown those views, but if Opposition Members stand for the minimum wage and the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty, and then say that they want free trade, what are the consequences for workers in this country? What does that add up to for the workers in this country? What will happen to the workers of the developing world who want to export their goods into a country where such additional add-on costs will put our people out of work? The result will be that ever-larger numbers of delegations of hon. Members will come to my office to try to ensure that the goods stop coming in.

The choice before the House is clear: do we offer developing countries investment, training, technology, jobs and an opportunity to buy and sell in the markets of the world—as the Government believe—or do we follow the Opposition path of minimum wages, minimum hours and maximum trade barriers, which will be the inevitable consequences of their policy?

I urge my hon. Friends to reject the Opposition's contradictory position, reject protectionism, and reject an approach which encourages continued dependency for developing countries. I urge the House to support our policy of enabling developing countries to support themselves through the tools of overseas investment and free trade.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow) *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to*.

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 256, Noes 314.

Division No. 334] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Tipping, Paddy
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. John Spellar.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, [illegible]ert *(Torbay)*
Amess, Dav[illegible]
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles

Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. James Arbuthnot.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House, noting the problems of indebtedness and restricted trade access in hampering the growth of developing countries, welcomes the agreements by the G7 countries in Tokyo to consider improved debt reduction terms for the poorest and most indebted countries, including the possibility of earlier action on reducing the stock of debt on a case by case basis in accordance with the Prime Minister's Trinidad Terms initiative, to make all efforts to enhance development assistance, and to seek to achieve a successful Uruguay Round before the end of the year.

BRITISH NATIONALITY

Ordered,

That the draft British Nationality (Hong Kong) (Selection Scheme) (Amendment) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 10th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Ordered,

That the draft Hong Kong (British Nationality) (Amendment) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 22nd June, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

PETITIONS

New Town, Cambridgeshire

10.16 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I beg leave to present a petition signed by more than 2,000 of my constituents. The views that it contains are supported by many more of my constituents; local, district and county councillors; and me.

The petition concerns a wholly absurd proposal to build a new settlement in the heart of my constituency. I have twice explained the objections on the Floor of the House, once as long ago as six years. The petition reads:

The Petition of the Parishioners of twelve parishes around and including Bourne and Caxton in the county of Cambridgeshire—

which may not be wholly unfamiliar to you, Madam Speaker—

whose names and signatures are included herein declares that there is a substantial case against the application for planning consent to build a new town in the locality and for which there is no need. Particular attention is drawn to the state of the housing market and to the new lower housing need estimates published by the County Council as compared to those current at the time of the inquiry. Another material matter is the recently revised and lower status of the A45 west of Cambridge. The dualling of this road was identified by the inspector as a vital factor in site location. Further that the question of traffic generation through Bourn village has not been adequately addressed in the spirit suggested by the Minister in his decision letter. If built the new town would irreparably damage the environs of many local village communities. The Petitioners herein respectfully and earnestly request the House of Commons to call upon the Minister to give adequate direction to those charged with the consideration of the issues by firmly declaring that Government advice in the form of planning policy guidelines should be carefully consulted to take account of those matters where material and significant changes have occurred in the planning context since the public inquiry. Further that these changes are sufficient in themselves to justify the Minister calling in the competing applications and decide that circumstances having changed so dramatically since the inquiry there is no useful purpose to be served in pursuing the concept of a new settlement in this locality. The Petitioners herein remain your obedient servants and humbly wait upon the pleasure of the House.

To lie upon the Table.

Wellfield Hospital

10.19 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): I am privileged to have the opportunity to present a petition on behalf of the Wellfield hospital action group. The petition, which has been signed by over 2,000 of my constituents, concerns the wellbeing of the former residents of Wellfield hospital. These people are, in the last years of their lives, unhappy and isolated from their families in their present location in Wellfield ward 2, East Herts hospital, Stansted road, Hertford.

The situation has been brought about by total mismanagement on the part of North West Thames regional health authority, under the chairmanship of Sir William Doughty, and its officers. Promises were made to the petitioners, which have been blatantly disregarded to allow further funding of the new Westminster and Chelsea hospital.

[Mr. David Evans]

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will recognise our call—by the Wellfield hospital action group—

upon the East Herts NHS trust to rebuild Wellfield Hospital IMMEDIATELY. And your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Bypass, Ambleside

10.22 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I have the honour to present to the House a petition sent to me by my constituent, Mr. Cook, of Ambleside. You will know, Madam Speaker, that Ambleside is one of the great jewels of the Lake district. The petition has been put together by Mr. Cook and eight stalwart canvassers. They have approached, or tried to contact, virtually all my 2,250 constituents who are on the electoral roll in Ambleside. They succeeded in contacting 1,314 people—that is, 58·4 per cent. of the total electoral roll.

The petition is about the need to construct a bypass round Ambleside. The petition says:

The excessive volume of traffic on the A591 road through our town is causing unacceptable levels of congestion, noise, pollution and delay, making the everyday commerce of the town difficult, dangerous and unpleasant for its residents, and further threatening its prosperity by rendering it unattractive to the visitors on whom its economic wellbeing depends.

Of the 1,314 people approached, no fewer than 1,046 —that is, 79·6 per cent.—voted for a bypass, compared with 188, or 14·3 per cent., who were against, and 80, or 6·1 per cent., who abstained.

This is a remarkable petition. It means that those who expressed their desire to have a bypass constituted 46·5 per cent. of the total electorate. Their purpose was to demonstrate to the House their hope that the petition would finally enshrine the overwhelming desire of the people of Ambleside to put a stop to the appalling traffic congestion in that beautiful town, and that a bypass would be constructed.

The petition ends:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will take measures to require the highway authority, Cumbria county council, to initiate the construction of a bypass road following the route described as the orange route in that council's 1992 consultative documents, and your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Sub-post Offices

10.24 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I beg leave to present a petition against the removal by the Government of the right to receive pension and benefit payments at local sub-post offices.

The petition was collected by sub-postmasters and postmistresses and by pensioners and claimants in York, to whom I pay tribute. It is signed by county councillor Janet Lucker, of Clifton Dale, York, and by L. W. Quinn, the secretary of York Labour party, of Bramble Dene, Woodthorpe, York. The petition is supported by me and it reads as follows:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland assembled. The Humble Petition of the people of York Sheweth that the Government is proposing to make compulsory the method of paying pensions and other benefits by Automated Credit Transfer and that we, the undersigned, vigorously protest against this proposal for the following reasons:

(1) The small post office is very often the hub of the community, performing a very important social service.

(2) Many small post offices rely on paying pensions and other benefits to survive.

(3) Many people rely on the post office to cash their benefits and in some cases may not have a bank account.

(4) Compulsory payment of benefits by automated credit transfer takes away choice from people.

The petition is signed by 9,367 of my constituents and concludes with the following words:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for Social Services to give people the right to choose to receive pension and benefit payments at their local post office, recognising the benefits of this to the individual and community.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

VAT on Fuel

10.28 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I have the honour to present a petition from residents of Barnsley who protest against the Government's decision to impose value added tax on domestic fuel and power.

The petition of the residents of Barnsley, some 2,000, in total,

Sheweth that the recent disgraceful announcement of VAT increases on gas and electricity bills has filled the people of Barnsley with deep concern because of the consequential hardship these increases will have on old age pensioners, one parent families and, in general, poorer members of society. They believe these increases to be to the long-term detriment of those least well off in Barnsley and throughout the nation. Hundreds of people of Barnsley have expressed their concern by signing this petitiin because they feel they are neither economically or socially justified.

The petitioners end their petition by saying:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will take measures to see that these increases will not proceed because of the social and economic hardship for pensioners, one parent families and communities.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Hip Replacement Operations

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

10.28 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): This is a remarkable story. It is about a scandal at the heart of the national health service, leading to a wanton waste of millions of pounds and to an immeasurable and unnecessary amount of human suffering. Forty thousand hip operations take place in Britain every year. They provide renewed mobility and an end to acute suffering for the great majority of those who receive them. In part, it is a great success story. However, there is another side to it.

Many senior surgeons have expressed deep anxieties about the Government's policy. Earlier this year, the British Orthopaedic Association withdrew from discussions with the Government over best practice guidelines. The main charge is that there has been a deterioration in the quality of operations, possibly as a result of over-emphasis on the quantity of operations.

The number of failed operations has mushroomed. In the 1980s, the number of failures trebled to 12 per cent and it is feared that that rate will rise to 33 per cent. In an article in the *British Medical Journal* in March this year, Dr. Bulstrode, a former orthopaedic surgeon at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, described what he called "designer hips". They are newly developed implants that are expensively designed. Factories are tooled up and the product is developed and marketed at great cost. Most designer hips are indistinguishable from the traditional hips that have existed for a long time. Some of the new ones are successful, but others fail—they usually quietly disappear from the scene without leaving a trace because there is no register of failures.

The standard traditional hip replacement—mainly the Charnley, which was designed about 30 years ago—can be sold for as little as £100 and has a failure rate of less than 1 per cent. per year. The newer "designer" implants can cost up to £1,500. Most are untested and unproven and some are failing within four to five years.

I would like to present precise figures of what has been happening in the United Kingdom, but that is impossible—not because I have not diligently prepared for this debate, but because the figures are simply not known. On 14 February, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health told me that the Government have no record of the success and failure rates of hip prostheses used in this country. Luckily, one country has done the work. Sweden has conducted detailed research on 93,000 hip replacements. Among many other useful bits of information, it was discovered that one implant—the Christensen hip—has an atrocious record. It was used in more than 5,000 operations and virtually not one of them lasted four years.

The cost of that designer hip is an estimated $20 million in the revision operations required, plus the anguish of the thousands of victims. Do we know if there has been a similar mass failure here? There has almost certainly been such a mass failure, but we have no knowledge of it because so many of the prostheses that have been introduced in the past 20 years have quietly disappeared without any national record.

In 1971, there was only one type of implant—the Charnley. There are at least 34 on the market now. Dr. Bulstrode said:

"There is now more money in design than in success rates. Every year there is a new colour, a new shape, a new coating."

He estimates that if every surgeon used the most reliable model, the annual cost of revision operations would be £200 million. If we continue to use unproven implants, the cost will rise to about £600 million in the next 10 years.

In July 1992, the *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin* had this to say:

"There are no formal controls for new joint designs nor for their marketing. The newer hips should be considered experimental and this should be made explicit when seeking the patient's informed consent to surgery."

How can clinicians, let alone patients, exercise choice? How can they make informed decisions? There are no statutory tests that hip replacements must satisfy before they can be marketed, nor is there any centrally held information. I recently asked the Secretary of State for Health what plans she had to introduce a national register. She told me that she had no such plans. The manufacturing registration scheme of the Department of Health is voluntary and has in no way deterred manufacturers from launching suspect and unproven designs. The Government lack the courage to compel manufacturers to meet statutory standards and to subject them to the kind of close monitoring that takes place in the United States and in many other countries.

A point strongly made in the report by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs in 1991 on elective surgery was why it was that drugs had to undergo rigorous tests before they could be introduced and prescribed when implants were treated differently. The dangers are just as great. The damage caused by an inadequate hip implant is not easily rectified. Dr. Michael Wroblewski—Charnley's successor in Wigan, where the technique was pioneered—says:

"The first time is the best time. After that it is salvage."

When the first operation is carried out, a great deal of the good, healthy bone has to be sacrificed. In perhaps his most stark comment, Dr. Bulstrode said:

"I could go home tonight, knock up a hip in the garden shed, bring it in tomorrow, sterilise it and just whack it into a patient and there's no law in the land to stop me."

Revision operations drain NHS resources and lengthen waiting lists. They take nearly twice as long as primary operations and require longer hospital stays. One revision means that two primary operations have to be cancelled.

The Government have long been obsessed with the methods and the language of the market. Increasingly, they apply their ideology to everything, including health care. Understandable concern about waiting times has spurred the Government into precipitate action. The Government have maximised bed throughput by minimising standards. The modern health service manager is subjected to performance-related pay and has one overriding objective—to treat as many patients as possible. That is the measure of successful management and, in isolation, it is extremely dangerous and damaging. Higher productivity cannot be the sole criterion when the raw material is a human patient. The value of an operation cannot be measured by knocking one number off the waiting list. It must be assessed carefully over months and years.

Specialist orthopaedic surgeons have a high success rate. It is surprising to know that in Britain we have the

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

lowest percentage of specialist orthopaedic surgeons of any western country. What is happening with the conveyor-belt surgery that is being cranked up to maximum productivity is that more and more non-specialists are being employed. The specialist hip or orthopaedic centres are losing patients to general hospitals simply because they happen to have a surgeon available. A short-term reduction in waiting lists is followed by an influx of patients requiring revision. A report in *The Guardian* quotes one specialist, Mr. Khalid Drabu, a consultant surgeon at East Surrey hospital, as saying:

"An artificial hip can and should last 15 to 20 years, but we've got a tidal wave of patients returning within four to eight years and many sooner."

What do the Government offer? Answers to parliamentary questions reveal that the Government have no register of revisions, no statistics on which implants fail, no database to explain what is happening and no study —there is one study of Trent—as comprehensive as the Swedish one which would identify the rogue prostheses. They have no plan and they have no strategy, except perhaps the lame excuse that was given to me in a letter —that the European Community would come galloping to their rescue.

In a letter to me, the Minister says that a European CE marking will apply to hip implants, and that it is intended to come into force

"on 1 January 1995 with a transitional period that will extend to about mid 1998."

That is five long years away, whereas the misery, the tragedy and the waste is happening now, and is still evolving—a great medical scandal. We need action from the Minister now. We need him to say tonight that he will commit himself to setting up a national register of hip replacements which will identify the rogue prostheses and the least competent surgeons, both of which are formidable elements in the scandal that we are discussing.

We want immediate short-term studies on new operations. These can be done easily. It is possible to measure accurately through minute X-rays the tiny migrations that take place in the first six months after an operation. That can be plotted to show what will happen over the next five or, indeed, 20 years. The technology is there. We must do that now.

We need a thorough investigation into the selling and marketing of prostheses by manufacturers. We hear odd stories of inducements being offered. We know of cases in which improper commercial pressures are being put on surgeons and others in the health service. We need more professionally trained orthopaedic surgeons. We need a system of audit that rewards NHS managers and medical staff for the quality, not the quantity, of their work.

These are not new concerns. This letter was written by Mr. Michael Freeman, the present president of the British Orthopaedic Association. He demands that we take steps to prevent

"the unlimited proliferation of indistinguishably different or bad prostheses".

That letter was written on 13 November 1973. Some 20 years later another distinguished orthopaedic surgeon wrote to Mr. Freeman, pointing out that that 1973 letter probably initiated the interest of orthopaedic surgeons in the field. He said:

"For all these years we have been struggling to get some scheme off the ground. The sadness is that even when it had been accepted by all the various bodies, even the Minister himself, absolutely nothing happened."

That letter was written on 25 March this year.

There have been 20 years of vain struggle. The legacy of Government inactivity is now exacerbated by market forces coming into the health service. Inducements are offered by greedy profiteers. The tradition of care, high science and best quality medicine is being corrupted by the Government's devotion to market forces.

10.42 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on obtaining an Adjournment debate on this important topic. The debate is timely and I know that he has a long-standing, close personal interest in the topic. Not many people would give up the chance of representing Britain in the 400 metre hurdles in next year's Olympic games just to have an Adjournment debate on hip and knee joint replacement surgery.

My hon. Friend rightly referred to the topic of the debate as yet another scandal story about how the health service operates. I am pleased that, although I am speaking as Labour's Front-Bench health spokesman in Wales, it is the Government's English Under-Secretary of State for Health who will respond, because that will avoid any possible problems in relation to the quasi-judicial functions that the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Health occasionally have.

I intend to add some local interest and to refer to the Yellow Ribbon story in relation to knee and hip joint replacements that are carried out at the Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital. It is in my constituency, but it serves virtually the whole of Wales for replacements if the waiting time has exceeded the patients charter guideline. That waiting time was 18 months, though an attempt is being made to reduce it to 12 months now. I do not criticise the unique method used by the Welsh Office under this Government of having specialist "treatment centres", which do not exist in England, simply to treat those who have been on the waiting list for a long time. The centres treat cataracts and there is one in my constituency at the Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital, Rhydlafar, for knee and hip joint replacements.

I applaud the treatment centre phenomenon, but the surgeon in charge of the Rhydlafar centre has experienced considerable difficulties and has now been suspended on full pay pending disciplinary hearings. Those hearings will obviously take their course in the usual way, but I raise the matter in the House because I suspect that there is a strong connection between the point raised by my hon. Friend and the treatment centre.

A specialist treatment centre for patients on the waiting list for knee and hip joint replacements takes bread out of the mouths of the orthopaedic consultants who, to a man —they are all men—also operate at BUPA and other private hospitals in Cardiff and Newport. I believe that there is one private centre in Newport at a Catholic foundation hospital and there is a BUPA hospital in Cardiff. Most orthopaedic surgeons tend to share their time between the two.

If a treatment centre is set up with the specific aim of taking all the patients from anywhere in Wales who have been waiting for 18 months—I think that it is now 12

months—since first seeing a consultant for treatment, free to the purchasing health authority, that obviously takes bread out of the mouths of the private consultants who would love to be treating them at £3,000 or £4,000 a time at a BUPA hospital.

To make matters worse, on 1 April 1993 at the Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar, a third operating theatre was opened. The triple suite there now means that the work can be dealt with rapidly and, in theory, the waiting list could be removed altogether. That, in turn, takes the bread out of the mouth of the BUPA and other private hospitals with orthopaedic facilities.

That places enormous pressure on orthopaedic consultants' income from private work. The more work that is done under the NHS and the more the waiting lists for hip and knee joint operations under the NHS shrink, the more one removes the incentive for private operations at BUPA and other hospitals. That sets up enormous tensions between the surgeons who are best at cutting the waiting lists and the surgeons who make most of their money from private work.

A surgeon can either be one of the boys, take it slowly and not work too fast in order to leave plenty of work to be done privately, or he can be as committed to the NHS as it is possible to be and thereby upset his colleagues. Attitudes to patient care and the functions of the NHS must be borne in mind when specific treatment centres are set up as part of Government policy.

At the Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar, the top orthopaedic surgeon involved in knee and hip joint replacement, who is in charge of the contract from the Welsh Office, has been told to cut the waiting list. Patients waiting longer than the maximum time allowed by the patients charter, whether they are from north, mid or south Wales, have to be treated free, at no cost to the patient or the purchasing health authority from which the patient originates. They can be dealt with immediately at the Prince of Wales hospital. That is what should, in principle, be done.

But that has probably led to a climate of jealousy and tension between professionals which may well, in turn, have led to the suspension of the director of the treatment centre, Ian Mackie, on 17 June pending disciplinary proceedings for a series of charges of gross misconduct, professional misconduct, and so on.

Whether the charges have been trumped up, as many people believe, I am not in a position to say, but the tension between the various professionals in knee and hip joint replacement surgery has been building up for a long time. The treatment centre has been putting pressure on the private income of those who have been largely dependent on performing knee and hip joint work at BUPA and other private facility hospitals in south Wales. It is, therefore, fortunate that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), will be dealing with the issue, because the Welsh Office Minister might at some time in the future have to deal with quasi-judicial appeals. The Minister here tonight will not have to, so he will not be embarrassed by my referring to the issue.

Since Mr. Ian Mackie has been suspended from duty, members of staff, patients and others have been wearing yellow ribbons to show their support for him. I was told of an incident only today when the acting unit manager visited the hospital to get members of staff to remove "Back Mackie" stickers from their cars while they are on hospital premises. That is getting heavy; people should be free to express their opinions about the surgeon but they are clearly not able to do so because of the health authority's sensitivity and the fact that the authority is undertaking disciplinary proceedings.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West made an extremely important point about the lack of guidelines. Biomet and Zimmer are the two companies which are in dispute and are behind the present incident that led to the suspension. They are or were American owned. Nobody knows how far such companies can go in encouraging consultants to be demonstrators or lecturers at international conferences. Are they supposed to ask consultants to demonstrate their equipment, or is it a breach of disciplinary procedures? We do not know, because there are no guidelines laid down by the British Medical Association or the hospital service. In the absence of any satisfactory guidelines from the NHS, I am pleased that my hon. Friend has raised the matter tonight so that the Minister can tell us what the Government's position is in a matter on which they do not appear to have any policy.

10.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on raising this important subject. I know of his strong interest in hip replacement operations.

The medical development of the prosthetic replacement of joints culminated in the 1960s in the first hip replacements for patients. The development of the early hip prostheses owes much to the ingenuity of Sir John Charnley in Manchester and the pioneering work carried out by Mckee and Watson-Ferrar in Norwich. In less than 30 years, other joint prostheses have been added, but the one that meets the greatest need of people all over the world remains the hip joint replacement.

Many problems have been recognised in the use of prostheses, such as that of operating on elderly patients. In the first 15 years or so, it was the elderly lady with the fractured neck or femur and those suffering from the degenerative condition of osteoarthritis who were the natural priorities. In the 1960s, however, doctors and patients immediately recognised that a hip replacement offered effective treatment for debilitating or depressing health problems. From the wheelchair or from confinement to the house and dependence on others for simple activities, people could become free of the pain of osteoarthritis and able to lead more independent lives.

The numbers of hip replacements rose rapidly. In England in 1969——

Mr. Flynn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sackville: If I do, I shall not be able to get through what I am trying to say, so I would rather not.

In England in 1969, there were 10,869 operations. By 1979, the number had risen to 28,788. Recently published data show that more than 50,000 operations were carried out in 1989-90. Total hip replacements have been one of the outstanding success stories of the national health service. Through this operation, skilled surgeons are making a major contribution to improving the quality of life for many thousands of people every year.

[Mr. Sackville]

As the hon. Gentleman said, many prostheses have been brought into the market since the early days of Charnley, and the majority of the 800-plus orthopaedic surgeons are performing this operation every week in the national health service. The success of the operation has brought new developments in its wake. Surgeons are now extending the range of patients for whom it is considered beneficial to provide prostheses—younger, fitter, more active people who expect to return not only to domestic activities in comfort but to the energetic pursuits they enjoyed before joint disease slowed them down. We can justifiably take pride in the achievements of the national health service in providing such a large number of operations and in extending hip prostheses——

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sackville: I have only four minutes left.

Mr. Jones: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

Mr. Sackville: We must also recognise that there is an implication for the design and long-term performance of the prostheses themselves, subjected to much greater wear and tear over the longer lifespan of those younger patients. Much research and development worldwide is concentrating on the problems that this presents to patients and their doctors. The sorts of areas of research aimed at reducing the effects of wear include the materials prostheses are made of, the precise design and, thus, the distribution of stresses during movement, and the value of the use of various types of cement to fix the prostheses in place and whether cement is needed at all.

Of course, there is not consensus among clinicians about individual prostheses. Indeed, as has been said, we have insufficient knowledge in many areas. However, we know that the life expectancy of a hip prosthesis is reckoned to be between 10 and 15 years. We also know that 9·5 per cent. of all hip replacement operations in 1990-91 were revisions. Of course, this does not give us a true percentage revision rate. Estimates of revisions vary considerably. Many experts would agree on about 10 per cent. Revisions are an important load on the national health service resources, and we are all—patients, doctors and everyone involved in the service—concerned to reduce that burden of distress and to maximise the use of resources so that more patients may have a satisfactory outcome and more money may be available for providing treatment.

In the United Kingdom, total hip replacements are classified as medical devices and, as yet, are not subject to specific legislation. Voluntary controls have, however, been applied for many years by the Department of Health, under the manufacturer registration scheme, which has been in operation since 1986. This involves the assessment of the manufacturer's facilities to ensure they meet the Department's requirements for quality assurance, including control of product design. The requirements for total hip replacements are included in "Quality Systems for Orthopaedic Implants", which was published in 1990. This calls for compliance with BS 5750, as well as specific materials and product standards.

The list of approved manufacturers is supplied to the NHS and the private sector, which are strongly recommended to buy only from registered companies.

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Sackville: Another important control is the Department's——

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it a point of order for the Chair?

Mr. Flynn: It is, Sir. I appeal to you, as the defender of the rights of Back Benchers. My speech tonight was my first Back-Bench speech in the Chamber for more than 12 months. The Minister is abusing his position by ignoring all the——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 15 July 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CROYDON TRAMLINK BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a second time on Wednesday 21 July at Seven o'clock.

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

WOODGRANGE PARK CEMETERY BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 22 July.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

1. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest figures for the PSBR since 1 April; and if he will make a statement.

8. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current level of public sector borrowing.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): In the first two months of the financial year, the public sector borrowing requirement was £9·3 billion. A deficit of that magnitude is too high and we intend to reduce it.

Mr. Williams: During the 1992 Budget debates, the Chancellor's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Kinston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), published Treasury forecasts of a borrowing requirement of £32 billion this year, falling to £25 billion next year, £19 billion the following year and £6 billion by 1996-97. In reality, we have a deficit of £50 billion this year and, far from falling away as was predicted, it is a recurring deficit, the Chancellor's biggest problem and an albatross around the neck of the country's economy, perhaps for years to come. Can he explain to me, and to the people of this country, why we were so misled at the time of the general election, and how the Government have got us into this mess?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman will find that all forecasts for the PSBR tend to be hedged around with uncertainty. A range of forecasts is being made about next year and £50 billion is the Government's current forecast, which is at the upper end of the range. One thing of which I am quite sure is that the forecasts will all have changed by the time that I get to the Budget, let alone at any other time. I propose to make a judgment in the light of the circumstances prevailing when we get to the November Budget.

The hon. Gentleman makes a valuable point, however. The deficit was not planned, or the result of anticipated action. To the surprise of almost every forecaster, the recession in this country was more persistent and lasted longer than anyone expected, thereby causing a longer fall in revenues than anyone expected. The Government have to face up to the consequences of that, and Britain will be one of the foremost countries in Europe in tackling its fiscal deficit.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, unlike the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the Conservative party has no intention of further expanding the PSBR and placing a greater burden on future generations? Also, was it not the last Labour Government who had to run to the International Monetary Fund because they could not control public spending either?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is correct. Quite rightly, we face questioning about the size of the PSBR from the Opposition as well as from our own supporters. I get pressed by Conservative Back Benchers to take vigorous action to deal with it. It is impossible for either the Liberals or the Labour party to make a speech from the Opposition Benches without advocating measures that would increase the amount of public sector debt and borrowing. That makes their contribution to debate on the issue seem somewhat irrelevant to real life and to the task of sustaining our recovery and getting out of the recession.

Mr. Sheldon: In the light of the horrendous PSBR, why is the Chancellor of the Exchequer excluding the one area that is easy for him to handle—the level of higher rates of income tax? Those were reduced at a time when the Government thought that the economy was doing well. Now that he understand the reality, why does he not reverse the process?

Mr. Clarke: Because throughout the 1980s extremely valuable supply-side effects resulted from reducing direct taxation from the disgraceful and punitive level at which it was left by the previous Government. I have made no decisions about taxation for the Budget.

The right hon. Gentleman, with his experience, knows perfectly well that the revenue-raising consequences of increasing the top rates of income tax are quite slight, but he typifies what I just described—that the only solution that the Opposition can ever think of, in response to such problems, is to put up taxation on somebody or other. If that is the Opposition's only approach, it is damaging to the country's prospects of doing well in the economic world.

Sir Peter Tapsell: In the same spirit that I heretically urged his predecessor, in the salad days of Friedmanite monetarism, to show caution about the Treasury's capacity accurately to measure sterling M3, may I now counsel—it may not be necessary, but, as I have already prepared the question, I shall go ahead—a little caution to my right hon. and learned Friend before he prostrates

himself before the altar of a £50 billion PSBR estimate, because that notoriously unreliable statistic could lead us into unnecessary difficulty? As experience has shown, the outcome may prove to be billions wide of the mark—no pun intended—either way.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend, who knows me well, realises that I have never drunk of the pure milk of monetarism, any more than he or Lord Lawson did. That remains my view, which is why I dealt with some scepticism with the question about previous forecasts of the size of the public sector borrowing requirement.

Nevertheless, it is important to underline the fact that we face a serious problem. The figure that I gave in answer to the question from the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) shows that, at present, the monthly PSBR is running in line with the forecast. If it falls faster than I expect, I can probably deal with any problems that that may cause with considerable ease.

However, it is preferable for me to take those forecasts as the best that we have and ensure that I do not just assume that things will come out better but behave prudently and ensure that we are certain that we will get our fiscal deficit down. At the moment, it is one of the principal obstacles that would otherwise lie in the way of sustaining our recovery, which is why it is so blindly irresponsible of Opposition Members simply to suggest that I put up some spending and some taxes.

Ms Harman: Will the Chancellor tell the House that he totally repudiates the proposals of the Tory 1992 Group, particularly its proposal that he should cut 5 per cent. of the public sector work force? Given that that is 300,000 people and that making them unemployed would add £2·7 billion to the dole bill, does he agree that the way to reduce the deficit is not to put more people out of work but to bring unemployment down?

Mr. Clarke: I had an extremely friendly and useful discussion with the executive of the 1992 Group, who presented me with proposals to deal with the problem. Their proposals were infinitely more worked out than any yet produced by the Labour or Liberal parties. I share the instincts of my colleagues in the 1992 committee working group—I think that they call it that—that, in the interests of the economy and taxpayers, we should look first at means of restraining public expenditure. It is hopeless to regard public services, as the hon. Lady always has, as a kind of job creation agency. We can deliver high-quality public services in a more cost-effective way. One has only to look at the effects of contracting out on local government services, and the amount that that is now saving council tax payers in various parts of the country, to see what can be achieved.

European Courts

3. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last discussed with his ministerial colleagues from other member states of the European Community the question of additional financial assistance being given to the Court of Auditors and the European Court of Justice; and if he will make a statement.

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): The last formal meeting of the Budget Council of Ministers was on 16 November 1992, when we discussed the 1993 Community budget, including provision for the Court of Auditors and Court of Justice. Since then, discussions have proceeded informally and through officials.

Dr. Godman: Are Ministers aware of the serious difficulties encountered by the European Court of Justice in ensuring the timeous translation of cases submitted to it by member states, the opinions of its advocate-generals and its own judgments? Does he agree that there is no point in seeking to ensure that the European Court of Justice and the Court of Auditors carry out their work in ensuring compliance with Community law if they are so badly financed by member states by way of the budget?

Sir John Cope: I am certainly aware of some of the delays that take place in the Court of Justice, although they do not occur so much in the Court of Auditors. Both institutions have had increases in financial assistance of an average of 10 per cent. a year for the past couple of years. I do not think that is bad and it means that they do not need such a large increase this year.

Mr. Sykes: Will my right hon. Friend consider ceasing financing the antics of the European Court of Justice altogether and does he think that it is right for it to sit in judgment of the tourist beaches in Britain, especially when so many Mediterranean coastlines and beaches are awash with sewage?

Sir John Cope: One cannot agree with all the judgments that courts make, but that is not a reason for ceasing to finance them or abolishing them altogether.

Growth Rate

4. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what comparisons the European Commission has made between Britain's projected growth rate over the next two years and the growth rate in other countries of the EC.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The European Commission expects that Britain will be the fastest growing major Community country in both this year and next.

Mr. Thompson: On the day when unemployment is continuing to fall in my constituency of Norwich, North and throughout the country, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that over-regulation of the social and labour markets can damage growth, as has happened in Spain, for example, which has one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe? Will he comment on the folly of those in the House who seek to add to the burdens on industry at a time when business is reviving and unemployment is falling?

Mr. Clarke: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We have the highest proportion of population in work of any country in the European Community with the exception of Denmark and, I think, Luxembourg. We have always shown the capacity to create jobs more quickly than other European countries because we have avoided the tightly regulated labour markets and the excessive burdens on industry, which are part of the tradition of some continental countries. It is a pity that that tradition is being reinforced by the social chapter making problems worse, in my opinion, in Germany, Spain and elsewhere. It is extremely important that we in Britain stick to our

opt-out from the social chapter, which is helping to achieve a much more buoyant recovery in our labour market.

Mr. Trimble: It not it the case that better prospects for the United Kingdom growth rate are due to the fact that we were ejected from the exchange rate mechanism and were thus able to reduce interest rates and reduce the level of sterling? Is not the last thing that we want now either to see interest rates maintained at a higher level than necessary or to see sterling appreciate? Is not there a case for some action on that front?

Mr. Clarke: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question in my opinion is no. The five-points reduction in interest rates that we achieved before we left the ERM was as important a contribution to our recovery as the four-point reduction in interest rates that followed. We were seeing the beginnings of recovery before we left the ERM and we are now seeing the results of many of the supply-side changes that we made in the British economy.

Obviously, the hon. Gentleman will not expect me to answer questions on any further action on interest rates. I shall make judgments as and when they are necessary in the light of the monetary guidelines that I have laid out before the House.

Mr. David Martin: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the way in which to create real jobs is to have sustained economic growth, rather than the Keynesian-inspired spending sprees supported by the Opposition parties?

Mr. Clarke: What is now called Keynesian does not often bear much resemblance to the work of John Maynard Keynes, who was very good on monetary policy. I agree that I do not think that John Maynard Keynes or anyone else would have advocated a spending spree to boost the economy at a time of a large fiscal deficit of the kind that we are carrying and is being forecast. That is not an option open to us. Unfortunately, it is an option which is usually seized by the Labour and Liberal parties because they are so detached from the real world.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Should not the Chancellor be alarmed rather than complacent about the finding of the competitiveness unit published this week that British productivity is 25 per cent. below our main competitors, that what it calls our low skills base and research effort are among the worst in Europe, that our national income per head is falling behind that of Finland, Iceland and Italy and that it is now falling to the levels in Spain and Portugal? Amid all those challenges, and now that we have a new Chancellor, where are the new policies?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman has taken some selective readings from the extremely valuable document on competitiveness produced yesterday. At least it has enabled him to ask a question without adding to the public sector borrowing requirement, as far as I noticed. He comments on our level of productivity. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is right to point out that our productivity is still below that of some of our major competitors, most notably the Japanese.

Throughout the 1980s, we have had the fastest improvement in productivity of any of the G7 nations. It shows how bad things were in 1979 that we still have not caught up with our foremost competitors. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the good news today, yesterday and the day before, he will see that the improvements in productivity in British industry during the recovery are quite remarkable and have contributed to the 3 per cent. increase in manufacturing output compared with a year ago, which is the first substantial achievement of this recovery.

Mr. Wilkinson: Has my right hon. and learned Friend seen the latest statistics on the rapid and dramatic decline in car sales in EC countries? Sales there have dropped by no less than 17 per cent. over the past six months, whereas in this country which, thank goodness, is out of the exchange rate mechanism and can again enjoy the benefits of low interest rates and growing demand, we have had double-digit increases in car sales. Would not the French and the Spanish industrialists, for example, agree that the British are much luckier than they are because we are not constrained by artificially high interest rates?

Mr. Clarke: There are other countries that were forced out of the ERM and not all of them are enjoying a British recovery. In terms of the ERM, my hon. Friend is right to point out that the buoyant state of car sales in this country is not matched in other major centres in the European Community. The fact is—let me be cautious again—that we are showing some signs of recovery and it is being sustained at the moment, although we must persevere to keep that up and trust that it strengthens.

In Germany, in France and even in Japan, there are falls in manufacturing output on the latest figures, whereas we have just seen the encouraging figures showing 3 per cent. more than a year ago in our manufacturing output announced only two days ago.

Bank of England

6. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy regarding payment for work carried out at the Bank of England by sub-contractors; and if he will make a statement.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Portillo): Under the Bank of England charter of 1946, such management matters are for the court of directors of the Bank and not for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I understand that the Bank maintains a policy of prompt payment against validated invoices for work carried out by its contractors.

Mr. Dowd: I thank the Chief Secretary for that reply and I also thank him on behalf of R. M. Simpson, a small heating contractor in my constituency, which has been waiting two years for the settlement of a £250,000 bill for work carried out at the Bank of England. The company eventually received a reply from the Chief Secretary once I raised the question in the House.

Is not it a disgrace that work done at the Bank of England cannot be regarded as secure and that the Bank does not ensure that the money is passed on to those working for contractors who are working for the Bank —those who actually do the work? The financial framework under which they execute their contracts needs a complete overhaul, especially for the sake of small businesses which are struggling in these difficult times.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we have been in correspondence. Mr. Simpson carried out

work for Taymech; in turn, Taymech worked for Bovis, and Bovis was doing some work for the Bank of England. There is a dispute about a claim for loss of expenses. The matter certainly does not rest with the Bank of England and is certainly not a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. There is no valid invoice from Simpson to the Bank of England; nor could there be, because the contract rests not between Simpson and the Bank of England, but between Simpson and Taymech.

Mr. Jessel: As to work carried out in the Bank of England by contractors, has the Governor got a contract and is it in his contract that he must try to stifle comment in the House on the rate of interest?

Mr. Portillo: No. That is not one of the Governor's responsibilities. He plays an important part in the vital matter of controlling inflation and I pay tribute to his dedication in that matter.

Tax and National Insurance

7. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase income tax and national insurance contributions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall be considering options for tax changes in the next Budget over the summer and in the autumn.

Mr. Mullin: I know that the Chancellor is not readily given to embarrassment, but does he feel a tiny twinge of guilt at having been elected on a promise of lower taxes and now to be presiding over some of the largest increases in our country's history. Or am I being naive?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Clarke: I am not frequently embarrassed and the hon. Gentleman is not frequently naive. As he knows, we have made spectacular progress, beyond what anyone in his party would have thought possible, in reducing direct taxation. We did so for supply-side reasons and, when we first began to get rid of the extraordinarily high levels of direct taxation that we inherited, we found that revenue actually increased as we reduced the level of tax. We have now cut marginal rates of income tax to 25 per cent. and introduced a lower rate of 20 per cent. as well.

We are committed to continuing to reduce income tax when it is prudent to do so. I do not think that it lies in the mouth of any Labour Member to criticise the Government for their tax-cutting record.

Mr. John Townend: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, with the basic rate of income tax at 25 per cent. and national insurance at 9 per cent., the working man has to pay over one third of his income in tax? Is not that level sufficiently high? Is not the big difference between the Labour party and our party the fact that we believe in taking as little as possible from the pay packet of the working man, whereas the Labour party believes in caning taxpayers, particularly those who are hard-working and enterprising?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. If I were a Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, my Back Benchers would be urging on me a rapid increase in taxation of all kinds. However, I am a Conservative Chancellor, and my hon. Friend reminds me of the basic commitment of the party. I will bear that in mind when I prepare my Budget in the autumn.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Chancellor said on Monday that no Chancellor could bind himself on taxation, yet at the time of the general election the Prime Minister said that there would be income tax cuts "year on year". Whom are we to believe—the present Prime Minister or the Chancellor, who clearly hopes to be the next Prime Minister?

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have related the Government's record on income tax. I do not recall the Labour party voting for any of the reductions in income tax, so the idea that those tax cuts are suddenly being held against us or are being adopted by the Labour party strikes me as unlikely. The commitment of the Government is to continue to cut direct taxation and income tax when economic circumstances permit and when it is prudent to do so.

Corporation Tax

9. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the current level of corporation tax is in Britain and in other industrialised countries; and if he will make a statement.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The main rate of corporation tax for 1993 is 33 per cent. That is the lowest main rate in any EC or G7 country.

Mrs. Knight: Does my hon. Friend agree that the low rate of business tax, coupled with a massive increase in manufacturing productivity since 1979, is a key reason why Britain has become the most popular of the European countries for inward investment? Does he also agree that that inward investment is creating jobs in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is precisely right. The figures show that the United Kingdom attracted one third of all inward investment into the European Community in 1991. That is a vote of confidence from the internationally mobile business community. It is also an expression of what Mr. Delors called our policy of turning Britain into a paradise for Japanese investment.

Mr. Macdonald: Corporation tax is, obviously, one of a number of taxes. Will the Minister confirm that the share of national wealth paid to the Government in overall taxation is now higher than it was in 1979? Does the Minister agree that, after 14 years of a Government committed to reducing taxation as a proportion of national wealth, that is an abject failure on the Government's own terms?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman's question is yet another illustration of the total failure of the Labour party to understand how a tax system impinges on the wealth-creation process. What matters is the marginal rate at which tax is collected on wealth creation.

The difference beween the Labour party and our party on corporation tax is that, under the Labour party, 52 per cent. of every marginal £1 of profit that was earned in a corporation was paid to the Government. That has fallen

to 33 per cent. under the present Government. That is the incentive to wealth creation which has attracted international investment to this country.

Mr. Jenkin: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the Government's determination that this country should be allowed to set our own rate of corporation tax without interference from the EC, because it is so vital to our competitiveness. Will he undertake to maintain that right, come what may?

Mr. Dorrell: That is indeed the Government's position. It was endorsed during the British presidency of the European Community when the subject was under discussion last year. It was not a controversial view among any of the member states of the Community.

Mr. Darling: The Chancellor has said that he may have to increase taxes in the autumn to meet the growing public sector borrowing requirement deficit. How much of that deficit do the Government estimate is structural, and how much cyclical?

Mr. Dorrell: The Chancellor has said that he will make his Budget judgments and announce his conclusions in November, and I am certainly not going to pre-empt those conclusions.

VAT on Fuel

10. **Sir John Hannam:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with which organisations he has held discussions on the impact on charities of VAT on fuel and power.

Sir John Cope: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and I have received representations from a number of charities and I have particularly had discussions with the Charities Tax Reform Group.

Sir John Hannam: I thank my right hon. Friend for the courtesy that he has shown the representatives from the charities at those meetings. Will he take into account the fact that in recent years charities have faced an ever-increasing burden of non-recoverable VAT, and the £25 million in VAT on fuel and power in addition to that is presenting them with major problems? Will he therefore give sympathetic consideration to the proposal for a tax refund system for charities; and will he give the Charities Tax Reform Group an opportunity to meet him between now and the Budget?

Sir John Cope: The allowances against VAT given to charities have increased since 1979 from about £23 million a year to about £150 million a year—a fact which my hon. Friend should bear in mind. Of course, I will consider any proposals put to us, and I will be pleased to see the Charities Tax Reform Group again before the Budget, if it should so wish.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Is the Minister aware that the imposition of VAT on charities and on the people of this country would not have been necessary if the Government had collected the £1·7 billion that the Inland Revenue wrote off in uncollected taxes last year? That was about 20 times the amount uncollected in the last recession. Does he believe that this recession is 20 times as bad, or is it time for the Government to start looking at collecting taxes from those who owe them instead of imposing new burdens on charities and others who cannot afford them?

Sir John Cope: Both on VAT and on the Inland Revenue side, we go to great efforts to collect all the taxes due, and we shall continue to do so. Of course, it is to be expected that that is more difficult in a recession, when the figures, of course, go up.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Will my right hon. Friend call in the charities again and discuss with them the thinking of the Labour and Liberal parties as set out in their policy documents, so that he can make it clear to them that a carbon tax or a tax on energy would be what those parties would advocate were they in government now?

Sir John Cope: I will certainly make that point clear.

Mr. Betts: At the general election, the Government gave an absolute commitment that there would be no increase either in the level or the range of VAT. They have broken that commitment by imposing VAT on domestic fuel, to the detriment of the elderly and the poor. Is any consideration being given to the imposition of VAT on public transport, which was also ruled out at the general election and which would be a move that would also disadvantage the poor, the elderly and the young, and create traffic congestion in our cities?

Sir John Cope: The hon. Gentleman exaggerates what was said before the election. He has obviously not paid attention to the many debates that we have had on the subject recently.

Growth Rate

11. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the level of growth for the United Kingdom economy for the last 12-month period for which figures are available; and what was the average figure for the rest of the EC.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In the first quarter of this year, GDP in the United Kingdom was 0·9 per cent. higher than a year earlier. Over the same period, GDP in Germany fell by 2·8 per cent. and GDP in France fell 0·6 per cent. In the year to the fourth quarter of 1992—the latest period for which complete figures are available—GDP in the EC as a whole fell by 0·1 per cent.

Mr. Carrington: I am grateful for that answer. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that increasing exports are vital to our economic recovery, and that the Prime Minister's championship of free trade and his excellent achievement in putting the general agreement on tariffs and trade negotiations back on the rails are the best tonic that our economy and its recovery could have?

Mr. Clarke: I do agree. It is encouraging to see British industry performing so well in non-European Community markets. We would perform even better in the EC if demand there were not dropping because our partners are still going into recession.

I also agree with my hon. Friend that, because of our record as a trading country and the need to have an export-led recovery, we have to encourage free trade. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's contribution to maintaining progress towards a successful conclusion of

the Uruguay round is very much in our interest. It is also in the interest of everybody who wishes to see economic revival generally across the western world.

Mr. Mandelson: In the light of the Prime Minister's comments on Tuesday, when he made his statement following the G7 summit, that the Government were working on new ideas and initiatives to contribute to President Clinton's employment summit in the autumn, will the Chancellor tell the House what specifically new policy ideas and initiatives are being worked out in the Treasury?

Mr. Clarke: I am glad to say that the Treasury is closely involved in discussions with my right hon. Friends in the relevant Departments, such as Employment and Education, to continue to work out policy on education and training, particularly for those between the ages of 16 and 19. As we now spend two and half times as much as was spent on those sectors before we came to power, and as we have introduced a series of training initiatives, all of which were opposed—as far as I can recall—by the Labour party, it is likely that we can be expected to build on an excellent record, having inherited a somewhat bare cupboard.

Mr. Forman: The Chancellor has every reason to be satisfied with our relative performance on economic growth as compared with our partners in the Community in recent times. However, does he recognise, and will he therefore take steps to push forward the idea, that we must be competitive internationally with the new super-competitive countries in the Pacific rim, where growth rates are significantly higher?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valuable point. For the next generation, we will remain at the forefront of developed and prosperous countries only if we are able to compete with our most challenging competitors—the Japanese and the countries of the Pacific rim and, probably, the north American economies if they recover their normal powerful growth. That is why we have not only to ensure that our own climate is right, but to persuade our European Community partners that Europe as a continent will fall behind if we saddle ourselves with costs on employment and restraints on economic change, which they do not impose on themselves when they are trying to earn their living in Japan or north America.

Mr. Andrew Smith: As 60 per cent. of Britain's exports are to the rest of the EC, is not there a real danger that recession there will knock back the export-led recovery, which we need to sustain us here? Does not that make it all the more important that everything possible is done jointly with our European partners to get economic recovery going in Europe and not have further deflation? What new proposals will the Chancellor put to the European Commission, which is producing the White Paper that will be the basis for the joint economic policy under the Maastricht treaty? Is not it an indictment of the new Chancellor that he has not been able to tell us one new proposal for recovery this afternoon?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. It is extremely important to us that the rest of the Community comes out of recession, because it is our most important market and we need to see demand revived there. That is why I was glad to take part in the convergence process. I was glad that the Community welcomed the steps that the Government are taking to cut the public deficit and public finances and to improve prospects for recovery. That is why I look forward to urging the Community to take the necessary measures to tackle exactly the same problems, particularly of fiscal deficits, which many member states face.

The main proposal that I shall make to the European Commission is that it should stop putting new burdens on employment and industry. We will certainly make our suggestions for the forthcoming White Paper. They will be based on increased efforts to improve the competitiveness of European industry, including our own, ever-more flexible labour markets, improved education and training, benefits systems that ensure that incentives for work are maintained and keep the unemployed close to employment, and all the other supply-side measures on which the Government have been leading the way in Europe for the past 14 years.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the manufacturing sector of the United Kingdom can make a major contribution to continued economic growth? Therefore, will he consider not only extending capital allowances, which run out at the end of October, but increasing them—they could either run on immediately from 31 October or be introduced in his Budget—because manufacturing industry, particularly epitomised through the Machine Tool Technologies Association, can make a major contribution not only to increasing efficiency and productivity, but to aiding our economic growth?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of manufacturing industry. That is why, when asked about other matters, I kept putting stress on the figures for manufacturing output that we had two days ago. They show that, in the past few months, we have already recovered about half of the drop in output that we suffered in the depths of the recession. My hon. Friend made a Budget representation about capital allowances, which I shall carefully bear in mind. I hope that he will consult his friends in manufacturing industry about his views on the social chapter and his proposed voting intentions in the light of what I have just said about placing burdens on manufacturing industry.

Manufacturing Investment

12. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase manufacturing investment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government will continue to foster an economic climate which will encourage investment.

Mr. O'Brien: Is the Minister aware that many industrialists and business men in manufacturing do not share that complacent view of his policy? Is it not the case that manufacturing investment at constant prices year on year is still at a level below that at which it was when the Government came to office in 1979? Does he agree that that is not a good record? When will we have new policies that will start to increase manufacturing investment?

Mr. Dorrell: It is extraordinary that we have been on Treasury Questions for 35 minutes and not a single Labour

Member has chosen to refer to the fact that, today, we announced that unemployment has fallen for the fifth month in succession. The hon. Gentleman thinks that he has a point that will embarrass the Government, but he is wrong. If we compare business investment in 1992 with that in 1979—1979 being the top of the nearest thing that the Labour party got to a boom and 1992 being a poor year in our record—that in 1992 was 37 per cent. higher in real terms than that in 1979.

Sir Donald Thompson: Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the drop in unemployment in my constituency, which is down to 7·5 per cent? Will he keep paramount in his Department the interests of manufacturing industry and the people who work in it and in commerce because it is on them that we all depend?

Mr. Dorrell: Yes, I am glad to join my hon. Friend in welcoming the fact that his constituency, among many others, is enjoying a fall in unemployment and has been for five months this year. That is, at least in part, because business investment through the 1980s grew faster than in any other G7 country, with the single exception of Japan. That is in sharp contrast to the record of business investment growth in the 1970s when the country was at the bottom of the league—seventh out of seven. In the 1980s, it was second out of seven.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Is the Minister aware that, while the House welcomes his commitment to a general economic climate that will promote growth, the two essential ingredients necessary to achieve that are a competitive exchange rate and low interest rates? While we do not expect from him or from the Chancellor any commitment on those points, could not there be a general sign from the Government that those two quintessential requirements for sustained economic growth, which we are now witnessing, will be foremost in their minds, not only as they formulate the Budget later in the year, but in the next few weeks and months?

Mr. Dorrell: If devaluation were the path to economic expansion, the 1970s would have been glory years rather than locust years. The Government believe that the best backdrop that we can deliver to allow business to invest, expand and create jobs and wealth is to provide monetary stability and price stability, which give the opportunity for long-range planning, rather than the short-termism that was imposed on the private sector when the hon. Gentleman tried to run a company against the impossible background created by the then Labour Government.

Mr. Garnier: Does my hon. Friend recognise that the good employment figures in my own constituency of Harborough are to be welcomed? They are the lowest in the county, as he, as a Leicestershire Member, will recognise. Does he accept that one of the reasons for that is that manufacturers in my constituency have continued to invest in manufacturing industry, and that we have the fullest order books for some time, both domestically and in the export market? Would he care to comment on the good performance of Leicestershire manufacturing industry at the moment?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to the success of manufacturing and, indeed, all other forms of economic activity in the county that both of us have the honour to represent. I have referred to investment as being one of the things that brought that about. Another thing, of course, is the fact that productivity has grown in the last 12 months by 8·7 per cent. That has made possible a decline in unit wage costs in British manufacturing that is the best on record.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Waterson: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming not only the lowest inflation rate for 30 years, but the fifth successive monthly fall in unemployment? Does he agree that the House deserves an apology from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) for predicting a steady rise in unemployment over the spring and summer?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is unkind to remind the House of the predictions by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. There have been a great deal of them—all wrong. If it would be for the convenience of the House, I will place a copy of them in the Library. The further fall in unemployment and inflation is very good news indeed. Unemployment has fallen by over 80,000 since the beginning of the year, and, taken with the remarkable figures on Tuesday for manufacturing output, we can now say with some certainty that there is clear evidence of recovery gathering pace.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Prime Minister accept that it should be for the House to decide whether the social chapter is included in the British version of the Maastricht treaty?

The Prime Minister: The House has examined the whole of the treaty. I expect to ratify the treaty that I signed at Maastricht. The House has shown its support for the treaty; I expect that it will do so again.

Mr. John Smith: The Prime Minister has carefully not answered the question. Let me put it to him plainly and clearly. Whichever way the House votes on the social chapter, will the Government accept the decision?

The Prime Minister: I have said to the right hon. and learned Gentleman before, and I repeat, that I expect the Government's motion to be carried, and I expect to ratify the treaty that I signed.

Mr. John Smith: The House and the country will have noticed another failure to answer the question directly. Does the Prime Minister understand that, were he to defy the will of the House of Commons, it would be a monstrous violation of the rights of the House, and would at one fell swoop undermine our parliamentary democracy?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman perhaps does not understand the answers. I will make them more clear for him, so that he is in no

doubt. We expect to ratify the treaty that I signed at Maastricht. The House has shown its support for the treaty; I expect it to do so again.

Mr. Lamont: This month, like last, has seen a remarkable catalogue of good economic indicators. Is it not the case that, in addition to the fifth fall in monthly unemployment, we have seen the largest increase in industrial production for four years and the lowest inflation record for nearly 30 years? When one puts that into a European context and sees that Britain has a lower than average rate of inflation in the European Community, is the only country in the European Community in which unemployment is falling, and is the only country in the European Community in which industrial production is rising, I congratulate the new Chancellor on the rapid success of his policies.

The Prime Minister: I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be most grateful for my right hon. Friend's support for his policies. It is entirely clear that we are coming out of recession and into recovery. It is equally clear that we are leading Europe into recovery.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Prime Minister reflect on the fact that the Government have said to their rebels that nothing will stop them from ratifying the Maastricht treaty, but they have said to the House that adopting the social chapter would jeopardise the treaty? Both statements cannot be true; which is?

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Gentleman has forgotten what he said about the social chapter. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has not forgotten, but perhaps I can remind the House what he said:

"I believe what is now being put forward in the social chapter may well lead to a form of Euro-sclerosis."

He continued:

"The social chapter in the Maastricht agreement, it seems to me, is a really worrying attempt by Europe to try and rebuild in Britain the things that we have dismantled over the last 12 or 15 years."

If that is the view of the right hon. Gentleman and his party, and he is true to his view, I shall expect to see him in our Lobby next Thursday.

Portsmouth

Q2. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Prime Minister whether he has plans to pay an official visit to Portsmouth.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Martin: Does my right hon. Friend recall that he has not visited Portsmouth since the general election, at a time when the so-called poll experts were predicting not only a Government defeat in general but, even more shamefully, the loss of my seat in particular? Will my right hon. Friend visit us again soon, preferably in the 50th anniversary year of D-day? Such a visit would not only mark the premier naval port of Portsmouth's vital contribution to our defence needs in the past, but mark its present contribution and the efforts it will make for many years in the future.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is an extremely forceful advocate for Portsmouth, and I am grateful for his invitation. I understand how important the defence industry is to his constituents, and I hope that he will take every opportunity to remind them of two facts: that the Labour party would cut defence spending by a quarter, and that the Liberal Democrats would cut it by half. We hear a lot from the leader of the Liberal Democrats about taking military action in Bosnia; we hear rather less from him about how we would be able to take that action after his policy had dismantled the Army, the Navy and the Royal Air Force.

Engagements

Q3. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McAllion: Is the Prime Minister aware that, because of the legal shackles on British trades unions, this week sacked Timex workers were banned from taking part in the national launch of the Timex boycott campaign, and banned from calling on the support of other British trade unionists?

What is banned here is legal elsewhere in Europe. Sacked Timex workers have been in France this week, exercising the democratic rights denied to them in their own country. Is the Prime Minister not ashamed of the Government's record on labour law, which has isolated Britain in Europe and left British workers on their own, with no social chapter, no wages councils and no effective right to strike? The Government have turned Britain, once one of the workshops of the world, into one of the world's sweatshop economies.

The Prime Minister: The sort of behaviour that we saw from trade unionists at Timex is nothing for the hon. Gentleman to be proud of. I dare say that the jobs lost at Timex as a result will stand as the clearest evidence that the hon. Gentleman's policy is utterly the wrong way to look at labour and trade union relationships.

Q4. **Mr. Kynoch:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Kynoch: Will my right hon. Friend thank and congratulate the anti-terrorist branch and MI5 for its continuing efforts to protect the public from terrorist crimes, and especially their efforts yesterday? Does he agree that had we failed to pass the prevention of terrorism Act and gone down the path of giving away Northern Ireland—the policy of the Opposition—the anti-terrorist branch and MI5 might as well have been told by us to pack up their things and go back to traffic duty?

The Prime Minister: The police and the Security Service deserve our congratulations on their professionalism and vigilance. They have demonstrated that in fighting terrorism over many years. It is clear, and it has been endorsed repeatedly by the House, that we need the prevention of terrorism Act to defeat the terrorists. With the greatest goodwill in the world, I cannot understand why, year after year, Opposition Members have voted it down.

Mr. Boyce: In view of the Prime Minister's utterances in recent days about nuclear weapons being defensive measures, may I ask him to take this opportunity to assure the House, the country and the world that Britain will never use them first?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should know better than to ask such a daft question.

Q5. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Winterton: My right hon. Friend has announced this afternoon dramatic improvements in a number of economic indicators which are of immense interest to the House and the country. Will he continue to encourage manufacturing industry as a way of improving our economy, and will he ensure that in the Budget to be announced in December, the fragile recovery of our manufacturing base, which is vital to our future, will continue to be encouraged and that measures will be introduced to ensure that recovery and continued economic growth?

The Prime Minister: The whole House knows and respects my hon. Friend's advocacy of manufacturing, so he will be as pleased as I am about the growing success of British manufacturers. As he knows, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) introduced measures in the Budget and autumn statement to help manufacturing industry. I say also to my hon. Friend that the one thing that would do great damage to manufacturing industry would be the provisions of the social chapter.

Mrs. Mahon: Does the Prime Minister realise that 500,000 of the present unemployed are aged between 18 and 24 and that, because of the cuts that he helped to introduce, they are having to manage on £4·97 a day? Does he think that that is enough to keep them in food and on which they can live? Will he take action now to end the discrimination against that age group, instead of making cheap political points at the expense of the unemployed?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that the hon. Lady has grasped the training opportunities that exist for young people. I want youngsters to take up those training opportunities. That is what they are there for and it is in their interest to take them up.

Q6. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Amess: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's trade union reforms have made a significant contribution to Britain's increased industrial competitiveness over the past 10 years, while the trade unions have made a significant contribution to the Labour party's electoral uncompetitiveness over the same period?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I came across an interesting quote last week from a delegate at a Transport and General Workers Union conference, who said:

"We are not the tail wagging the dog. We are the dog."

That is the true relationship between Labour and the unions. The unions are the dog and Labour is the lamp post.

Q7. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 July.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hain: What is the Prime Minister going to do about corruption in his flagship council in Westminster? When will he stop crooks financing the Conservative party? Why did he allow 44 of his own Members to vote themselves tax privileges in the Lloyd's amendments on Tuesday? Is that why he is the most unpopular Prime Minister on record?

The Prime Minister: The best that can be said about that compendium question is that it is worthy of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Fry: In welcoming the unemployment figure, will my right hon. Friend also take time to express vividly to all those in employment the cost of the social security budget, currently running at more than £60 a week for every worker? Does not that large sum justify the Government's intention to re-examine that budget?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right about that for the reasons that I have set out on a number of occasions in recent weeks. That problem is faced not only in Britain, but right across the European Community, in Japan, the United States and other industrial countries.

Open Government

3.30 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. William Waldegrave): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about open government. I am publishing today a White Paper——

Madam Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber do so not only quickly but quietly so that we can hear the statement?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am publishing today a White Paper which marks the conclusion of a review that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister asked me to undertake in May last year. It is a significant step forward towards more openness, on which the Government have already made considerable progress.

The White Paper draws together two strands of policy that are not always associated by those who have campaigned for freedom of information—the citizen's right to find out and the Government's duty to inform. Governments can wait to be asked, but, across a whole range of policy areas, the objective should be to initiate the publication of information that is of practical use to people. That is a principle of the citizens charter, aimed at providing more information about services in a form that helps users of services to understand, to compare, to assert their rights and, wherever possible, to exercise choice.

That is why we are determined, for example, to publish comparative information on schools and why we have attached such importance to the publication of information measuring performance in transport, health and many other areas.

The White Paper builds on what has been achieved and takes progress further with six new steps. First, it sets out a new code of practice on access to information held by central Government. It commits the Government, for the first time, to a clear set of principles governing what information will be available and what can properly be withheld. It deals with the information that we shall aim to provide as a matter of course, including the facts, analysis and reasoning that lie behind decisions; and explanatory material, including internal guidance, dealing with Departments' rules and procedures in their dealings with the public.

The code includes a commitment to meet reasonable requests for factual information relating to the policies, actions and decisions of Departments, filling the gaps in the framework of published information.

Obviously, some categories of information will be exempt from that commitment. They are set out in part II of the draft code in annex A to the White Paper. Those categories will be familiar to those who have studied overseas access legislation and many areas of confidentiality would have been exempt also under the Right to Know Bill introduced this Session by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). Chapter 3 of the White Paper explains the rationale for those exemptions, and for some issues on which we have taken a different approach from that adopted in the Bill.

The second and crucial step is that the new code will be independently policed by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration—the ombudsman—who has agreed to consider complaints that a Department has failed to provide information that should have been provided under the code. This can be done under his existing powers if referred to him through a Member of Parliament.

Citizens will thus have an independent investigator working on their behalf. The ombudsman will be able to report to Parliament if he finds that information has been improperly withheld. Ministers and their Departments can be called to account if they are criticised by the ombudsman, as they can now be called to account for maladministration and injustice. Parliamentary accountability is enhanced, not diminished.

The code will apply in the first instance to Departments and other bodies within the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner and his opposite number in Northern Ireland. However, the Government believe that similar codes could apply with advantage to the national health service and to local authorities. We shall consult representative interests, including the relevant professions and the local authority associations, before publishing further proposals covering those areas.

People have a direct interest in the accuracy and privacy of information held about them by Government. That is why our third proposal is to introduce a new statutory right of access for the subject to see such personal information, applying to a wide range of public sector authorities. There will be exemptions broadly in line with the Data Protection Act 1984, for example, where disclosure would prejudice the prevention or detection of crime, the apprehension or prosecution of offenders, or the assessment or collection of tax. Confidential references will also be protected, as will certain other specified categories of personal information such as records relating to immigration, nationality and consular records.

The greatest number of representations received over the last year by my Department related to information held by Government in the area of public health and safety. That is why our fourth proposal is a new statutory access right to health and safety information held by public authorities, on the lines of the existing access right to environmental information. That will go beyond health and safety at work to include information on such matters as the safety of public places, transport, food and consumer goods and environmental health risks. Obviously, proper protection must be offered to genuine trade secrets and manufacturing know-how and we must honour past commitments where information has been given in confidence. However, it will be a key aim to make the process of regulation more transparent both to the public—in whose interest it is carried out—and to the industries affected, which have sometimes found regulatory requirements to be unclear or poorly explained.

Where there is a statutory right of access, there should be a right of appeal to an external authority on matters in dispute. The Government will be consulting further on whether new tribunals should be established to hear appeals arising from the two new access rights.

Fifthly, we have identified and listed in the White Paper the many statutory provisions that limit the ability of the Government to disclose information. Where those provisions run across the new access rights, provision can be made to set them aside. However, in the other cases we see no reason to revise the opinion of the Franks committee in 1972 that there is no contradiction between proper openness and the necessary protection of private information that has been entrusted to the state in confidence. Parliament has approved all those provisions,

often on the basis that protection of confidentiality was quid pro quo for some invasion of privacy. The majority of them should stand. In future, however, we shall consider the selective introduction of harm tests into those statutory offences.

Sixthly, and finally among the main White Paper proposals, I come to the review and release of public records. An invitation that I issued to historians last summer has produced useful suggestions, which have led to some significant publications. Examples of those and of records released as a result of other initiatives are listed in annex D to the White Paper. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is releasing further papers today relating to the early history of intelligence operations.

A working party established by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has recommended, and my noble and learned Friend has accepted, changes in the criteria for closing records, reductions in the periods of extended closure and the application of a harm test, which will mean that, in future, records will not be closed for longer than 30 years unless actual damage would be caused by their release. That will lead to a substantial increase in the material available to historians.

I think it relevant to mention to the House that, in addition to the six main proposals in the White Paper, the Defence, Press and Broadcasting Committee is reviewing the D notice procedure in order to modernise it and to make it more open. Parliament will be notified of the outcome of that review shortly.

I believe that the House will recognise that those proposals, taken together, lay down a sure and lasting foundation for more open public administration and government. They are a series of practical steps that meet the principal objectives of those who have advocated a full statutory freedom of information regime, without the legal complexities that that would entail. They do so while strengthening the role of Parliament in calling Ministers to account, rather than sidelining it. I commend the White Paper to the House.

Ms Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I begin by briefly acknowledging the work of Maurice Frankel of the Campaign for Freedom of Information, as well as the sterling work of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). Other hon. Members on both sides of the House, many of whom are here today, have also put in much work to try to bring more openness into our system of government.

I congratulate the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on having, at last, after many months of tough negotiations with other Ministers, brought into the open a White Paper on open government. We have had to wait some time for it. When hon. Members have time to read the report, they will see that it is a well-researched, carefully documented account. Nevertheless, unfortunately, it epitomises exactly the qualities for which the Chancellor is gaining a reputation, and which we have just seen him demonstrate. There were a lot of nice words and good intentions, the statement was high on rhetoric, but, in the end, there was a deep failure to deliver the policy of open government that many Members want.

The fundamental flaw in the White Paper and the basic problem with it, which the Chancellor tried to skirt, is the fact that, in the end, it will be a Minister who decides what information is available to the public. I ask hon. Members to reflect on the fact that that Minister will be one of the very Ministers who, in the past year, have refused to give information on the legal advice on Maastricht and the Matrix Churchill affair—the Minister who refused to put Lord Scott into the public domain, and refused to publish the accounts and records of the pits, the facts about the privatised prisons—[HON. MEMBERS: "Asil Nadir."]—and Asil Nadir and political donations. *[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friends are telling me, the list goes on and on.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Rubbish.

Ms Mowlam: The hon. Gentleman may shout rubbish, but will he deny that the Scott inquiry was carried out in private? Will he deny that Asil Nadir's donations are not in the public domain? That is the deep problem with the report, and that is the reason why it is flawed. Ministers will decide what is released. That is why, sadly, the White Paper will be the epitaph to what will in the end be seen as a weak ministerial career.

Will the Chancellor confirm that, under the code of practice that he outlined today, which I readily acknowledge covers many of the right areas and includes many of the right exemptions—I welcome the test of exemptions—it will be Ministers who can refuse access to information in the first place? If people want to appeal, they will have to do so to the parliamentary ombudsman. Will the Minister confirm that that is the same ombudsman whose average response time to queries is now 13 months and 18 days?

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): That is cheap.

Ms Mowlam: If the hon. Gentleman had used the parliamentary ombudsman system, he would know that it is slow, bureaucratic and toothless.

Mr. David Nicholson: Even cheaper.

Ms Mowlam: To suggest that that will be the mechanism for appeals will not work—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): What about——

Madam Speaker: Order. I resent interventions from sedentary positions, especially when they continue, as in the case of the hon. Member.

Ms Mowlam: Will the Minister also confirm that a year ago he identified 200 Acts or other statutes that would be swept from the statute book? I remember the Prime Minister talking about the "cobwebs of secrecy" that would be removed when that happened. Will the Minister confirm that, ironically, as he has just told us, those 200 statutes cannot now be abolished, so they will remain? Three pages in the document argue with good All Souls logic why those statutes have to stay. In the end, they will stay.

Will the right hon. Gentleman further acknowledge that the real parentage of this White Paper is a 1979 Green Paper by Lord Callaghan, which contained exactly the same sections, section by section, covering a code of practice, tribunals and the ombudsman? Will the right hon. Gentleman admit that, in terms of the past 14 years, the Government have just caught up with 1979 and have learnt nothing from the freedom of information legislation that has been practised over the past 10 years in Australia, New Zealand and Canada?

[Ms Mowlam]

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that whistle-blowers, who have been gagged by current legislation and are unable to disclose information when that is in the public interest, will still be subjected to criminal sanctions after the publication of his White Paper?

I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's comments about individual rights in respect of health and safety. However, will he please tell me why that proposal cannot go back before 1991, as many people with disabilities and those who are terminally ill would like to see those historical health records? The same applies to the exemptions on immigration to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

With regard to talking about the Government's commitment to open government, it is difficult to examine the details of the section on immigration, because it was only when I entered the Chamber at 3.30 pm that I was passed the White Paper. I received a copy of the Minister's statement 22 minutes before that. If that is an indication of open government, I should like to know what the Government's record is.

When the Minister replies, will he tell us why Opposition Members, in particular my hon. Friends the Members for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) and for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), are not allowed to visit scientific institutions in this country without a ministerial chaperon? That has just been confirmed by the Leader of the House. We cannot visit such institutions without a Minister being present.

Without substantive changes and without the kind of Right to Know Bill for which we have argued, and despite the many pages of rhetoric in the White Paper, ours will continue to be the most secretive Government in the western world.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Lady was almost as impressive on this subject as she was on science. When her colleagues greeted the science White Paper, they made such a pig's ear of it that even the Opposition spokesman in the House of Lords took the opposite view. They have taken the precaution today of not asking for a statement in the House of Lords so that they do not fall into that trap again.

When the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) has done her homework—which her colleagues tell me she very seldom does—she will find that she has made a fool of herself. I am absolutely happy to acknowledge that many of the ideas in this White Paper were also endorsed by the Labour party. I do not think that that is a weakness for my argument. I believe that it is a weakness in the hon. Lady's argument.

Let me remind the House of the last Labour Government's record on openness. In 1974, the Labour manifesto promised to increase openness and to replace the Official Secrets Act 1911. In 1975, the Queen's Speech promised to increase openness and to amend the Official Secrets Act. In 1976, the then Home Secretary promised to replace section 2 of the Official Secrets Act with an official information Act. In 1977, the Queen's Speech promised to increase openness and to replace the Official Secrets Act. In 1978, the Government published a White Paper—and so it went on until 1979. I could read out the rest, but Labour did absolutely nothing and the Opposition have no right whatsoever to talk on this subject.

The hon. Lady asked, more or less, a couple of questions. She asked about the speed of the ombudsman. She may like to know that in freedom of information regimes—the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central, (Mr. Fisher) will remember this, as it was at the Campaign for Freedom of Information's conference that Mr. Grace warned of it—the legislative route, or Freedom of Information Act route, is much slower than the ombudsman route. In Canada, it takes about two years, as Mr. Grace himself said.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman may shake his head, but I have the quotation with me. It is true that overseas regimes are much slower. I have already had discussions with the ombudsman, and it will be his objective to speed inquiries as much as he can, and that is right.

The hon. Lady said also that investigations of the statutes protecting privacy should be swept away. She cannot have thought about what she said. Is she really saying that statutes that protect privacy and make it a criminal offence to release private information should be swept away? Of course not. Lord Franks was perfectly right about that, and we have re-endorsed what he said.

There was very little else in what the hon. Lady said, except for her usual round of abuse about my college at Oxford, which obviously causes her to have a chip on her shoulder. I apologise for that. *[Interruption.]* She asked a question about retrospection; that is perfectly true. In relation to retrospection, we have taken the view that information given in good faith under one regime should not be released under another. It would be bad faith to release information when it was provided on the basis that it was going to be kept confidential. Most hon. Members, on reflection, would support that.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, far from the carping attitude of the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), most hon. Members think that he has taken a larger step forward in this matter than any of his predecessors? Is not my right hon. Friend proposing that only when there are overwhelming reasons for it should information remain secret? Is not that a great step forward?

Is not it a further great step forward that the rights of the House are preserved, because the Parliamentary Commissioner will be taking a role and it will be left to an Officer of the House to decide whether a Department has behaved reasonably if it has refused access to a document in the described circumstances?

Will not the Parliamentary Commissioner criticise a Department for failing to produce a document, and will it not then be up to the relevant Committees of the House to decide whether his criticism is right? That is a great step forward, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on it.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend is right. The Parliamentary Commissioner will have the capacity to investigate whether the code has been properly followed. He will, as he does at present, have the right to say to Departments that he believes that it has not been followd and that they should put matters right. If a Department is so unwise as to resist him, he has the right to come to his all-party Committee and to the House.

Recommendations of the Parliamentary Commissioner have invariably been followed by Governments, and it is right that they should be. The case is strengthened further by the fact that, in a sense, the Parliamentary Commissioner has the redress in his own hands in that he has the information. We have discussed the issue with him and he has fairly said that he has always given a Department the first opportunity to put the matter right; that is fair.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): The right hon. Gentleman's statement confirms that he has decided not to introduce a freedom of information Act and, therefore, the right of recourse to the courts for freedom of information, as successive Labour and Conservative Governments have refused to do. However, his proposals are a step forward and they are welcome in that respect.

In the proposals for the implementation of the new code, the right hon. Gentleman places reliance on the ombudsman. Will he provide extra resources to speed the work of the ombudsman, who will have a whole new work load as result? Will he extend the ombudsman's investigative powers to include consumer groups, interest groups, lobbies and others who, in other countries, use freedom of information provision to campaign on behalf of people, or will he stick with the current provision that the ombudsman can take up cases only when there is loss to an individual? That would invalidate the ability of the legislation to allow Governments to be properly scrutinised by other bodies.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his fair recognition that this measure represents a major step forward. It is perfectly fair to say that there is a resource implication for the ombudsman's work. We made it clear in the White Paper that the additional work load must not damage the already large work load that he has, so he will have to have more resources.

Under the code, the ombudsman does not need to demonstrate that there has been loss to an individual. If the code has not been followed, that will be evidence that the person does not have his rights. That will enable the ombudsman to make a recommendation. It is not for me to say what the scope of the ombudsman is; that is for the all-party Select Committee. At present, I have no plans to recommend any widening of his scope.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I thank my right hon. Friend for the statement and urge him to disregard the remarks of the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam). I fear that she spoke without giving the matter her usual consideration. The statement does much to enhance the principle of open government. I certainly welcome the idea of a code of practice that will be closely supervised by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. As my right hon. Friend knows, the Parliamentary Commissioner is not responsible to Ministers or the Government—he is responsible directly to Parliament. That is, he is responsible to hon. Members on both sides of the House. As my right hon. Friend mentioned, the Select Committee——

Madam Speaker: Order. A number of hon. Members want to put questions to the Minister. On these occasions, I often ask for one question and a brief exchange, and I insist on that now.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the Parliamentary Commissioner is the right person to administer the code of practice? Will he ensure that all adequate resources are available to the Parliamentary Commissioner? As the Select Committee is likely to suggest enhanced powers, will my right hon. Friend support them when they come before the House?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend, who chairs the Select Committee, correctly reports the situation. The Parliamentary Commissioner is a servant of the House and it is not for the Government to lay down the law about how he should behave. He has said how he will take forward this new duty, which his present powers enable him to carry through. In William Reid, we are lucky to have a formidable Parliamentary Commissioner. I will listen carefully to what my hon. Friend and his Select Committee say in so far as it relates to the responsibilities of the Government, especially with regard to resources.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): The White Paper rightly identifies section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968 as a barrier to openness. Why does not the White Paper recommend the abolition of that section, which was provided for in my Medicines Information Bill? That Bill was supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Waldegrave: The reason, which is set out in the White Paper, is that we believe that there should be further openness in this area. However, we believe that this is a classic case where steps should be taken on a Europewide basis. As the hon. Gentleman knows, European legislation is in preparation. There would be dangers to the extremely important pharmaceutical industry in this country if we did not proceed on a Europewide basis.

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in practice, it is hard to find the right balance between the ideal of freedom of information and chaotic government in which both Ministers and civil servants are reluctant to commit anything confidential to paper? I congratulate him on taking many steps forward to more open government in the White Paper that he has announced today, especially the two new statutory rights for individuals which seem to meet many of the objectives of those who wrote in to support the Right to Know Bill.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. We have taken major steps forward. It was noticeable that the campaign of cards that were sent to many hon. Members—certainly to me—by the Campaign for Freedom of Information concentrated, understandably, on practical rights and acces that ordinary people want in their daily lives, especially with regard to health and safety. We are meeting those rights properly by statutory access and that will be welcomed by many of those people who lobbied hon. Members.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): I congratulate the Chancellor on his ingenuity. He has taken the existing system as far as it can possibly go. He finds himself in the same position as the last Labour Government, who struggled mightily to prevent themselves from having to introduce a freedom of information Bill. They succeeded, and he has succeeded. I welcome some of his ingenuity and the increased powers for the Parliamentary Commissioner. Can he tell the House and

[Dr. Tony Wright]

the country why, having come to the point at which the Government decided not to give a statutory right to know or to introduce a freedom of information Bill, he decided to do that?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his first remarks. The one difference between this Government and the Labour Government is that they agonised for seven years and did nothing, whereas our Prime Minister pledged in our last manifesto to increase openness and we have done something about it a year later.

The argument for not taking a statutory route was set out by the Labour Government at the time. Opposition Members below the Gangway, who are stalwart upholders of the rights of this House, seem to be on my side in this matter. Their hon. Friends seem to be arguing for moving responsibility for key matters away from the House to judges. On the rare occasions when there will be conflict —I do not believe that there will be conflict often between the Parliamentary Commissioner's advice and the Departments—it will be on a serious matter. Do we really want to delegate those decisions to appointed judges? We would not avoid the politics by that; the political decisions would simply be taken by appointed judges rather than, ultimately, by the House. That is why we, like the Labour Government, believe that we need to increase information at the same time as enhancing the powers of the House.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): My right hon. Friend and his officials deserve warm congratulations on what has been a long march through the institutions. I particularly welcome the innovation in respect of the Parliamentary Commissioner. Will my right hon. Friend remind those who are, rightly, concerned to make progress with this issue that, because openness in Government depends on everyday decisions by Ministers and officials, it is just as important to get a new culture and attitude in Whitehall as it is to create new rights and entitlements?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. In many ways, it would be much easier, putting aside the inevitable arguments about getting parliamentary time, to pass an Act and say that by creating that confrontation the problem is solved. That would not be the case. Let me quote again the advice given to the information commissioner. In talking about legal compunction, he said:

> "The power to compel means confrontation; it could put the information commissioner"—

in the Right to Know Bill of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central——

> "in a chronic state of war with government institutions and would inevitably result in the most narrow legalistic application of the law."

I believe that to be right. It is far better for the ombudsman to work with Departments and get them to improve their practices, as he has done on administrative procedures, while having in the background the power to compel them, if need be. That is much more likely to change the culture in Whitehall.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South) *rose*——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Dennis—no, Bob Cryer. I call Mr. Cryer.

Mr. Skinner: I thought you said me, Madam Speaker. Hold on a minute. What is going on here?

Madam Speaker: Mr. Dennis Cryer means Mr. Bob Cryer.

Mr. Cryer: It is a very comradely arrangement——

Mr. Skinner: It is on this occasion.

Mr. Cryer: Will the proposals for a code of practice, as opposed to legislation, enable ordinary citizens to gain access to, for example, the secrets of installations such as Menwith Hill near Harrogate? For many years, concern has been expressed about that institution which has not had formal parliamentary approval. The Minister wants to give Parliament more power. Surely people have a right to know what is going on there, particularly now that any military justification, even by the Government's standards, has long since gone and especially as Menwith Hill is a spy on external, ordinary civilian telecommunications.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman will understand that under my code, as under the Bill of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central, proper national security will be protected. It should be protected. If information is requested and a refusal to give it is challenged, there will be an independent adjudicator, in the shape of the Parliamentary Commissioner, to assess whether the Department's decision has been fair.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): As a former civil servant, an occasional historian and a member of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, I welcome what my right hon. Friend has announced and greatly regret the unnecessary traducing of aspects of the Parliamentary Commissioner's work by the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam).

In view of the concern of my constituents about such matters as organophosphorus sheep dips and the results of an important derailing of a train carrying noxious liquids some 18 months ago, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the measures he is proposing on health and safety will greatly help the right to know on those matters?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend should not worry too much about the hon. Member for Redcar. She always does that.

On health and safety, the new statutory right will provide the sort of legislative clout that is based on statute, because it is proper that it should. In the process of passing the statute, we may need to override some of the statutory bars to the release of information that are listed, which we could not do through a code, and they will help my hon. Friend with the questions that he raised.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): If the Minister is so keen on open government, will he abolish the Osmotherley rules, which so severely restrict civil servants' ability to give evidence to Select Committees? Will he, his colleagues and their civil servants tell us the criteria for the privatisation of Government agencies?

Mr. Waldegrave: There is no secret about the latter as those matters are debated widely. The Osmotherley rules cover the distinction between what it is right for civil servants to answer and what it is right for Ministers to

answer. The rules are broadly correct, but, from time to time, the Select Committee on which the hon. Member serves considers them and the guidance given to civil servants, and comments on them.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Apart from that information to which we have a statutory right and information that is classified for some reason of privacy or national security, what is the status of all the rest of the information that may be given voluntarily, or may have to be prised out of the civil service and Government by the ombudsman?

Furthermore, is it consistent with any sort of freedom of information that the great wisdom and experience of one Government should continue to be denied to their successor Government by the arrangements that exist, or will it be open to the ombudsman to say that some of the things that were done by the Government or their predecessor should be made available, if requested, by their successors?

Mr. Waldegrave: All the information laid down in the code belongs, by right, to those who want it. As I said in my original statement, however, the Government should not wait to be asked. We should improve the practice of initiating the publication of information on many subjects, as we are doing.

Advice given to Ministers by officials should be covered by privacy laws, and I think that all freedom of information regimes throughout the world cover it. I believe that the rule that Ministers of a successor Government cannot demand by right to see the previous Government's papers on those matters is correct. It would damage the openness and frankness between officials and Ministers if officials thought that they would constantly have to explain to a successor Minister why they argued in a particular way.

Mr. Fisher: It happens in the United States.

Mr. Waldegrave: That seems to me to be an extremely bad analogy, because in the United States large parts of the bureaucracy change with the Government, at great cost to good government there.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why should anybody take a blind bit of notice of this Tory Government when they talk about open government? We have just witnessed the Prime Minister refusing to answer a question that the Leader of the Opposition put to him three times and he has refused to give an answer about summat that is going to happen next Thursday. If they believe in open government, why do they not tell us where they get the money from for the Tory party—from all the sleazebags round the world? Why does the Minister not tell us the names of the eight Tory Members of Parliament who are in Asil Nadir's pocket? That is open government.

Mr. Waldegrave: Perhaps one day the hon. Member will think up a really smart question to ask the Prime Minister, such as when he stopped beating his wife, and be cross when he refuses to answer.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the publication of the code of practice. I also thank him for his generosity in agreeing to meet me and to publish the criteria for the retention of official documents within Departments and their release by the Public Record Office. Can he confirm that, under the new regime, the advisory committee that allows the Lord Chancellor to retain documents beyond the 30-year limit will now at least be allowed to read them?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. The advisory committee, which advises the Lord Chancellor and is chaired by the Master of the Rolls, will have access to papers when there is a dispute. Disputes between Departments about releasing documents are rare, but arrangements are in hand to see how that can best be done so that access to documents will be available.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): I congratulate the Chancellor on the White Paper and many of the details in it. However, in responding for the Opposition, my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) was right to say that, although the White Paper is well argued and researched and the code of practice furthers the principles of open government well, in practice it will not make much difference, because it contains no means of enforcement.

The Chancellor rests on the ombudsman, but the ombudsman is slower. He rests on Mr. Grace, but everybody knows—and his own research shows—that Canada has the worst form of enforcement. Australia has a better system, with delivery of material in 30 days, as my Bill provides. The Chancellor knows that the ombudsman's present record is, as my hon. Friend said, 14 months and 18 days. What specific extra resources will he provide? Will he publish a target for response times for the ombudsman?

The White Paper's real weakness is that Ministers will continue to decide. That is the position now and nothing will change. Ministers will be in the dock for not releasing information and will be judge and jury in their own case. They have been hiding information consistently throughout last year.

We need a freedom of information Bill and we shall have one, as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and every other country have. The Government know that they have lost this argument this year. They are like King Canute. Having brought themselves to the brink of freedom of information with the White Paper, they have not the courage to jump in the water and accept that the game is up. We cannot be behind the rest of the world by not having freedom of information legislation any longer. I believe that the Conservative party will include freedom of information legislation in the next Tory party manifesto, but they will not have a chance to implement it because we shall be in government.

The British people want the right to know and they will get it. But the White Paper does not give people the right to know.

Mr. Waldegrave: Unfortunately for the hon. Member who is a real expert on the subject—unlike the hon. Member for Redcar—the Labour Government's record was outstandingly bad. When we measure progress under the two parties since the war, my party does much better. A famous example was quoted by a former Member of Parliament, Clement Freud, of the resounding minute written by the great Mr. Herbert Morrison saying that people had a right to know which he classified "secret". So that made little progress.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned timing. He said that the response time was 30 days and that is fair enough. We must have proper targets for Departments to respond.

[Mr. Waldegrave]

That is not the comparison with the two years which Mr. Grace was talking about. Mr. Grace meant the time that it took for disputes to go through the courts. It does not take 30 days to settle court disputes in Australia.

If the hon. Gentleman is saying that this country is likely to produce a much faster procedure in the courts than Canada, with all respect to my noble and learned Friends, he is a little optimistic. The ombudsman is much more likely to act more swiftly. It will be cheaper for the citizen because there is no need to employ lawyers and others, who tend to waste a lot of money. I believe that the ombudsman has worked extremely well. His recommendations have been invariably accepted by Governments and he is the obvious enforcement agency to use.

Business of the House

4.15 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week and a day or two beyond that. The business will be as follows:

MONDAY 19 JULY—Supplemental timetable motion on and consideration of Lords amendments to the Education Bill.

TUESDAY 20 JULY—Opposition day (18th allotted day).

There will be a debate described as "The Threat of Government Policies to the Social Fabric and the Security of the Individual", on an Opposition motion.

Motions relating to immigration and asylum. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

WEDNESDAY 21 JULY—Estimates day (first allotted day, second part). There will be a debate relating to domestic violence.

Details of the estimates concerned and the relevant Select Committee reports will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motion on the Suppression of Terrorism Act 1978 (Application of Provisions) (India) order.

Motion on the Incumbents (Vacation of Benefices) (Amendment) measure.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

At 10 o'clock, the House will be asked to agree the outstanding estimates for 1993-94.

THURSDAY 22 JULY—Subject to Royal Assent being signified to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill, there will be a debate on a motion considering the question of adopting the protocol on social policy.

FRIDAY 23 JULY—There will be a debate on the environment on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 26 JULY—Motion for the summer Adjournment.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) (No.2) Bill.

TUESDAY 27 JULY—Debates on the summer Adjournment.

In view of what I have said about those last two days, the House will obviously wish me to say something about the contents of the motion for the Adjournment. Subject to the progress of business, it will be proposed that the House should rise for the summer Adjournment on Tuesday 27 July until Monday 18 October. The House may be also asked to consider any Lords messages that may be received.

I have already announced that the debate for Thursday 22 July is subject to the signifying of Royal Assent to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. It may be helpful to the House to know that the Government motion for that debate would be

That this House, in compliance with the requirements of section 7 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, notes the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the adoption of the protocol on social policy.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet on Wednesday 21 July to consider European Community documents as follows:

Committee A, document No. 6654/93 on control of residues in meat; Committee B, document No. 9909/92 on human rights, democracy and development.

[Tuesday 20 July

Immigration and Asylum

1. Statement of changes in Immigration Rules (HC 725)

2. Asylum Appeals (Procedure) Rules (SI 1661)

3. Immigration Appeals (Procedure) (Amendment) Rules (SI 1662)

4. Immigration (Restricted Right of Appeal Against Deportation) (Exemption) Order (SI 1656)

Wednesday 21 July

Estimates Day

Class VIII, Vote 1, Police, Criminal Injuries Compensation Board and other grants, England and Wales; Class VIII, Vote 3, Home Office Administration, Immigration, Probation and Police Support Services, England and Wales; Class IX, Vote 1, Lord Chancellor's Department: Administration of Justice: England and Wales; and Class IX, Vote 5, the Crown Prosecution Service: Administration, in so far as they related to Domestic Violence.

The Third Report of the Home Affairs Committee, Session 1992-93 (HC 245-1) and the Government reply to the Third Report from the Home Affairs Committee, Session 1992-93 (CM 2269) are relevant.

Wednesday 21 July

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community document: 6654/93, control of residues in meat; relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 79-xxxiv (1992-93).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community document: 9909/92, human rights, democracy and development co-operation; relevant European Legislation Committee reports: HC 79-xviii (1992-93); HC 79-xxv (1992-93).]

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): The Lord President of the Council will know that we have pressed on a number of occasions for a debate in Government time on the stocktaking exercise that was announced for Scotland. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman recalls that the major part of those proposals was the offer of extra meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee.

Is he aware that, despite an extra long Session, the Scottish Grand Committee has met less often than usual, rather than more? I understand from my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland that we would normally expect two or three meetings at such a stage in the Session. It is said that the Secretary of State has issued instructions to cancel all the meetings scheduled before the summer recess. Is not that a betrayal of the undertakings given in the House and of the people of Scotland? Should not the Secretary of State therefore come to the House to answer for that decision, preferably in a debate in Government time?

Is the Lord President also aware that the Opposition are concerned about the somewhat last-minute switch of Friday's debate? We were hoping for and would still press for a debate on the affairs of London. There is also concern at the guillotining of the sole day's debate allowed for the Education Bill, to which, I understand, some 600 amendments have been tabled in another place.

The Leader of the House should be aware that it is our view that, first, it is not fair to the House to allow only one day with a guillotine motion to debate that number of amendments. Secondly, amendments on that scale and scope do not suggest Government responsiveness to outside pressure, but either indecision in policy-making or incompetence in the execution of legislation.

I ask the Leader of the House to recognise that, although we all appreciate his statement that the Government's plans for the final week allow for some fluidity, we hope that he will accept that the House should be told officially by him if there are likely to be major votes in the final week.

Mr. Newton: I shall take the points in the order in which they were raised. On the Scottish stocktaking exercise, I understand that the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) cancelled the meeting due this week with the Secretary of State to discuss strengthening the Scottish Grand Committee.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Newton: I understand that the Opposition have repeatedly failed to take up all the opportunities available to them to debate issues in the Scottish Grand Committee. I note that there is some dispute about that from a sedentary position by the hon. Gentleman. I will certainly draw that and what the right hon. Lady has said to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

The right hon. Lady asked about a debate on London. Her request left me slightly wondering whether I had inadvertently failed to announce the business for Friday 23 July. If I did, I shall put the matter right. There will be a debate on the environment, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. That is the debate that the right hon. Lady had hoped would be on London. The Government have concluded that it would be more appropriate for it to be on the environment. It is fair to say that there will clearly be opportunities for matters concerned with London to be raised on a number of occasions of the kind that take place before the House adjourns for the summer recess.

The arrangements announced for the Education Bill are for the general convenience of the House. I believe that the time that we have allocated is adequate for consideration of the Lords amendments. It is our intention that the opportunity for discussion should extend to midnight rather than to 10 pm, to take account of the concerns that the right hon. Lady expressed.

The right hon. Lady asked whether there would be votes in the final week. She will be aware that the motion for the Adjournment can technically be voted on, as can the motion that paves the way for the Consolidated Fund debate. She and her right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench may be able to have some influence on the question whether such votes take place.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Will my right hon. Friend be able to arrange an early debate on law and order issues, which are of great concern to my constituents and no doubt to the constituents of other hon. Members? Will he endeavour to ensure that such a debate takes into account the Government's announcements and the recent release of the Sheehy report? Will he ensure that law and order is shown as being at the top of the Government's priorities?

Mr. Newton: I very much appreciate my hon. Friend's reasons for adverting to this extremely important subject. It was only a fortnight ago, in the immediate aftermath of

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the Sheehy report, the royal commission report and the White Paper on the police, that the Government arranged for a full day's debate on law and order matters. However, the importance of the subject is such that I hope in due course to be able to provide further opportunities. My hon. Friend, whom I know to be an assiduous attender, may find an opportunity to raise the matter on the summer Adjournment, or he may wish to put in for a debate on the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Leader of the House turn his mind to the possibility of a debate in Government time at the earliest opportunity on GATT? I understand that some progress was made at the G7 summit, but I know that there is a great deal of concern in textile communities and agricultural communities that there should be an early statement or debate on this very important subject.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that many share the hon. Gentleman's view of the importance of the subject, as the Government clearly do. It is difficult to see how to fit such a debate into the programme that I have announced. I have a feeling that the hon. Gentleman may wish to go on holiday as much as others do.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): To avoid any confusion about Thursday's business, can the Leader of the House confirm that, in the event of the House on Thursday approving an amendment that gives support to the social chapter, there will be an opportunity immediately thereafter, if the House so wishes, to vote down the motion as amended, and thereby to remove any commitment to or support for the social chapter?

Mr. Newton: It would be inappropriate for me to attempt to dictate the handling of the procedures of the House with you, Madam Speaker, sitting there with your eagle eye upon me. I will leave that matter to you.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 2317 on the siege of Sarajevo?

[That this House notes with grave concern that Sarajevo has been under siege for 15 months and that its people are living in atrocious conditions, including having to boil up sewage water for drinking water as there is no fuel to operate the pumps that could clean the water due to the Serb paramilitaries' refusal to allow United Nations fuel convoys through to the city; further notes that surgeons cannot wash their hands before performing operations, that the first cases of typhus have been reported and that the World Health Organisation is predicting imminent epidemics of typhus, dysentery and cholera; believes that the United Nations has the authority to lift the siege of Sarajevo; urges urgent action to lift the siege and save a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community which has so far resisted ethnic division and which symbolises the values of the United Nations Charter; and welcomes the decision of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly to hand in its appeal for action to lift the siege to the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street, at 10 am on 15 July, along with samples of untreated sewage water, as a reminder of the atrocious conditions in which the people of Sarajevo are forced to exist.]

Sarajevo is a multi-ethnic, multicultural mixed community which has been under siege for 15 months and is now at the end of its tether. Water supplies have been cut off by Serbian paramilitaries, and there is a great danger of typhus and other epidemics spreading within the area.

Can we debate the situation in Sarajevo? Would the right hon. Gentleman like to drink the water that I have here in the Chamber, which is the sewage and untreated water presently being used in Sarajevo?

Mr. Newton: I need hardly say that the Government share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the critical humanitarian situation in Sarajevo and in other safe areas that have been established under UN Security Council resolution 836. It is deplorable that the parties involved in the conflict should withhold supplies of vital utilities. It is increasingly important that the early arrival of troops and equipments to implement the safe areas resolution should be secured. It is also important for Governments to step up their contributions to the humanitarian effort.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): The Leader of the House will be aware that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has just made a statement to the House on open government. In that statement, he went as far as he reasonably could down the road towards open government, without being sidetracked into the primrose path of ungovernability.

It would be wrong of me to suggest that the summer Session be extended any further than has been proposed, but does my right hon. Friend agree that it might be helpful for the House to have an opportunity to debate freedom of information, as until now that opportunity has been given only to Standing Committee Members for a short time on one Friday earlier this month?

Mr. Newton: It would indeed be helpful, but it may be easier for me to be helpful later in the year, rather than next week.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): When can we expect to have a debate on the report of the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice? Many hon. Members were surprised that there was not a statement from the Secretary of State for the Home Department. There is widespread curiosity about the Government's plans for implementing some of the reforms that are proposed in the report. When can we expect a debate on the subject?

Mr. Newton: Not next week, Madam Speaker. However, there may be time during Home Office questions on Thursday 22 July to raise the matter. As to the rest of the hon. Gentleman's question, I should have thought that probably everybody would think it sensible for the Government to spend time studying the royal commission's report before rushing to conclusions.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): Will my right hon. Friend consider having an early debate on early-day motion 2319, which deals with the subject of an energy tax as outlined in a recent edition of *Labour Party News?*

[This this House notes the discrepancy between the policy expressed in the House and elsewhere by the Leader of the Opposition, especially regarding VAT on domestic fuel, and the latest edition of Labour Party News which invites Labour Party members to consider shifting taxation from 'good things', such as income, towards bad things, such as 'resource depletion', specifically suggesting an energy tax

as one alternative; and calls upon the Leader of the Opposition to clarify his or his party's position by making a statement to the House at the earliest opportunity.]

As the right hon. Member for Derby South (Mrs. Beckett) seems reluctant to use an Opposition day for a debate on the subject, will my right hon. Friend consider using a Government day?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the somewhat curious position of the Leader of the Opposition and his hon. Friends. They have made a good deal of noise about VAT, but have also made it clear that they are considering wide-ranging proposals for energy taxes.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Govan): Will the Leader of the House take note of the revelations on television and in newspapers this week about outdoor pursuit centres? Some of those centres are still taking on staff without checking their qualifications. Those members of staff are likely to undertake hazardous activity with children.

Will the right hon. Gentleman note that one of the centres concerned was the St. Alban's centre in Lyme Regis, which was involved in a tragedy in which four of my constituents lost their lives? In view of the deep and bitter anger that is felt by my constituents who lost their children in that tragedy, and the fact that hundreds of thousands of children will be undertaking such holidays in the next few weeks, will the Leader of the House find time next week to debate that important matter?

Mr. Newton: I cannot undertake to find such time, despite the undoubted importance of the matter that the hon. Gentleman has raised—although he may be able to find his own opportunity to raise it on one of the occasions to which I have already referred. I shall of course ensure that his remarks are drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friends who are concerned with these matters.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend consider the fact that my constituents will be surprised that Parliament will not next week be holding a debate, at the request of the Opposition, to express pleasure at the fall in the unemployment figures? It seems that we are not to have a debate on the justice system, either. That, too, is surprising.

A music teacher's killer, who was high on drugs, who had been vandalising cars and threatening people in the neighbourhood, and who had a knife in his pocket, has not been found guilty of murder or of manslaughter and has been let off as a result of a clever legal plea of self-defence. Surely that constitutes a major problem, and Parliament should debate the justice system as early as possible.

Mr. Newton: I note my hon. Friend's request, which is similar to one from my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason). Manifestly, I am not in a position to promise a full-scale debate next week. My hon. Friend will know that the Home Secretary has asked officials closely to examine the case to which he has referred to see whether there are lessons that can be learned. I am sure that the whole House supports such an examination.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Given today's statement on open government, will the Leader of the House arrange for his colleagues from the Department of Transport to make a statement on their policies of open government, especially in the light of a letter that they sent me yesterday about the extension of the A550 and the public inquiry associated with it? They should explain why, in this era of open government, the public inquiry is not to be held in the area cut through by the road; it is to be held outside the constituency—indeed, in the country next door, Wales. The place where it is to be held is not even known to my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones)—although I suspect that that may come up in the debate later this afternoon.

Mr. Newton: The safest course for me on this occasion is to draw attention to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is due to answer questions on Monday 26 July. If the hon. Gentleman cares to stay on that long—I might encourage him to go on holiday earlier—he might get an opportunity.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): My right hon. Friend will know of the concern in my constituency about the redrawing of the assisted areas map. Can he assure me that there will be a statement on that before we rise for the summer, and if possible next week?

Mr. Newton: I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry will aim to make a statement at the earliest possible opportunity; but at the moment we are awaiting the European Commission's conclusions on the proposals that the British Government have put to it.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): As the Leader of the House already recognised the importance that hon. Members attach to the report of the Sheehy inquiry, could he arrange next week, or certainly before the House rises, to give us an idea of the legislative programme that will be followed in this context? Many Members will be discussing the matter with representatives of police forces during the summer recess, and it would be helpful to know whether there will be separate Scottish legislation, given the differences between Home Office and Scottish Office responsibilities.

Mr. Newton: The position on the Sheehy report is pretty much the same as that on the royal commission, about which I was asked earlier. It is not a report by the Government or a set of conclusions by the Government: it is a report which the Government and others need to consider.

As for the rest of her question, the hon. Lady has been here long enough to know that the Leader of the House does not anticipate the Gracious Speech in the autumn.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Will it be possible at an early stage for the House to discuss the changes taking place in the Province of Northern Ireland, to allow us to debate the obvious abandonment of that Province by the Opposition, and the obvious failings of the Anglo-Irish Agreement? In such a debate, we could also put in context the Government's efforts to defeat terrorism and repeat our commitment to the people of Northern Ireland and to the union that it represents.

Mr. Newton: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is perhaps surprising that the Opposition have chosen to use their Opposition day next week to discuss the subject that I read out, rather than the extremely important signs that

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have been given about a major change in their policy towards Northern Ireland, which would call into question the whole constitutional basis of the arrangements.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the fact that, this morning, the West Midlands regional health authority decided that the Department of Health has no moral obligation to the pensioners of Qa Business Services. Will he arrange for his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to come to the House next week to explain why it is felt that there is a moral obligation to give £10,000 to a discredited chairman of a regional health authority, yet pay nothing to people who have lost their security in their old age as a result of a bungled privatisation?

Mr. Newton: I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to that question.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): My right hon. Friend will recall that, during the statement on the Defence White Paper a few days ago, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said that he would make a separate statement concerning the procurement of tanks for future British Army requirements. As there will be several opportunities for export sales of the Challenger 2 tank —opportunities that would be much enhanced by an early and positive statement, which would benefit greatly my constituents and the industrial infrastructure in Leeds— will my right hon. Friend see whether such a statement could be made as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Newton: I shall brief my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, who is due to be here on Tuesday, on at least one of the questions that he may be asked.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): As the Leader of the House has already suggested that the Home Secretary will want to give time to debate the Runciman report, will he be willing to bring forward for discussion, with particular urgency, the recommendation for a criminal cases review authority?

Just as many hon. Members share the concerns of the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) about the case that has occurred recently, it is also true that there are many instances where people are in prison and have maintained their innocence over several years. There is an urgent need for an authority to be set up, preferably with its own independent investigating officers.

Mr. Newton: I shall take that as a clear sign of support for one of the recommendations, but I do not want to add to what I said earlier about it being right for the Government to consider the report before jumping to conclusions.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): While I acknowledge the response that my right hon. Friend gave to an earlier question, will he reconsider, for the sake of the minority parties, the decision to hold an urgent debate for a day on law and order, as only one of the Liberal Democrats managed to attend the last such debate? Perhaps that would give them a chance to reassess the importance that they attach to the issue.

Mr. Newton: That is a helpful question. I note that it has been heard by the Liberal Chief Whip, who will no doubt ensure better attendance on a future occasion.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Will the Leader of the House consider having a debate next week on the White Paper that the Government published on Tuesday about Sunday trading? Is he aware that the House should at least have had a statement from the Home Secretary on their complex document? Those who support one particular option would like to know why the Government are dictating to the House the terms of the option that any organisation may wish to offer regarding employment protection. The Government are under an obligation to present the House with a statement so that they can qualify on what grounds they are dictating the options that will be presented to the House.

Mr. Newton: My understanding is that there is no question whatever of the Government trying to dictate to anybody. There has been some difficulty in getting sufficient details of proposals from some quarters to turn them into the form in which they have appeared in the White Paper. As to the question of an early debate, the whole purpose of publishing the document at this time was to give all Members of the House a good opportunity to study the whole range of options and think about the issues before we debate them in detail later in the year.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will it be appropriate in the Adjournment debate on the environment on Friday to discuss carbon taxes and their role in preserving the environment? If it will be, could my right hon. Friend arrange to have copies of "Costing the Earth", "Looking to the Future" and the Labour and Liberal manifestos available in the Vote Office, so that people can look at those documents and their contribution to the debate on carbon taxes, particularly as the Liberal Democrats' manifesto called for a larger than VAT tax on energy, with the money so raised being used to reduce the VAT scales on luxury items?

Madam Speaker: Order. That is hardly a matter for next week.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend has made some good points. I am not sure whether it would be proper for me to make the documents available, but I shall do everything I can to ensure that as many people as possible are made further aware of them, together with some other recent documents about an energy tax published by the Labour party. My hon. Friend makes a good point about next week's business, in that it would seem to me that there is a jolly good chance that it would be in order to consider such matters in the debate on the environment.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): It is unfortunate that the Secretary of State for Employment has not taken the opportunity to make an announcement about the future of May day. There are three possible reasons for that: first, he intends to make an announcement in the recess, when it cannot be subject to scrutiny; secondly, he will make an announcement in the autumn, which will cause considerable inconvenience to the leisure trade and to the printing industry, which will be preparing diaries and calendars; thirdly, he has realised that the whole idea is a load of dogmatic nonsense and is trying to get rid of it.

Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State to come to the House to make a statement and clarify the matter?

Mr. Newton: I will bring to my right hon. Friend's attention the hon. Gentleman's engaging speculations. All that I can say is that an announcement on those matters will be made in due course.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 2100 and my amendment to it?

[*That this House condemns the heavy-handed and bullying methods employed by GrandMet in its manoeuvres against the Morning Advertiser's campaign on behalf of Inntrepreneur tenants; notes that the Agriculture Select Committee believed that the Government's policy towards the brewing industry has done nothing to help tenants whilst the six giant breweries have increased their market share by five per cent. to 82 per cent. since the introduction of the Beer Orders; believes that the issues raised by the Morning Advertiser report of 21st May call in question both the fair trading policy of Her Majesty's Government and the actual working practices of GrandMet; and calls upon the President of the Board of Trade to instigate and immediate inquiry into the state of the brewing and licensed trade before more tenants are forced out of business.*]

It refers to the bully-boy tactics of Inntrepreneur Estates, the unacceptable face of the brewing industry, which is charging exorbitant rents, driving people into bankruptcy and causing disturbances in an industry whose problems were supposed to be solved after the report from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Despite the fact that the brewers distribute largesse to Conservative party funds, can we have a statement from a Trade and Industry Minister on what will be done to help the tenants and the consumers of the brewery industry's products?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman can ask that question directly of Trade and Industry Ministers, with luck, on Wednesday 21 July.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement and a debate next week on local government reorganisation in Wales? On 1 March, the Secretary of State for Wales announced proposals for reorganisation, only for hon. Members to find yesterday, in the Welsh Grand Committee, that large chunks of these proposals had been ripped out and new ones put in. That is an affront to democracy, particularly as Parliament will have no opportunity to scrutinise the White Paper before the Bill is produced in October. That is a disgrace, and the Secretary of State should make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise either a debate or a statement, but the organisation of parliamentary questions next week is turning out rather well, because the Secretary of State for Wales is here on Monday.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Leader of the House ensure that, when we have our debate on open government, it will include consideration of the procedures used in the House to correct untruthful parliamentary answers received by hon. Members?

Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that today I received a letter from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces telling me that information given to me last month —that British soldiers in the Gulf were warned of the danger of depleted uranium shells—was completely untrue? Is it not right that, when untrue answers are given, they are corrected in *Hansard* with a supplementary answer and not given to individual Members in a private letter?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman has clearly found a way to draw attention to the letter that he received. I shall draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to that point.

Mr. Cryer: Can I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 2315, headed "Questions of procedure for Ministers"?

[*That this House notes that section 107 of the Rules for Ministers says 'Ministers must resign any directorships they hold when they take up office' and is concerned to note that in recent company returns Viscount Cranbourne is a director of Stalbury Trustees, which is devoted to the promotion of conservative principles; further notes that the honourable Member for Conwy is a director of Professional Secretarial Services Ltd., that the honourable Member for Richmond and Barnes is a director of Sheridon-Hanley Enterprises Ltd., and that the honourable Member for Suffolk South is a director of Aracol Holdings Ltd., a subsidiary of which has principally been engaged in security dealing; and calls on the Prime Minister to investigate these breaches of Ministerial rules and publish his conclusions.*]

Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that the Prime Minister published that document? Therefore, breaches of rule 107 by four Ministers—there are more—holding directorships should be answered by the Prime Minister in a statement. It is no good publishing the rules for Ministers if they are to be breached behind closed doors. There should be accountability to the House to demonstrate that Ministers are not breaching the rules. The companies listed have nothing to do with Ministers' family estates.

Mr. Newton: I understand that, in all the cases that the hon. Gentleman has in mind, the companies are wholly concerned with private family financial affairs. The Ministers concerned are satisfied that there is no conflict between their private interests and their public duties. In those circumstances, there would appear to be nothing further to investigate.

Points of Order

4.45 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Questions to the Leader of the House are an important moment in the parliamentary week and one that Back-Bench Members treasure because it gives them access to a discussion of the subjects that are to be debated next week. Increasingly, that time is being used by some hon. Members to ask the Leader of the House to comment on party political points. That is a derogation of the rights of hon. Members and does neither the Government nor individual Conservative Members any credit.

Madam Speaker: That gives me an opportunity to remind the House that business questions should relate to the business next week. Far too many hon. Members go into great detail, making long comments about personal and constituency cases. It is an important period in our proceedings and I hope that hon. Members will take to heart the fact that they should ask questions relating directly to the business for the next week. They should be put briskly and directly to the Lord President, who, I am sure, will do his best to give short replies.

Summer Adjournment Debate

4.46 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a short statement to make about arrangements for the debate on the motion for the Adjournment which will follow the passing of the Consolidated Fund Bill on Monday 26 July.

Members should submit their subjects to my office not later than 10 pm on Wednesday 21 July. A list showing the subjects and times will be published the following day. Normally, the time allotted will not exceed one and a half hours, but I propose to exercise a discretion to allow one or two debates to continue for rather longer, up to a maximum of three hours.

Where identical or similar subjects have been entered by different Members whose names are drawn in the ballot, only the first name will be shown on the list. As some debates may not last the full time allotted to them, it is the responsibility of Members to keep in touch with developments if they are not to miss their turn.

Orders of the Day

Welsh Language Bill [*Lords*]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair.*]

New clause 1

OFFICIAL STATUS OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE (NO. 1)

'That the official status of the Welsh language shall be not less than the official status of English in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales.'.—*[Mr. Morgan]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.51 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss also the following: New clause 2—*Official status of the Welsh language (No. 2)*—

'(1) For the avoidance of doubt, the Welsh language shall be regarded as having official status in the conduct of official or public business and in the administration of justice in Wales and shall be treated on a basis of equality with the English language in accordance with the provisions of this Act.

(2) Official or public business for the purposes of this Act means business conducted in Wales or with persons resident in Wales by the Crown and by public bodies as defined in section 6 of this Act.'.

New clause 8—*National status of the Welsh language*

'As the national language of Wales, the Welsh language shall be regarded, along with the English language, as an official language of Wales for the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales, as defined by this Act, and both languages shall be treated on a basis of equality.'.

New clause 9—*Official status within Wales of the Welsh language for European Community purposes*—

'For the avoidance of doubt, in matters relating to which the European Community institutions may have jurisdiction, the Welsh and English languages shall be regarded as official languages in Wales and both languages shall be treated on a basis of equality.'.

Mr. Morgan: With new clause 1, we come to what, by common consent, is the moment of truth for the Bill. It has been a long time getting to Report stage as we are the second House to deal with it, so the Government have had many opportunities to fulfil their promises to be a listening Government and to be conscious of the fact that the Conservatives are in a minority in Wales. When the Minister gives his final comments on the Government's opinion on the issue of official status and the Welsh Language Bill, he will have something constructive to say.

The Minister is probably as aware as any other hon. Member that, throughout the passage of the Bill, the Government have promised that, at the next stage or the stage after, they will have considered the objections made to the omission of reference to official status. There is no longer a next stage. Today is the day. Report is the penultimate stage, with only Third Reading to come. This is the last opportunity that the Government have—I am pleased to see that the Secretary of State has arrived for the moment of truth—to convert this Bill into what it says in

its title. It says that it is the Welsh Language Bill, but unfortunately what we actually have is a Welsh language quango Bill—what might be called a quango for the lingo. We want it to be a genuine Welsh Language Bill, not a Bill simply about setting up another quango.

When people in Wales hear that the Government have it in mind to set up another quango, they say, "Lord save us from another quango; do not create it, cremate it; cremate it before you create it"—or whatever their phrase might be. They are deeply suspicious about the Bill. It is all very well to have a Welsh Language Board, but there has to be a context within which it can operate, or Parliament is simply washing its hands of issues relating to the Welsh language and passing them on to a nominated body.

We are therefore worried that the title of this Bill is a misnomer. It is rather like the incident in the 13th century —I am sure that some of the historians on the B[illegible] Benches will correct me if necessary—when Edward II told the Welsh princes that he was going to create a Prince of Wales who did not speak a word of English. They thought that he intended to choose one of them for the job, but he produced a babe in arms who did not speak any language at all.

In presenting the House with a Welsh Language Bill, but not giving it a legal context within which to work in relation to aims, objectives, goals, status and rights, the Government have left the quango completely dependent on definitions of common sense, and all being good chaps and understanding roughly what the Government want in terms of doing something, but not going too far, not pressurising people too much, not spending too much money, and not conferring rights, which would be inconvenient. It is all far too reliant on what has been referred to elsewhere as the good chap theory of government. It is not our job as legislators to leave it to the good chaps, with the occasional statutory woman, perhaps, on the quango. Our job is to write good, tight, comprehensive, well-thought-out, long-lasting legislation and this is the last opportunity that we in this place will have to make sure that the legislation does last.

Our new clause 1 is based on what we believe to be a compromise between new clause 2, which contains a declaratory statement about official status for the language, and the Government's use of the verbal device of the Welsh language being treated on a basis of equality. We are acting in the spirit of trying to meet the Government halfway and hope that the Government will respond by trying to meet us halfway.

It sounded as though there had been no further movement on the Government's part—but there may have been further consideration since then—in the exchanges between the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and the Prime Minister in Prime Minister's questions on Tuesday. They were not promising at all, but we are hopeful that, if this Report stage is to have a meaning and is not some sort of charade, the Government have the ability and the freedom to consider what we shall be saying this afternoon. They have had two further days now to think about what the consequences will be if they completely reject any idea of linking the Bill with some form of official status.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I agree wholeheartedly with what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Has he noticed that, during the last two or three days, the Government have had representations from Beata Brookes, chairperson of the Consumer Council, urging official status, and from the Archbishop of Wales, numerous members of the other place, and different denominations of churches and chapels in Wales? The will of Wales on this matter has been quite clearly declared. Is not it time that the Government listened to Wales rather than their own advisers?

Mr. Morgan: I could not agree more. I believe that the Government would like to be judge and jury in their own house because they won the election, but judges and juries in Wales have been pressing on them very strongly the idea that official status must be a part of the Bill if it is to have any meaning. The Government must show some humility with respect to their weak political position in Wales and their lack of democratic sanction for what they are doing. That is not to say that we expect them suddenly to resign over the issue, but they should recognise that they are not the majority party, or anything like it, and never have been since the secret ballot was introduced. They must be conscious, therefore, of who can, roughly speaking, say that they represent feelings in Wales, and not ride roughshod over the feelings expressed by people who can claim majority representation in Wales.

We are very concerned that the Welsh Language Board, in the absence of a reference to official status, will be working in a vacuum. There is a difference between

"on a basis of equality"

and

"that the official status of the Welsh language shall be not less than the official status of English."

This amendment attempts to meet the objection that the Government have already mentioned in the other place and at different stages in this House: that the Bill might open up a legal Pandora's box and legal cases for years to come. Obviously, the Secretary of State is something of an expert on Pandora's boxes after his efforts on local government yesterday. Nevertheless, we believe that the Government must be conscious that, when they do things in relation to the Welsh language, they must not act like a colonial governor-general.

We are not criticising the Government's lack of generosity in financial terms to the Welsh language. We can see from the Government's expenditure plans that they hand out a considerable amount of money to Welsh language organisations. They can boast about it in their mauve-coloured book. They can say that the Urdd Gobaith Cymru—the Welsh youth movement—gets so many hundreds of thousands of pounds every year, the Welsh Books Council gets a subsidy, the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin—the Welsh nursery schools movement—gets a subsidy, and the National Eisteddfod gets £360,000, but these are all handouts.

The age of the handout and the quango is considered very demeaning in Wales. People in Wales want rights, not handouts. There is always the thought of Secretaries of State, and even Ministers of State, who are from Wales —which makes a change—calling up the tribal chieftains, as it were, in their grass skirts and carrying their spears, and saying that they can have a collection of Gideon bibles, beads, and so on, but they cannot have rights; the natives must be kept quiet, but they are not to be given rights, although we will give them £150,000 for this and £250,000 for that.

It can be said that, except in the context of a Welsh Language Bill, the Government do not have an opportunity to confer rights on people. They are in the

[Mr. Morgan]

handout business each year when they are looking at the budget for the Welsh Books Council, and so on, but we have an opportunity now with the Welsh Language Bill before us. That is why it is important to confer these rights on the Welsh language, the speakers of the Welsh language, and those who may not be Welsh-speaking themselves, but want their children to be educated in Welsh, as a matter of right.

The Government have probably not, so far, understood the importance of the Welsh language to Welsh identity. They are probably misunderstanding the nature of the union of the United Kingdom, which this Parliament represents, and the difference between Scottish and the Welsh circumstances.

The Scottish Acts of Union were not based on absorption; they were based on allowing the Scottish people to retain all their separate legal, administrative, educational and religious separateness, and their separate identity, because it was a relatively voluntary arrangement. The Welsh Acts of Union were not voluntary at all; they were based on the principle of absorption.

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): No. We absorbed the English.

Mr. Morgan: Well, it may be possible to make out a case on one historic reading, but there was no doubt where the power lay, as distinct from where the office lay—although I do not want to go into the remarks of the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer on the difference between being in office and being in power now, because that would be a very considerable diversion.

Wales did not have—except in relation to markets ouverts and, later on, Sunday drinking—any separate legal, administrative or educational structures; and, until the disestablishment of the Church in Wales, it had no separate religious structures either. So the only thing that prevented the complete absorption of Wales into England, until the arrival, possibly, of international rugby and football matches between Wales and England in the 1870s, was the language.

In the preservation of Welsh identity in the 17th and 18th centuries, and most of the 19th, the language performed the function provided in Scotland by its separate administrative, educational and religious structures. We did not have that; our language was all that we had to prevent our being absorbed. That is why it is so important to appreciate the extent to which—even for those who do not speak Welsh—the language defines Welsh identity. Most people in Wales secure their national identity either by supporting Welsh rugby, soccer or other sports teams, or by speaking Welsh.

5 pm

I do not think that that point has been fully appreciated, especially by Conservative Members who are not Welsh. I remember when Billy Boston opened the Welsh Sports Hall of Fame in Cardiff. In the introduction to the ceremony, his wonderful rugby league career was described: it was said that he was the biggest rugby league scorer ever and had made more appearances in cup finals for Wigan and won more Great Britain caps in matches played against Australia than anyone else in the history of the game. When asked to say a few words, he said, "Yes, but I would have given all that up if I could only have won a cap for Wales." Every grown man present was suddenly in floods of tears. To Billy Boston, gaining a Welsh identity would have meant putting on the red jersey of Wales. Before 1880, it was not possible to play rugby league for Wales because it did not yet exist in any significant sense; in those days, the language linked people with their roots and gave them the identity about which the Scots do not need to worry.

New clause 1 is critical. It refers to "official status", but in not making it declaratory we have attempted to meet the Government's objections. We believe that it also covers the point about reciprocity of European Community legislation. Those wishing to sell Welsh goods on the continent, and to list ingredients and the like in Welsh, would have the right to do so. They would have the right to put Welsh lava bread in bijou little containers and have it sold in delicatessens on the Champs Elysees, Unter-den-Linden or the Via Venezia, listing all the ingredients in Welsh, just as Greek ouzo is now sold in Queen street or St. Mary's street in Cardiff.

The Government refer to "a basis of equality" in the Bill, but make no reference to official status. New clause 2 goes much further, including a declaratory statement with regard to official status—although it also defines and confines it in a way that I hope to discuss later. We have a few bob staked on new clause 2, but we basically believe that the Government should meet us half way by dispensing with the weasel words "a basis of".

I have mentioned the importance of the Welsh language to Welsh identity and the importance of official status in repairing the damage done to the language—not only by the Acts of Union, but by the introduction of universal primary education exclusively in English in the 1870s and 1880s. That period marked the beginning of the numerical decline of the language from its peak in the 1880s and the start of the inexorable westward march of the English-Welsh dividing line across industrial south Wales. At roughly that time, it began in the eastern valleys of Monmouthshire; more or less every decade another valley has been picked off. Now, in the 1990s, the battle lines—although that may not be an appropriate term—for the future of the language have reached the Tawe and Swansea valleys and, to an extent, the Neath valley.

The language continues to decline in one sense. There has been an apparent slowing down of that decline, caused by the number of children between the ages of three and 15 attending Welsh schools. However, if we ignore that age group, we find that, between 1981 and 1991, the decline in the census was very sharp. There was a fall of some seven percentage points in the number of people outside the school age group who spoke Welsh; the position was therefore rather artificial. The fear that the westward march of the English language across industrial south Wales will continue into the year 2000 is very damaging.

The fact that informal official status has been given to the Welsh language by administrative action and devolution to Wales is a purely coincidental by-product of the rise to political importance of Lloyd George, the United Kingdom's only Welsh Prime Minister, and the arrival of Tom Jones as the United Kingdom's only Welsh Cabinet Secretary in the late 1910s and the early 1920s. From that arose the concept of public business with which the Bill deals.

It was fortunate, perhaps, that in its early days the BBC was headed by a Scot, who was reasonably sympathetic towards matters Celtic. There were some counteracting

forces in the public world. Nevertheless, even as late as the 1960s, the average person bringing up children in Wales probably thought it preferable for his children not to learn Welsh if they were to get on in life. That phrase was continually heard among the common people. Perhaps the middle classes picked up the idea first from the gradual re-establishment of Welsh in the world of education and the expansion of the university system, which placed some emphasis on the language.

Gradually, the world of public business achieved a turnround in the status of the Welsh language and over the past 20 or 30 years people have thought about whether they want their children to be brought up speaking Welsh. However, it has been purely an informal process. Some of the residual damage done by the Acts of Union and the use of the Welsh knot to extirpate the language after the introduction of primary education on a universal and English-only basis in the 1870s is still present. Over the generations, fewer families have been Welsh-speaking and thus able to bring up their children as Welsh speakers.

The Bill can act as the culmination of a gradual turnround that has been taking place since shortly after the first world war. The Government's attitude to the Welsh language has been converted: rather than trying to uproot it, on the basis that it was bad for everyone in Wales to speak Welsh—that it held them back from economic expansion—they have gradually perceived that that approach constitutes a denial of rights, identity and people's connection with their historic roots.

The Government are introducing a Welsh Language Bill, but they have made no reference to what it seeks to achieve. As I have said, we want it to represent the culmination of the process that I have described. We believe that the Government should not only cease to try to uproot the language and get rid of it altogether, but confer official status on it to right the wrongs of the period between the 16th and 19th centuries.

The Secretary of State is gradually learning about matters Welsh. He experienced a great conversion on the road to St. Mellons in regard to unmarried mothers: indeed, he thinks that he may be the first person to speak about the matter publicly in Wales. Strangely enough, however, the main attempt to uproot the language was made by commissioners appointed by the House in the 1840s. The House was extremely worried about the Rebecca and Merthyr riots and about the Chartists; so three commissioners were sent to try to work out what was wrong with the Welsh.

The commissioners said that there were two things wrong with the Welsh: they kept having babies without marrying and they spoke Welsh. I must tell the Secretary of State that the St. Mellons estate had not been built at that time. The commissioners arrived in Wales knowing nothing about it and believing that there was something seriously wrong with the Welsh—largely because they could not understand them and because their habits did not seem to meet the standards of Balliol or Wokingham.

The Bill provides an opportunity to remedy that damage and repression. I commend new clause 1 to the House.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I shall be brief because I am anxious not to take time from hon. Members whose names are appended to the new clauses, and I wish only to make a point of principle in relation to those clauses.

The Bill starts with a preamble, as do all measures. But any lawyer who is used to addressing courts on the meaning of statutes knows that it is rarely appropriate, and even more rarely helpful, to address the court on the preamble. The substance of any Act of Parliament is contained in the text, not in the preamble.

When examining a Bill of this kind, one looks to clause 1 for the principle underlying the measure. What are the people being told? Parliament speaks to the people of Wales by the way it acts in the measure. The message that clause 1 sends to the people of Wales is that there shall be established a Welsh Language Board.

The establishment of that body has been welcomed. It has already done some excellent work, work which in some ways surpasses the excellence of the Bill. The creation of a statutory Welsh Language Board is at least equally welcome, but the people of Wales will not be satisfied with the creation of such a board and the consequent legal framework as an end in itself.

We have few opportunities to create for Wales legislation which is as specific and momentous as this. So let us not run away from this opportunity to do something momentous for Wales. Many people in Wales are speaking Welsh fluently, many children from non-Welsh speaking homes are learning to speak Welsh fluently and many youngsters who have perhaps learnt Welsh at school and not at home have become fluent speakers. They are ambitious, not to leave but to stay in Wales.

We should recognise those achievements by giving Welsh a status that is not a vague statement in the preamble to the Bill but is recognised in the first clause as setting out the aspiration of the measure and the determination of Parliament to provide something new and momentous for the people of Wales.

There could be no better way to achieve that than by giving Welsh its true and proper official status as an equal language in Wales in all official respects. I have read with care all the reasons that have been given for preferring the phrase "equal validity" and leaving it in the preamble, compared with giving the Welsh language enacted official status in the body of the measure.

The reasons given for that preference seem to be distilled into an assertion that there may be legal problems and that it may do nothing more than provide work for lawyers. Perhaps I should declare my interest as a lawyer practising in Wales. I have done that for the last 21 years. I am proud of that achievement—*[Interruption.]*—and I answer the catcalls by saying that, in a sense, I have been doing it for part of this week. I make no apology for fulfilling public duty in Wales in the courts earlier this week. Indeed, there are other Welsh lawyers in the House today who fulfil public duties in Wales of a similar nature, and there are others who would probably like to do so.

We in Parliament should not be afraid to take the occasional risk of doing something bold which might mean the Government, the Welsh Language Board or some other public body finding itself the subject of an application for judicial review because it is not putting into effect the terms of the Act, as the measure will become. Without the availability of judicial review, by which citizens of Wales can establish that the status of the Welsh language has been sustained, what will the Bill really be worth?

5.15 pm

I do not demur from the view that goodwill for the Welsh language is the subject of attempted expression in the Bill. I do not say that the Government have acted out of bad faith. I simply suggest that by running away from the declaration of official status for Welsh—I much prefer new clauses 2 and 8 to new clause 1—the Government are running away from the aspirations of the people of Wales.

Mr. Roger Evans (Monmouth): If Welsh had official status under new clause 1, what, as a matter of law, would that mean? Would it mean that anybody—however few people in a constituency spoke Welsh; only 2 per cent. of my constituents say that they speak Welsh—could insist that community councils or local authorities must conduct their business in Welsh and publish their records, minutes and reports in Welsh? That would seem to be the inevitable general universal application of the type of argument and drafting that the hon. and learned Gentleman is suggesting.

Mr. Carlile: The simple answer to that question is no. There is nothing in the new clauses which would lay down a requirement that the sort of extreme action to which the hon. Gentleman referred would have to be taken. I agree that it would be absurd for a community council in his constituency, in which 2 per cent. of the population speak Welsh as their first language, to have to publish minutes in the Welsh language. Indeed, in my constituency some community councils would find it extremely difficult to publish minutes in the Welsh language.

That is beside the point. We are not speaking of a requirement that every document should be in the Welsh language. To insist on that would be a patent absurdity. We are talking about the status of the Welsh language, and the Government should recognise that the only way to enable the aspirations of the people of Wales to be met by the Bill is to include that declaration of official status.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I need not delay the House because my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) covered most aspects of Welsh history relating to the matters that we are discussing.

New clause 1 takes a minimalist approach. It is an attempt to draw the Government beyond the statement in the preamble. They should find our proposal acceptable because it provides a way to give definition to the official status of the Welsh language in Wales alongside that of English.

Some weeks ago, the Welsh Language Board wrote to hon. Members pointing out that for the new board and its chairman to be effective, the Welsh language should have official status in Wales. More recently, to my surprise, the former Member of the European Parliament for North Wales, Beata Brookes, came out strongly in favour of the Welsh language having official status. I am sure that she is well known to Conservative Members. I imagine that, privately, she will have forcibly told them her views.

I shall read one sentence from her letter, as chairwoman of the Welsh Consumer Council, to remind Conservative Members of the views of that redoubtable lady. She wrote:

"But unless the Welsh language is given official status, the ability of the Board to give real support to the language will be seriously undermined".

I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will take full account of her words.

My constituent who was the chairman of the Welsh Language Board and who recommended that it should have official status was unable to continue as chairman of the board. I do not know whether it was because the Government did not offer him the job or whether he did not wish to continue, but whatever the circumstances, there is no doubt that, given his view that it was essential for the Welsh language to have official status, he could not continue as chairman because that was not the will of the Government.

I hope today that the Government will at least accept new clause 1. I hope that they will accept new clause 2 as well, but let us hope that, on the ground of accepting a minimal compromise solution, they will accept new clause 1.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): We are as much concerned with the status of the Welsh language as we are with the establishment of the Welsh Language Board. The feeling in Wales is that without a solution to the former, the latter will be an incomplete vehicle which will be hampered from the very beginning in the object for which it was set up.

New clause 2, to which I speak, is of immense practical importance as the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) has said. It is of even greater psychological importance.

Time and again on Second Reading, in Committee and in debates in the other place, the Government's view has been that a declaration of official status for the language would somehow open up a legal can of worms or an administrative Pandora's box.

The Welsh Office view is best described as excessive legal caution. Time and again we are told that the lawyers have come out against a declaration, saying that the language already enjoys official status in Wales. However, if that is true, why can we not encapsulate it in legislation so that there can be no doubt whatsoever?

The noble Earl Ferrers, on several occasions in the other place, referred to the need to clarify the position of the language and this is a great opportunity so to do. He said:

"The concept of Welsh being an official language raises similar concepts of definition and uncertainty. It is the Government view that whatever uncertainty there may have been in the past concerning the official language of Welsh, it should be removed by the Bill."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 2 February 1993; Vol. 542, c. 152.]

In reality, there is no lack of clarity. The Welsh speaker in Wales is a second class citizen in his or her own country and the amendment tries to address that. Failure to embody a declaration of status, even in the simplest terms, will merely perpetuate that unacceptable position. Worse still, it will defeat the object of the Bill.

The noble lord Lord Williams said in the other place that all the good in the rest of the Bill will be lost without a declaration of status. He said that there were many helpful measures in the Bill and I add my voice to that. I am not here to be a full-time critic, but without a declaration of status it will be an empty Bill.

The noble lord Lord Hooson said that it is necessary to have a declaration of this kind within the Act to make it totally acceptable and I shall return to that in a few minutes.

The Welsh Language Board has stated its clear view that a declaration is vital. The board took the view it

should have been encapsulated in the long title. That could and should have been provided for; what is more, it could have been drafted without any problem whatsoever.

Since the somewhat turbulent passage of the Bill through the House, the immediate past chairman of the Welsh Language Board, Mr. John Elfed Jones, a man whose obvious virtues are held in high regard by many in the Chamber and elsewhere, has expressed his opinion. On a previous occasion, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) said somewhat mischievously that Mr. John Elfed Jones had done more for the language than Mr. Saunders Lewis.

I shall not debase the debate by pursuing that point, but it typifies the Government's esteem for Mr. John Elfed Jones who wrote to the Standing Committee on 18 June saying that, if the Bill omitted to include a declaration of status, the arguing and the tension in Wales would persist. Furthermore, and all-importantly, he said that the work of the board would be hampered ab initio and he spoke with the authority of having chaired the board.

When I raised that important point with the Minister of State, I received a sarcastic comment from him to the effect that anything that that gentleman says is unacceptable to the Government. He went on to say, with a smile on his face, that the comment was made ex cathedra, referring to the fact that that gentleman had left his post. However, ex cathedra, in cathedra, in chapel or anywhere else, thousands of people in Wales agree with the past chairman of the board that there must be a declaration of status embodied in the Bill. By failing to make such a declaration after decades of waiting and agonising delay, the Government will fail the people of Wales.

I have frequently said that I welcome the fact that the debates were not characterised by political point scoring. More importantly, the language was not sullied by such a scenario, but it should be asked whether it is acceptable for the Government in Westminster to deny the Welsh people. In any event, they have no mandate to rule Wales. They packed the Standing Committee with parachutists from England, people who went there to read their correspondence, who knew nothing about the Welsh language and cared even less. We had to argue our case against that brick wall. The Welsh language is our most valuable asset and we have to continue arguing against that dumb opposition.

My amendment in favour of Welsh jury trials was lost on the casting vote of the Chair. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), somewhat uncharacteristically, sided with the Government. The cards were yet again stacked against the Welsh people. I deeply regret that I, who live my life through the medium of the Welsh language, have to plead, here in London, for the very existence of my own language. I am dismayed and angry about it.

In the past few weeks, many eminent people have been writing to No. 10. They include judges, academics, bishops and the Archbishop himself, pleading with the Government to think again. My hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) raised the matter with the Prime Minister who said in his usual bumbling way that the language had an official status but no doubt we will be denied that in statute today.

Even the Government's most ardent supporter and apologist, Miss Beata Brookes, the chairwoman of the Welsh Consumer Council and of the Conservative party for Wales, wrote to all right hon. and hon. Members on 12 July. Her letter has been referred to, but it is important none the less. It states:

"unless the Welsh langugage is given official status, the ability of the Board to give real support to the language will be seriously undermined. The Welsh Consumer Council has consistently argued, in its response to Fforwm Iaith's *Strategy* and the Welsh Language Bill, that there needs to be"——

5.30 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman is concentrating on an official status for the Welsh language in Wales. Has he had the opportunity to ask his fellow party member, who now holds a distinguished position of power and influence in this matter, whether he intends to treat Welsh as though it has official status in Wales?

Mr. Llwyd: I am aware that the person concerned—Lord Elis Thomas—is within the confines of the House at this moment. I sincerely hope that he hears the pleas of hon. Members on the Opposition Benches. Had any hon. Members on the Conservative Benches any regard for the language, there would be pleas from them also. I have no doubt that Lord Elis Thomas will take into account what has been said today.

Has the Minister accepted the view of many eminent people in Wales? There is no doubt that English is, de facto, an official language in Wales. It runs through every piece of legislation, going back over centuries. Because of that, the Welsh language has been treated as inferior. We now have an opportunity to put that right. Failure to do so will be to fail the people of Wales.

On past occasions, I have referred to the wealth of good will in Wales towards the language and the large number of people each year who seek to learn it. I applaud and welcome that. I also applaud the fact that many of those who have moved to Wales recognise the need to nurture the language and its culture. They are aware of the great value that attaches to the language.

When the Bill was first presented, there was a consensus. It did not meet with any vociferous opposition because we all accepted that there was good will behind it. For reasons that I have already explained, the language was not treated as a political football because a consensus was reached on the implicit understanding that the Government would table numerous strengthening amendments. Where are they? Last December we were told, "Don't worry—it is not what you want, but it will be strengthened." Now, after a great deal of debate, not one of the 70 or more amendments tabled by the Opposition parties has been accepted by the Government. That is a said indictment of the Government and of their real intention.

The Minister said that he would strengthen the Bill—have we all been duped?

Mr. Wigley: My hon. Friend could also ask whether the members of the Welsh Language Board have been duped. They were on the point of resigning last December, and would have resigned were it not for the Minister's promise that the Bill would be strengthened. Were they duped, too? Has everybody been duped at every stage simply to pass a Bill that does not give the Welsh language the rights to which it is entitled?

Mr. Llwyd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments, which are heartfelt across the party divide.

[Mr. Llwyd]

Because not a single amendment was accepted by the Government, they have driven a coach and horses through the welcome consensus that they enjoyed when the Bill was first presented. Not only has the consensus in the Chamber disappeared, but in Wales the mood is one of anger, betrayal and exasperation. Many societies feel that their reasoned arguments have been dispatched without consideration or comment.

We have presented the Minister with numerous amendments dealing with the official status of the Welsh language. Some of them were designed to meet his objection that granting official status would militate against the language's perceived status in other legislation. Some amendments were designed to meet the opposite view, which he also gave us, that the wording covered too broad an application. Some amendments were drafted by eminent lawyers in Wales. They have knowledge of the everyday working of the language in Wales and of the various pieces of legislation. It was all to no avail.

The issue is important not just in this Chamber and in the United Kingdom, but in Europe. We will soon again be considering the Maastricht Bill; the Government must be wondering what that has in store for them. They have yet to ratify the charter on minority languages. In Committee, we were told that they were still considering it. I do not understand why they have had to take nine months to do so. I sincerely hope that that consideration will come to fruition before too long. If it does not and if the new clause fails, the language will not be official and neither will it have the protection of a minority language in Europe. It will be denied support from both this Chamber and the European Chamber. The Irish language has been recognised as an official language in Europe and it will receive European assistance. Whatever the outcome of our sad proceedings tonight, I hope that the Government will again consider the charter, without further hopeless prevarication.

The retired archdruid of Wales, Dr. William George —a person whose views I hold in great regard—said about the Bill that half a loaf is better than no bread. On this occasion, I must disagree with him. The half loaf is stale and it will not provide sustenance to the Welsh language. If the new clause does not succeed, history will record that a truly golden opportunity has been missed, to the great sadness of hon. Members and the people of Wales.

Some months ago, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg and other societies urged me to vote down the Bill at the first opportunity. I said that as a Member representing a Welsh constituency, my job was to try to strengthen the Bill. I reminded them that, last Christmas, the Minister had said that it would be strengthened. It was because I was confident of that that I told them that I would not vote against it.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): Does not the hon. Gentleman regard the amendments that we have made to the Bill—21 in all—as strengthening it? Have not we strengthened it by what we have said about written evidence, about charities and by our changes to company legislation? I resent some of the comments made by the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues.

Mr. Llwyd: Those amendments concern the minutiae of the Bill. I agree that the changes to company law, those relating to charities and the changes to one or two other words are welcome. However, the core issue is that for centuries the Welsh language has been treated as inferior, yet nothing in the Bill deals with that problem. I do not deny that there have been some cosmetic changes, one or two of them quite substantial—but by and large the important amendments dealing with the core issue have been ignored by the Government. *[Interruption.]* It appears that those of us who live and work in Wales do not know as much about Wales as those who live and work across the border. That is what they think and it saddens me.

If the new clause is not successful, it will be a betrayal of the people of Wales and a denial of their legitimate aspirations. The Government will be directly responsible for any divisiveness and disharmony. I urge hon. Members to vote for the new clause.

Mr. Roger Evans: What does new clause 1 as drafted mean? Does the phrase "official status" carry any legal practical weight whatever? If it does, it is dangerous, general and universal, and undermines the good will behind the Bill. If it is simply window dressing, what is the point of putting it in, except as a symbol? I respect the need for a symbol, but perhaps it would have been better to have put a grand statement in the preface, as Henry VIII's advisers would no doubt have done.

Mr. Llwyd: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was listening to me, but I tried to make the explanation fairly explicit. One short example is the fact that Welsh is currently denied any assistance from the European sphere. That is one aspect that the hon. Gentleman may like to ponder.

Mr. Evans: The effect in Europe is not clear. If the phrase had any meaning, the immediate practical effect of the amendment and others like it would be that, instead of a system that has been most carefully devised by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, with piecemeal schemes where they are appropriate and reasonably practical in the circumstances, we should have a general, universal rule that had to be applied equally in all circumstances.

I am prepared to listen to and even to accept the argument that there is something to be said for putting something suitably Welsh and passionate into the preamble to address the point that has been made—although it is now too late to do so. However, I object strongly to the corruption of the statute book by grandiloquent, general, American-sounding statements such as "the pursuit of happiness", which are legally imprecise and which will undoubtedly lead to litigation.

I am not satisfied by the answer given by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) when I asked him what more we should have than we have at present if Welsh were to have a statutory official status. Would an individual citizen in Wales be entitled to have a document addressed to him in Welsh? Would he be entitled to have the committee minutes of my community council given to him in Welsh? What does the phrase mean? If the amendments were accepted, such decisions would have to be taken by the High Court, not by an expert body such as the Welsh Language Board.

My right hon. Friend has devised a scheme whereby the needs of every part of Wales would be covered. The Bill is a monumental historical achievement. It is undoubtedly the best thing that has happened to the Welsh language for

half a millennium and it is deeply saddening that an imaginative, effective Bill, well drafted to promote good will in Wales, should be so unfairly belittled.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): I shall not detain the House too long, because I know that many Members wish to speak and there is a lot of business to conduct on the Bill.

As the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) told us, Lord Ferrers said in the other place:

"Welsh already enjoys official status"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 25 February 1993; Vol. 543, c. 347.]

If that is the case, and if that is the Government's view, is it too naive to expect them to state the fact in the Bill? I do not believe so. That status should be declared in the Bill.

It has been argued that that is not necessary, because the fact that Welsh is an official language is implicitly recognised in other statutes. However, the Bill must be the right place in which duly to recognise the statutory position of the Welsh language. If the legislation had been considered by the Welsh Grand Committee, as it should have been according to the rules of the House, the Welsh language would have been given official status and the Bill would have been stronger. It would have been considered by Members from Wales and there would have been more Members in the Chamber tonight. As we see, the Conservative Members who do not represent seats in Wales and yet were on the Committee have not chosen to come here tonight. Presumably they have decided to deal with their mail somewhere else.

The Bill should promote the greater use of the language, which would promote its development and give it equal validity with English in the life of Wales. We have heard many quotations tonight, but here is another, from the Welsh Language Board:

"Equal validity for the Welsh and English languages in Wales is a prerequisite for a fair society. Any status for the Welsh language that falls short of this is demeaning".

It demeans the Welsh language.

We have already heard some history tonight. Welsh is the oldest language in the United Kingdom. The Gododdin, the oldest Welsh document, dates from the 9th century, I believe, so Welsh is considerably older than the English that is known and used in the House today.

The Government's policies will once again fail the people of Wales unless the principle of official status for Welsh is incorporated in the Bill. That is a fundamental request and if it were granted it would give the Welsh language new life and vigour. The Welsh Language Board put the position succinctly in paragraph 36 of its recommendations for a new Welsh Language Act:

"Unless it be declared by an Act of Parliament that the Welsh language shall have equality of status with the English language it will continue in its existing state of inequality. It is therefore imperative that Parliament uses this opportunity to right some wrongs of the past and to provide the Welsh language with the status it deserves".

If our new clause is not accepted, an historic opportunity to right 450 years of wrong done to the language will have been missed.

Unlike the hon. Member of Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, I shall not oppose Third Reading, if only on the ground that half a loaf is better than no bread. I agree that the half loaf is probably stale, but at least it is something. It is a shame that we shall have only that stale half loaf and not a whole loaf for the people of Wales.

5.45 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I shall be brief, not only because what I wanted to say has been said already, but because of my deep reverence for the Whips. I heard what the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) said about the Welsh Language Board being duped and his extremely passionate denunciation. I hope that he will have a brief word with Lord Elis Thomas and ask him to consider his position.

The key difference between the two sides of the House is that the Government have clearly failed to understand the importance of symbolism for the language. New clause 1 offers them an olive branch and a way out. We do not know what "official status" and "a basis of equality" mean precisely, but whatever they mean we want Welsh to have the same status as English. I am not sure whether there is a Welsh word for "me too-ism". My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) suggests "fi hefyd-ism". If it is good enough for them, it is good enough for us.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): The Bill has been received in Wales with a deep disappointment, felt most by those who are most committed to the future of the Welsh language—those who have campaigned long and hard to bring about such a Bill, and without whom the Bill would never have been introduced.

The disappointment springs first from the total failure to establish in the Bill rights of any kind—crucially, perhaps, the right to receive education through the medium of the Welsh language. The second disappointment is the failure to make an unequivocal declaration of official and equal status. There is talk about

"the principle that in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality".

However, that statement is ambiguous and the ambiguity is compounded by phrases such as,

"so far as is appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable".

The principle is hedged about by all kinds of conditions, so it is both ambiguous and limited in scope. As we shall no doubt hear later, there is no reference to the privatised utilities and other such organisations.

Campaigners for the Welsh language have seen a language Act not simply as a kind of totem, nor even as a symbol, but as a necessary basis for a practical process and for the restoration of the Welsh language to its proper position in the life of Wales. That is what the campaign for a Welsh Language Act has been all about. To use current jargon, the campaign has been designed to set in motion a process that some people call the reversal of language shift. That means bringing about an ever-wider knowledge and use of the Welsh language in Wales. The Welsh language has been undergoing the contrary process to that for the past century.

Reversing language shift is no mean task. It is a serious business and is difficult to achieve, although not impossible. It is a major task that requires a great deal of understanding and much commitment of resources. Whether or not that task is undertaken, how seriously it is attempted and its prospects of success depend on the good will of one person—the Secretary of State for Wales, whoever he or she may be at the time. That is deeply

[Mr. Cynog Dafis]

unsatisfactory. In the absence of the establishment of rights and of an unequivocal declaration of official status, my colleagues and I find it impossible to support the Bill.

Despite what I have said so far, I am prepared to concede that those who drafted the Bill, and in particular the Minister of State, seem to have been well intentioned. Theoretically, through the mechanism of the schemes, much could be achieved on certain conditions. What are the conditions which must be fulfilled? [HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] I am entitled to say what I want to say and I am trying to do that. I believe that I am saying something that has not been said before.

What are the conditions which must be fulfilled to ensure that the schemes' mechanism delivers something? The membership of the board must be determined on the basis of a commitment to, and an understanding of, the needs of the Welsh language. It must be based on that and not merely on acceptability to the Government of the day. The board's professional staff should have commitment, application, knowledge and ability. The board must be adequately resourced to fulfil its extraordinarily broad remit. It must be adequately staffed to carry out the complex procedures of dealing with the schemes with expedition to provide momentum to the process of increasing knowledge and use of the language. Momentum is all-important at this stage. At the end of the day, the legislation and the board should have the backing of the Secretary of State.

If those conditions are met, the Bill might provide the means to strengthen the position of the Welsh language. In addition, the Bill might create a new political context within which voluntary campaigning and action on behalf of the Welsh language could flourish.

If those conditions are not fulfilled—and that is what we fear—there will be disenchantment and frustration. We have no doubt about which of those two scenarios we want to be fulfilled. That is why we are so disappointed at the failure to establish rights and incorporate a statement on the principle of status. We want the positive scenario to reign in relation to the Welsh language in Wales.

The irony is that the nature of the Bill that has emerged, and the success that may attend it, depend on the political will of the Government of the day in London. If I may say so, that places a heavy responsibility on that Government.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have been accused of excessive legal caution. I have been urged by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) to take a risk. I have been told by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) that I am not concerned about symbolism. I must remind the House that we are legislating. It is all very well to include something in a Bill which gives us a great glow of satisfaction, but it may not actually mean anything.

Let me be quite clear. The Government start from the simple premise that the Welsh language already enjoys "official status" and can therefore be said to be an official language in Wales. That is, of course, what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on Tuesday.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Wyn Roberts: While the Bill serves to confirm the status which the language enjoys, it is not the intention of the Bill to confer that status on the language—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Hon. Members on both sides of the House should contain themselves and listen to the Minister. This is an important subject and hon. Members want to listen to the Minister.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I was saying that this immediately gives rise to one of my concerns with some of the general declarations of status that have been proposed in the new clauses. If the purpose of the Bill is seen to be to confer "official status" upon the Welsh language, it follows that the language does not currently enjoy that status. The Government's view is that it does.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Minister give way now?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

I believe that that ignores the current reality and would lessen the status of the language in matters not covered by schemes. That is the acid test and one of the criteria that we have applied to the new clauses.

The other criterion which, as I explained in Committee, we have applied to the proposals on this matter was that amendments on status should not have the effect of including in the Bill a general declaration of uncertain effect which could be interpreted only by the courts. The amendments should not include a provision which could be interpreted as corresponding to statutory bilingualism and they should not constrain the status of the language so as to be entirely dependent upon measures provided for in the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) was quite right to ask about the meaning of the phrase "official status". He is well aware of the point that I am making. The inclusion of that phrase would have an uncertain effect and lead to confusion. We do not require the inclusion of the phrase "official status" in the Bill to empower the board to perform its function which is already covered by other clauses.

Mr. Wigley: The Minister said that there is doubt about the meaning of the term "official status". Only a few moments ago, he said that Welsh has official status. He cannot have it both ways. There may be doubts about the meaning of the "basis of equality", but he includes that in the Bill although it is open to interpretation.

A case in the European courts involving a Dutch citizen and the Irish Government related to whether the Irish language was recognised as an official language within Ireland. Unless the Welsh language is recognised in law as having official status within Wales, we are open to similar cases being taken in the European courts. This matter must be cleared up now in the context of the Bill. If it is not cleared up tonight, it should be cleared up in the other place when the Bill finally returns there.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The official status of the language in Europe can arise only from the unanimous agreement of the European Council. It does not depend on there being a legal declaration of status in domestic law in this country. I could tell the hon. Gentleman much about the situation in Europe because I have examined it most

carefully. Passage of the Bill and its recognition of the Welsh language and its official status could be extremely helpful to the Welsh language in Europe.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The right hon. Gentleman tells us that the Welsh language now has official status in Wales, whatever that might strictly mean. Is not his fear that, if it is written into the statute, it will become an official language of the United Kingdom? Is not that the difference?

6 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman heard what I said and what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on Tuesday—namely, that Welsh is an official language in this country. That does not have to be stated in law. It is not stated in law in respect of English. English is also an official language.

Mr. Alex Carlile: The right hon. Gentleman said something interesting in answer to the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). Does the Minister say that Welsh is an official language in the United Kingdom, or does he say that it is an official language merely in Wales? There seems to be great confusion about that and, of itself, that confusion is surely evidence for defining status clearly in the Bill.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I do not agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said that Welsh is an official language. The hon. and learned Gentleman should read what my right hon. Friend and I have said.

Mr. Llwyd: If, as the Minister says, Welsh is an official language, surely his answer to me about the minority charter should have been that we cannot ratify it because it is an official language.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman is somewhat confused about the status of the European charter. We are still considering whether we should subscribe to it and take further steps. The hon. Gentleman is aware that we meet all the requirements of that charter in respect of Welsh.

I have considered the new clauses very carefully. They do not meet our requirements and they do not meet the criteria that I have set out. The inclusion of any of the new clauses would be contrary to the preamble of the Bill and they would certainly not provide a proper basis for the Welsh Language Board to pursue its function of promoting and facilitating use of the Welsh language.

Mr. Morgan: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister should be aware that what he said about not wishing to express noble declaratory sentiments is in absolute contrast with what the Secretary of State said yesterday about local government. The Secretary of State said that we must legislate in a way that resonates with the people and agrees with the people's sentiments in respect of local government reform. The same applies on Thursdays as applies on Wednesdays. One cannot enunciate a principle one day and deny it the following day.

In the main, the Minister addressed objections to the declaratory statements which characterise new clause 2. He barely addressed new clause 1, which would align the status of the Welsh language by way of official status in Wales with the de facto and de jure status of the English language. The right hon. Gentleman shuffled papers and accepted interventions in a way that I have never seen him do before. He criticised the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) for being in a state of confusion. Perhaps the confusion is among Conservative Members. Perhaps the Minister has lost a battle that might have gone to Cabinet.

A Bill which merely transfers from the Welsh Office to the new Welsh Language Board the right to hand out lollipops to the National Eisteddfod and the Welsh Books Council will not satisfy the demands of the people of Wales. The Government must recognise that. Therefore, I ask right hon. and hon. Members to support us in the Lobby.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 129, Noes 173.

Division No. 335] **[6.05 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dowd, Jim
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Jamieson, David
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Patchett, Terry
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rendel, David
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*

Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Spellar and
Mr. Ray Powell.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Day, Stephen
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Willetts, David
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Michael Brown.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 3

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR ADMINISTRATION (WELSH LANGUAGE)

'.—(1) For the purpose of conducting investigations in accordance with subsection (3) below, the Board, after having consulted the Secretary of State, shall appoint a Commissioner, to be known as the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (Welsh Language).

(2) The Commissioner shall be appointed within twelve months from the date on which the Board is established.

(3) The Commissioner may investigate any action taken by or on behalf of a public body in respect of the preparation or carrying out of a scheme, in any case where—

(a) a written complaint is duly made to a member of the House of Commons by a member of the public who claims to have sustained injustice in consequence of maladministration in connection with the action so taken; and

(b) the complaint is referred to the Commissioner, with the consent of the person who made it, by a member of that House with a request to conduct an investigation thereon.

(4) The Commissioner may exercise the powers to conduct investigations, call for evidence and issue reports referred to in sections 7 to 10 of the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967.

(5) The Commissioner may appoint such staff as he may determine, with the approval of the Secretary of State and the Treasury as to numbers and conditions of service.

(6) The Commissioner and his staff shall receive such remuneration, travelling and other allowances, and pension entitlements as the Secretary of State, with the approval of the Treasury, may determine.'.—*[Mr. Alan W. Williams].*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause provides for the appointment of a Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration for Welsh language matters—that is, an ombudsman specifically for Welsh language matters.

In Committee, we discussed at some length the complaints procedure in clauses 17 to 20. When there is a complaint against the operations of the Welsh Language Board, the board is required to set up an investigation. It was pointed out by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd

Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) that the procedure may be inadequate. An amendment tabled by Plaid Cymru called for a judicial review procedure if the Welsh Language Board is not receptive to a complainant.

Under the new clause, the Welsh Language Board could take over such complaints. It would require the board, once established, to initiate discussions with the Welsh Office for the establishment of an ombudsman on language matters within 12 months of the language board being set up. That ombudsman would be a neutral referee, as we are used to in local government affairs.

When the ombudsman service was introduced, it was a novelty to British administration, but, over the years, it has earned the tremendous respect of the general public and local authorities. It is unbiased, thorough and fearless. Generally, when recommendations are made, the ombudsman recommends fair solutions to, and reasonable settlements for, all problems.

In the correspondence that we received before the Bill was introduced, the Welsh Language Forum pointed out the need for a neutral arbiter. The forum proposed a Bwrdd Cymodi Ieithyddol. That is a language reconciliation board. The Welsh Consumer Council in its submission to us elaborated in detail on the need for an independent complaints procedure. In January 1993, all Welsh Members received a briefing on the Bill from the council. In paragraph 9 it says of the language board:

"We argued that an organisation set up 'to promote and protect' the Welsh language could not also provide a complaints and conciliation service."

The council then recommends an ombudsman to handle complaints. It further states:

"The positive handling of complaints and prejudice is an extremely difficult matter. Proper complaints procedures are central to consumer rights."

The one cannot exist without the other. My hon. Friends and I believe that there is a need for a neutral arbiter.

Complainants can come from both sides of the fence. An individual may not be able to get a particular service in Welsh and may find that the Welsh Language Board is deaf to complaints. The complaint could be about a scheme devised by a public body not being sufficiently rigorous in a particular district, or the complaint could relate to employment.

There is the danger of employment discrimination if a public body is over-zealous in insisting on Welsh speaking being a requirement for too many jobs. The Bill establishes the Welsh Language Board to promote the language—very properly. A complainant on one side of the fence would not expect justice from such a board.

At present, the Race Relations Act 1976 is the only vehicle for complaints. Later, under a new clause, we shall discuss the inappropriateness of that Act. Its use it not liked by the people of Wales.

The Labour party document before the last election, entitled "The Better Way for the Welsh Language", states:

"Labour believes that the Race Relations Act is not an ideal mechanism for dealing with abuses in this field."

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I have been trying to understand the new clause. My hon. Friend raises the issue of people seeking employment complaining of discrimination because they do not speak Welsh. Many jobs in public bodies in Wales require Welsh. That prevents a large number of people—90 per cent. of my constituents—from applying. How would they act under this procedure?

I am not saying that I am against positive discrimination. It must exist to solve the problems of history, but how would my constituents act and what would the ombudsman do? Would he say that there had been an offence against the law or would he provide a conciliation and arbitration service? I find it difficult to see the mechanics under which this will operate.

Mr. Williams The issue is complicated and, obviously, there are strong emotions on both sides. The Bill makes frequent use of the words "reasonably practicable" and "appropriate in the circumstances". What are the accurate definitions of those terms? There must be a pragmatic definition. The situation in the Rhondda will be different from that in Cardiff, Dyfed or Gwynedd. We need some sort of referee to ensure that the interpretation of those terms is fair to English speakers and Welsh speakers in particular communities. I acknowledge that there are dangers. I tabled the new clause in an attempt to deal with the complex problem of employment discrimination.

I would expect there to be more individual complaints about an inadequate service in Welsh than from the other side of the fence. As I said earlier, the Labour party recognised the problem before the last election and suggested in its policy document the establishment of an ombudsman.

All Opposition Members want a much stronger language Bill than the Government have presented. We believe strongly in the principle of equality for the Welsh language and a status for it no less than that of English in Wales. At the same time, we want the legislation to be fairly administered to both Welsh and English speakers. The Bill simply embeds a complaints procedure in the Welsh Language Board. It does not provide a neutral arbiter. We need an ombudsman to whom to refer complaints.

Sir Wyn Roberts: It may be helpful if I explain how the Government see the relationship between the Welsh Language Board and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, the local government ombudsman and the health service commissioner.

Schedule 1 makes it clear that the board will be an organisation whose activities may be the subject of an investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner. The commissioner will be able to investigate complaints of maladministration made against the board. The existence of the board may influence the way in which the commissioner investigates complaints of maladministration made against other public bodies that come within his jurisdiction, which concern the use of the Welsh language.

To the extent that such cases involve the operation of Welsh language schemes under the Bill, we envisage that the commissioner and the board would have to reach agreement on the extent to which they would expect the machinery that we are providing for the board to investigate complaints to have been used before the commissioner decides to investigate. That would be a matter for the commissioner to decide in the light of individual cases.

We would expect similar considerations to apply to the bodies that come within the purview of the local government ombudsman and the national health service commissioner. The Bill provides a means of redress for individuals who believe that they have been disadvantaged by the operation of a scheme.

Mr. Rogers: The Minister mentioned two public areas: health and local government. He has said that the ombudsman has a right to look into problems of discrimination. Often when we refer a case to the ombudsman he says that it is outside his purview. Would the local government ombudsman, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration or whoever be able to take up employment issues in relation to the national museum of Wales, the Wales tourist board or any other organisation that may say that Welsh is compulsory as a condition of employment? Would not the ombudsman come back on that?

In this case, would it not be better to accept the new clause for a separate ombudsman who could then deal with this specific problem? One of the big issues is that if the case goes back to the board, which becomes an arbiter, it must be partial in promoting the language. That would be wrong.

Sir Wyn Roberts: May we leave the problem of employment until we discuss a later clause?

In the first instance, ombudsmen are concerned about maladministration, rather than the specific subjects to which we have referred. I think that the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) understands what I have said about the relationship between the complaints procedure under the board and the procedure that could arise because the board will be subject to the Parliamentary Commissioner. The schemes may also involve either the local government ombudsman or the national health service commissioner.

We envisage that the ombudsman would expect the board's complaints procedure to have been exercised before agreeing to mount an investigation. Those matters will also be determined by agreement between the ombudsman and the board.

The board will, therefore, have a distinct role, which is analogous to that of the existing ombudsmen but complementary to both. Nothing in the legislation will limit the locus of the existing ombudsmen. In particular, nothing in the Bill expressly prevents the ombudsmen from investigating complaints of maladministration involving the Welsh language.

6.30 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I believe that one of the reasons why the new clause was tabled is vividly illustrated by an example that has been given by my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams). He mentioned a school in Carmarthenshire in which science was taught entirely in English, but the authority imposed a Welsh language qualification on the job of laboratory technician. What redress would a person seeking that post, and finding himself discriminated against on grounds of language, have under the system that the Minister describes?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I should have thought that the system did not apply to such an example. Ombudsmen are concerned about maladministration. If there has been maladministration, there is a role for the ombudsman, but he has to be shown that it has occurred or that there is a prima facie case. Given what I have said about how we would expect the system of investigating complaints to operate, we would not gain anything by the introduction of yet another commissioner, as provided for in new clause 3. I regret, therefore, that I cannot support the introduction of the new clause.

Mr. Rogers: I did not intend to speak on new clause 3 because my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) put the arguments well. However, I have listened to what the Minister said about the narrow range of complaints with which a commissioner can deal—as is the case with the present ombudsmen. I think that it ought to be incumbent on the Minister to come up with some form of alternative—if not now, certainly later.

The crux of the argument about the development of the Welsh language is that one can spend all the money and resources in the world, but, without the good will of the English-speaking population in Wales, the language will not be developed as many of us want. When those of us who come from areas where the majority of people speak English developed our policies on Welsh language education in schools, we had to convince many English-speaking communities of the value of spending resources on the Welsh language. Gradually, that view has become more accepted.

The Welsh language will develop only if hostility is not produced. We do not want people to say, "Our schools are falling down; classroom resources are not available for English-speaking children, but Welsh-speaking children, or people being taught in the medium of Welsh, can have those resources." It would be awful if there were a conflict in the community.

The same principle applies to jobs. When English-speaking people find that they cannot get jobs because they cannot speak Welsh—let us not forget that we are talking about at least 80 to 90 per cent. of the population—hostility towards the language will build up, which none of us wants. It will also create an exclusive class of people who get preference as a result of speaking Welsh—as it already has in certain parts of Wales, especially in public organisations—which creates a great deal of hostility.

What will the Welsh Language Board do in that situation? If complaints are made to the board and it has to be partial and make judgments, the basis of good will for the board will disappear. One side or the other will gain or lose. There will be a few contentious cases and the press will whip it up as a good story. Before one knows it, the issue of the Welsh language will again become a football to be kicked around.

Frankly, the Government have rejected the new clause without thinking through the issue. The Minister should have said, "Yes, the arguments are valid; the answers may not be ideal, but we shall consider the subject and come back with something." That is the proper way to deal with the problem. I hope that the Minister will accept my criticism constructively, and realise the potential for damage to the language that will exist unless there is a reasonable forum for complaining and sorting out issues without their becoming a source of conflict.

Mr. Rowlands: One of the unresolved questions in Committee was the extent to which the new language board would be a major instrument of positive discrimination in favour of the Welsh language. We asked that question over and over again and will come to it again later. There are huge legislative blanks in the Bill, which unfortunately do not allow us to deal with the issues that my hon. Friend is describing to the House.

Mr. Rogers: My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) has put his finger on it. That question has been considered by hon. Members who had the privilege to sit on the Standing Committee. Some of us were not able to do so, but the Minister must take note of what we say.

The Secretary of State can dream up policies on his feet, responding to the winds in whichever direction they blow. The Minister might find that difficult, but I appeal to him to suggest an alternative way of approaching the problem when the Bill comes back from the Lords.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: I thank the Minister for his comments. When *Hansard* is published I shall study them carefully, but I do not think that it is enough for there to be discussions between the commissioner and the language board about the potential problems. That is a behind-the-scenes dialogue and, in the last analysis, power to investigate complaints will rest with the language board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) highlighted the fact that there is a void in the law for people making complaints. They can have recourse only to the Race Relations Act 1976, which is an unfortunate piece of legislation to use in that context. So, in the spirit of the comments made by my hon. Friend, I hope that the Government will consider the matter more carefully, perhaps come up with a more carefully worked-out solution in the Lords, and will find a way to accept the new clause.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Bill is all about establishing good will and trying to remove many of the difficulties that we have experienced in the past. The board set up under the Bill will deal with many sensitive areas where it must exercise a great deal of caution. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) mentioned some of those sensitive areas.

However, clauses 17 and 18 provide for a procedure for conducting investigations, and investigations could also arise in the context of the Parliamentary Commissioner, the local government ombudsman and the national health ombudsman. Moreover, in the event of disagreement, people will have a right to approach my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. We have, therefore, covered most complaints.

I remind the House that the Bill's entire purpose is to sustain good will, eliminate obstacles and induce as much harmony as possible into the language issue.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 5

RIGHT TO HAVE LEGAL PROCEEDINGS WHOLLY THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF WELSH

'.—(1) In any legal proceedings in the courts in Wales, or in any tribunal, commission or other judicial or quasi-judicial proceedings, the officer in charge shall ascertain at the outset of proceedings whether the defendant or litigant, or whoever the principal party may be, wishes the hearing to be in Welsh or English, and shall proceed accordingly; and after having chosen the language of the hearing, that person shall not be required to furnish translation of any statement or comment which he or she makes.

(2) Where, in accordance with subsection (1) above, a case is to be heard in Welsh, it shall be the duty of the officer of the court to notify the Lord Chancellor's Department, who shall ensure that the hearing is conducted by a Welsh speaking judge and by Welsh speaking court officers and attendants.

(3) In all prosecutions brought by the Crown in Wales, the prosecuting officer shall conduct the prosecution in the language in which the defendant has chosen to have his hearing.

(4) In cases involving two or more principal parties, who disagree as to the language of the hearing, the judge, chairman, magistrate or inspector shall exercise discretion as to balance of languages at the hearing.

(5) Section 3(2) of the Welsh Courts Act 1942 is hereby repealed.

(6) In Wales, the judge or magistrate presiding at any trial, or hearing, the chairman of any tribunal or commission established by Act of Parliament and an inspector presiding at a public inquiry held by virtue of statutory authority may require the whole or any part of the proceedings conducted in Welsh to be translated into English or from English into Welsh if, in his opinion, the translation thereof is necessary in the interests of justice.

(7) In the Welsh Courts Act 1942 there shall be inserted in section 3 after subsection (1), the following new subsections:

"(1A) Such rules as specified in 3(1) above shall include a provision that only translators registered as having reached a sufficient standard of professional competence shall be employed in the proceedings of courts, tribunals, commissions established by Act of Parliament and public inquiry held by virtue of statutory authority in Wales, and translations by any other persons not so registered, shall not be admissable.

(1B) The Lord Chancellor shall keep a register of authorised translators for the purposes of subsection 3(1A) above".

(8) In order to make adequate provision for the purposes of the foregoing subsections of this Act, the Lord Chancellor shall, in making recommendations for the appointment of persons to judicial office, make reasonable provision to ensure that there is a sufficient number of persons holding judicial office who can use Welsh in the conduct of their office.

(9) In appointing justices of the peace for the counties of Wales, the Lord Chancellor shall make reasonable provision for each county of justices able to use Welsh in the conduct of their office.

(10) In appointing to the office in Wales clerks to magistrates, court clerks, Crown prosecutors, probation officers, police officers and inspectors charged with holding public inquiries and members of the clerical and administrative staff and ancillary staff attached to such officers, the appointing authority shall make reasonable provision for officers and staff able and willing to use Welsh in the conduct of their duties at all stages before to as well as at the hearing of any matter.'.—*[Mr. Llwyd.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Llwyd: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss also new clause 6—*Amendment of the Juries Act 1974*—

'In section 10 of the Juries Act 1974, there shall be added after the words "on account of physical disability or insufficient knowledge of English" the words "or, in the case of a trial in Wales, where the language appearing likely to be used by the defendant or a principal witness is Welsh, insufficient knowledge of Welsh".'.

Mr. Llwyd: I shall try to be brief, because I have already argued the point at length. It concerns the right of a person in Wales to have a trial conducted exclusively through the medium of the Welsh language.

[Mr. Llwyd]

Every time the matter has been raised, it has been argued that the fact that jurors are selected from a pool of Welsh speakers somehow detracts from the principle of random selection. That principle was dreamed up this century. It is not centuries old and cast in stone. Women were not included on jury panels until 1919 and, until 1972, there was a property qualification, which was subsequently broadened. Since 1974, persons over the age of 65, and latterly over the age of 70, have become ineligible to sit on juries.

The main argument against the new clause in the other place and in Committee—somewhat slavishly—was that the principle of random selection has been called into question. I have practised as a solicitor for 15 years, and I understand that a jury should be drawn from one's peers. Including a Welsh language qualification will have no effect on that.

Furthermore, it would be easy to do, because nowadays most juries are drawn from a computer sheet, and one simply needs to take the census figures. When people register to vote, they should be specifically asked whether they speak and understand the Welsh language. That information should then be taken on board when those facts and figures are produced in connection with trials by jury.

I realise that others may have different opinions on this matter, but I adhere to the view that the principle of random selection, such as it is, would not be imperilled by this procedure, to which I have referred on the hoof. I am sure that other more apt arguments could be thought up.

Random selection was discussed last week in connection with the Law Commission's report. I know what the Minister will say, because I have heard it before and have read his speech in the Lords *Hansard*. Indeed, I argued the point in Committee on that basis.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the novel idea of people ticking a box to confirm whether they speak Welsh, may I point out that, before the last census was taken, advocates of the Welsh language advised people that, if they understood any Welsh at all, they should say that they spoke Welsh. That would not be helpful for someone accused of fraud, for instance, and opting for an all-Welsh trial. A case would be extremely difficult for jurors to understand if they had ticked the box simply because they could say, "Shw ma'i."

6.45 pm

Mr. Llwyd: I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will know that Wales has always been referred to as "Gwlad y menyg gwynion" and I am sure that few large fraud trials emanate from Wales—*[Interruption.]* Some hon. Members seem to make a decent living out of them.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's important point, but it is already catered for. Part of a judge's function is to ensure that jurors can understand what will be transacted before the court. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) will confirm that. If there is any doubt about it, the judge must decide whether a person is fit and able to sit as a juror, so the point could be taken on board at that stage. In any event, a selection process applies in all courts where juries sit.

It is understood that translation is always second best and that principle goes back many years.

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Llwyd: The right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), who is an experienced advocate, is nodding.

In 1575 a renowned judge, Sir William Gerrard, who sat on the Wales and Chester circuit, said that judges in Wales should be able to understand the Welsh language. He believed, as many of us do, that translation is strictly second best. I want the Bill to provide that juries, too, should be able to understand it.

On Second Reading, I referred to a Privy Council case that established the principle that English jurors sitting in an English language trial must be able to understand English. That is painfully obvious, but it is appropriate in this instance, and it assists my case.

If I thought that, in asking for provision for Welsh language trials, I was imperiling the interests of justice, I would not be moving the new clause. Clearly, that is a prerequisite. However, although translation is second best, it is wrong that a person who seeks to have his trial dealt with through the medium of the Welsh language should have it dealt with through translation. There are two reasons for that: first, anyone who has conducted a trial will know of the nuances involved in every sentence. Sometimes a word can mean everything in a case.

Mr. Morris *indicated assent.*

Mr. Llwyd: Again, the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon is agreeing with me.

Although there are some excellent translators in Wales, ultimately translations are strictly second best, and we should not be prepared to sanction a system that delivers second-best justice in Wales.

Secondly, with any form of translation, whether simultaneous or not, there is an inevitable time lag of a second or two, often longer, when it is possible that the defendant will have more opportunity to think of a more plausible answer. Perhaps the Minister will consider that matter. Many practitioners throughout Wales, who have, like myself, conducted many trials through the medium of the Welsh language, think that it is never as satisfactory to conduct a trial through a translation. I say that with the greatest respect, and I hope with a sincerity that the Minister will accept. I am pleading for equality with the English language to ensure equality of justice in Welsh courts.

About 98 per cent. of trials in Wales finish their course in the magistrates courts and do not proceed to the Crown court. That argument again does not find favour with me, because there will always be a case where, conceivably, a person will not get the right quality of justice purely because of the language barrier. It is only right that Welsh should be an option, and I see no real difficulty in that approach.

I shall return to the point with which I started about random selection—which, as we know, was thrown at every hon. Member who previously argued about it. The royal commission's report, published in the past week, said:

"We are reluctant to interfere with the principle of random selection of juries. We are, however, anxious that everything possible should be done to ensure that people from the ethnic minority communities are represented on juries in relation to their numbers in the local community. The pool from which juries are randomly selected would be more representative if all eligible members of ethnic communities were included on

the electoral roll. Even if this were to be, however, there would statistically still be instances where there would not be a multi-racial jury in a case where one seemed appropriate"

The report says that the Commission for Racial Equality had also put that point:

"The CRE considered whether the judge should have power to order that the three jurors from the ethnic minority communities should come from the same ethnic minority as the defendant or victim. They concluded, however, that this would be impractical. While this may be so, we believe that it should be open to the defence or prosecution to argue the point and to the judge to be able to order in appropriate cases that one or more of the three jurors should come from the same ethnic minority as the defendant or the victim. We so recommend."

The principle of random selection has been used, not as a smokescreen, but rather as an absolute argument each time the matter has been raised. How long will it be cherished by the Government and remain as it is when the royal commission's views represent a substantial inroad into that principle?

The suggestion of the royal commission is even less practicable than the suggestion that I made in Committee. Nothing is more simple than ensuring that there is an electoral list, with an indication by one's name of whether one can converse in Welsh and understand the Welsh language. It then proceeds by way of computer.

In all honesty, I cannot see how the principle would suddenly be devalued. To those who may argue—although it seems that few will, probably because of lack of interest in the subject—with me about the Monmouth case, for example, on which the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) spoke so eloquently, where 2 per cent. of people speak Welsh, I say that, realistically, there could easily be a trial centre in south Wales, a Welsh trial centre in the north and one somewhere in mid-Wales. As a matter of practice, I have frequently been involved in Crown court cases that have been transferred from the town of Caernarfon to Knutsford.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's point, although I do not agree with his basic premise that the transfer of Welsh cases out of Wales to Chester, and Knutsford especially, is wholly unacceptable. Does the hon. Gentleman support the efforts made—not always successfully—to prevent that?

Mr. Llwyd: As a one-time secretary of the Gwynedd law society, I wrote several letters to the circuit administrator, and I know that some heed has been taken of that problem. I agree that it is a problem, but the general point that I was making was that trial centres could take place in one, two or three centres in Wales, which would create far less potential inconvenience than if the cases were transferred to Caernarfon or Knutsford at the last minute.

It has also been argued that, if the new clause were accepted, potential jurors, be they English people or Welsh people who cannot speak Welsh, would be excluded. At the worst, one would have to hurt the feelings of jurors who could not sit on a jury because they did not speak Welsh. From experience, I would say that most potential jurors would be relieved not to have to sit on a jury, especially in a lengthy fraud trial. I say that out of a sense of jest rather than anything else.

If it is a choice between hurting the feelings of a potential juror and achieving quality of justice, of course the scales weigh heavily in favour of the quality of justice. The Minister must be aware that, as Welsh language trials are conducted with ease in magistrates courts throughout Dyfed, Clwyd and Gwynedd, that facility should also be available in Crown courts. To continue with a second-class delivery of justice is unacceptable. I plead with the Minister at this eleventh hour to accept my reasonable new clause.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I know that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) moved the new clause in complete sincerity and with a determination founded on principle, for which I respect him greatly. He will probably agree that we are discussing a tricky balance of interests. It is matter of judgment how the House decides, but I come down on the other side from the hon. Gentleman.

As I said earlier—although I deprived myself of one year—I declare the interest of having practised on the Wales and Chester circuit for 22 years. I have conducted a great many Crown court trials and, I am delighted to say, some of them have been well instructed by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, who has an excellent reputation as a good solicitor in his county. I hope by saying that that I shall ensure that he instructs me again. I do not think that the rules against touting apply in the House—at least I hope not.

I also defer to the remarks made on the subject by two extremely distinguished and senior legal colleagues of mine, who are both members of the Wales and Chester circuit: my noble Friend Lord Hooson and the noble Lord Thomas of Gwydir. Lord Thomas has now retired, but Lord Hooson is still practising. They both practised on that circuit for more than 45 years. They both came to the same conclusion as I did, but unlike myself, they are capable of conducting a trial through the medium of Welsh at any level and in any court. They share with me the experience of being involved in trials where witnesses have given their evidence through the medium of Welsh and where simultaneous translation has been used.

I agree that occasionally nuances in a person's voice, a word used or even an inflection may make some difference. However, I have never been in a case in which I have found that the nuance has been lost through the simultaneous translation. Indeed, my experience of simultaneous translation, not only in criminal courts, but in other tribunals, such as planning appeals, is that the quality of simultaneous translation in Wales is now as good as that at the United Nations, where I have seen it in operation, and perhaps better. It is capable of ensuring that the court has a full appreciation.

7 pm

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy said that the time that translation gave a person to think might make what he said more plausible. The courts are not really concerned with plausibility. Plausibility is often what convicts a liar. The lie may be plausible, but it is all too easily detected as a lie by its very plausibility. The process by which juries reach a decision is sophisticated. Unfortunately, it is not well understood, although, as a result of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice, we may be able to do some proper research into the way in which juries operate.

I do not believe that juries are deprived of the opportunity to reach the truth by the fact that they may not speak Welsh as fluently as the defendant does, if they speak it at all. Indeed, the recent experience of those who

might have wished to be tried by all-Welsh speaking juries, in north Wales at least, has shown that they are capable of obtaining substantial justice without the need for the new clause.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I remember reading a recent translation in the organisation to which the hon. and learned Gentleman just referred. Someone said in French, "This issue depends on the good sense of the people of Normandy." It was translated in English as, "This depends on Norman wisdom." How can the hon. and learned Gentleman say that all the full nuances of a language are translated unless in his cases he has understood both languages with great fluency? Is he making that judgment on the basis of his fluency in Welsh and in English?

Mr. Carlile: I am glad to have been able to take the part of feed to the hon. Gentleman's joke, which I suspect is more Morecambe than Wise. I have already said that, in my view, the simultaneous translation system available in Wales may be better than that available at the United Nations. I can speak only of my own experience, combined with the 90 or so years of combined experience of the noble Lords to whom I have referred. I recognise that there is a balance of interests, and it appears that my judgment does not accord with that of the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn).

There is a fundamental misstatement of the nature of a trial in the new clause. New clause 5(1) refers to the principal party at a trial as if there was only one. There are two principal parties in any criminal trial in the Crown court. There is the defendant who is, of course, always regarded as the most important principal party, but the trial would not occur at all were it not for the other principal party, which is the Crown. In balancing the interests of the Crown, which also have to be protected as we have seen in a very controversial verdict in London in recent days, and the interests of the defendant, we come to the conclusion that the present system of jury trial in Wales is adequate.

Many examples can be given of why it would not be just to enable people to choose to be tried only by Welsh-speaking juries. Harking back to an historical jury panel does not help the argument. I do not want to go back to jury panels that excluded women. I do not want to go back to jury panels that included only people of property. I do not want to go back to a jury class that was restricted by artificial distinctions.

One of the greatest advances that we have made in attempting to secure fairness in jury trials during this century, and especially during the second half of the century, is to increase the number of people from whom jurors are selected. I believe that random selection is a principle worth holding to.

More than just principle is at stake. Let us consider a few examples of what might occur. Let us suppose that there was a burglary in the town of Montgomery in my constituency. There was a burglary at Bunners Agricultural Ironmongers in Montgomery some time ago. It caused something of a stir because, in the middle of the night, the Dyfed-Powys police helicopter went out and caught the burglars en route back to the midlands.

Let us suppose that there was another burglary in Montgomery, which was committed by somebody who said that he wanted an all-Welsh jury. That would exclude almost the entire population of Montgomery and of Welshpool from serving on that jury, because there are not many people in Montgomery and in Welshpool who happen to speak Welsh.

It is a fair principle that the people of the area in which the crime has been committed have the right to serve on the jury. It is fair to say that they would be deeply offended —rightly so—if they found that they were excluded from being able to serve on a jury dealing with crimes committed in their area. I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) in his place. The Monmouth example is too obvious to state.

Let us take another example. In past decades, a celebrated and much-loved Queen's counsel on the Wales and Chester circuit was known for his success in fraud trials. I do not know whether this is a fair comment, because I never saw him conducting a fraud trial, but I am told that one of the reasons for his success was that he had a great capacity for so totally confusing the jury that it was driven eventually to return a verdict of not guilty because it had so failed to understand the case that it could not be sure that the defendant was guilty.

Let us suppose that a guilty fraudster was prosecuted and that he had committed a fraud entirely through the medium of English, using an English accounting system while working for an English company in Wales. Being a wily fraudster, he decides that one way to cause confusion is to insist on having a trial in Welsh.

That is not an absurd example. In 22 years of working in the criminal courts, I tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there is no shortage of people around who would take advantage of such an opportunity. I of course acquit the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), who is another good solicitor, of that charge. However, there may be solicitors around who would say to their clients, "Well, why don't you ask for a trial in Welsh so that we can confuse the issue further?"

That is a realistic and practical problem. The establishment of Welsh language trial centres in different parts of Wales would not resolve the problems to which I have referred.

Mr. Llwyd: I know of the hon. and learned Gentleman's advocacy in the Crown courts and of his experience, and I appreciate his point. However, I do not see why, in Welshpool, for example, it would be impracticable to empanel a Welsh-speaking jury. The hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the Monmouth example. Next door to Monmouth there are tens of thousands of Welsh-speaking people in Cardiff. If the trial centre was in Cardiff, people in Monmouth would have to go only seven or eight miles along the road. There is the answer.

Mr. Carlile: I would ask the hon. Gentleman why people from Monmouth should be excluded from serving on a jury when the alleged offences were committed in Monmouth. That, in my view, defies logic.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: I wish to say two things about the hon. and learned Member's analysis. First, most Welsh language trials would be in Dyfed, Gwynedd or other Welsh-speaking areas. The hon. and learned Gentleman is talking about exceptional circumstances. Secondly, the hon. and learned Gentleman describes Welsh-speaking fraudsters and others who might choose to use the

language as a vehicle to escape justice. I wish to point out that Dyfed and Powys have the lowest incidence of crime in Britain. I am sure that the situation is similar in Gwynedd. Welsh-speaking people are law-abiding.

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Gentleman will know, if he has been following the newspapers recently, that the largest fraud committed in Wales is now between conviction and sentence, and relates to offences that were committed in the counties of Powys, for the most part, and Dyfed. That is the Foulkes Ingram case. I can immediately contradict the hon. Gentleman on that score.

Mr. Alan W. Williams *rose*——

Mr. Carlile: I will not give way again. There may be other hon. Members who wish to speak, and we will want to hear the Minister's response.

There is one aspect in which I echo the remarks of the hon. Gentleman for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy. It is essential that there should be enough judges and practitioners in Wales capable of understanding and speaking Welsh, to the extent that they are able to conduct with total fluency those parts of a trial that are heard in Welsh.

We have a distinguished body of such practitioners in Wales. I mentioned the two noble Lords as examples. There are many Welsh-speaking judges of great distinction. The Minister of State's brother is one of the best known of them—a greatly admired and just civil judge in north Wales. He is known to other hon. Members also.

I would be the first to say that I hope that the Lord Chancellor's Department will continue to follow the policy of looking for suitable Welsh speakers to fill judicial appointments. I also hope that the Crown Prosecution Service will pursue its policy of employing professional officers and others who can conduct trials and can assist the police with advice, where necessary through the medium of Welsh. It is important to do so. When it comes to the selection of jurors, the principle of random selection should be paramount.

Let us not forget the final point that I wish to make. If there was a case in which it was patently unjust that the trial should be conducted by the jury panel that was selected by random selection through the computerised system that is now used, a procedure remains open to the defendant and his legal advisers. It is possible to make what is called a challenge to the array, which is a challenge to the whole jury panel. It is not often done, and is probably done successfully even more rarely. I certainly have seen it done on one occasion and I believe that I have done it once myself in 22 years. The opportunity remains in common law to challenge—in extreme circumstances—the panel that is brought to court.

If a defendant came before the court on a serious charge and it were possible to show that he did not understand English sufficiently to be tried fairly, and that it was not possible for one reason or another for a simultaneous translation to meet the needs of the case, then the judge might exercise his discretion to allow a challenge to the array. The possibility ought not to be brushed aside, and I thought it right to mention it in the debate.

7.15 pm

Mr. Flynn: I hate to intervene in what appears to be a private debate between lawyers, solicitors and the relatives of lawyers. That is probably why it has attracted so much attention in the House, attention that is out of all proportion to its importance.

I was provoked by the failure of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) to answer my simple question. How did he come to make the statement that all the fine nuances of a language are communicated when it is translated from English to Welsh? It is not possible, unless one has a thorough knowledge of both languages.

The hon. and learned Gentleman was silent on that particular issue—I respect his right to silence. I have never heard him speak Welsh. I look forward to that joy, and it is a moment for which I shall live. I do not know on what the hon. and learned Gentleman bases his judgment, but if he does not speak Welsh there is no way that he can make a decision on the matter.

The hon. and learned Gentleman made another point—one of some, if not great, importance—which was that people have a burning desire to make judgments on crimes that have been committed in their own countries. There may be something in that. However, overriding that are the needs of people who speak Welsh as a first language. No one speaks another language in the way that they speak their first language, which is usually learnt in the cradle. It is the language in which we are happiest, and most comfortable. People have different personalities in different languages. We can all think of people who are dignified and on whom we look with respect in one language who are stuttering buffoons in another. It happens in many languages. The right to speak in a proper and comfortable way is more important than the right to speak on juries.

I shall finish with one brief point. I was in the town of Harlech and wrote a cheque in Welsh at a strange bank. I handed over the cheque and my identification, but the person behind the counter brushed the identification aside, and said in Welsh that there was no need for identification. "Crooks do not use Welsh."

Mr. Morgan: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) I feel a degree of diffidence about this matter, and as a non-lawyer, I am fearful of sounding like a "stuttering buffoon."

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. John Redwood): As a non-lawyer also, I wonder when I hear lawyers talk about balances whether we should also hear about the "cheques".

Mr. Morgan: The Secretary of State is trying to prove that the description of him in *The Guardian* last week was true. The newspaper described him as having the eyes of Hannibal Lecter and the hairstyle of Bob Monkhouse. He was trying there to show that he has also the wit of Bob Monkhouse. Most people would not want to be associated with Bob Monkhouse, even if they did not mind being associated with Hannibal Lecter.

My point was about the practicality of the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) about computerised jury lists. The case for eligibility for jury service is currently denoted on the computerised version of electoral rolls—although, I

[Mr. Morgan]

believe, not on the versions that appear in print—to ensure that OAPs are no longer called for jury service. It seems a practical extension of that principle to provide the same electoral computerised roll, only stating the availability of and the competence of a person to act as a juror in Welsh.

Mr. Alex Carlile: How would the hon. Gentleman test the ability of those who perhaps might put the letter "W" on an electoral roll to indicate that they spoke Welsh?

Mr. Morgan: That is a practical problem which seems far from insuperable when it comes to the selection of a jury at a trial. It would not be difficult for a judge to put a request to the jurors before the start of a trial, asking them to assure the court that they were capable of handling the case, whether it be a complicated fraud case or a relatively simple, open and shut burglary case. It is not an insuperable practical problem, but it would help to solve the long-standing grievance that people have felt over their inability to claim a jury trial in Welsh.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The debate has concentrated largely on the jury system. We had a similar debate in Committee. Hon. Members who represent the legal profession showed then that there is a division of opinion among them about the matter. I am sure that that would also be the case in the House as a whole.

I set out in Committee, the Government's policy about all-Welsh juries and the Government's view remains unchanged. We do not consider it appropriate to make provision to require juries of trials conducted through the medium of Welsh to be composed solely of people who understand Welsh, mainly because we cannot allow anything to interfere with the principle of random selection of juries nor place further hurdles in the way of the administration of justice.

I call in aid not only all the arguments put forward by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) but the findings of the report by the late Lord Edmund Davies. The Government's policy conforms with the recommendations of his report and I remain firmly of the view that the best way to safeguard not only the interests of Welsh speakers but justice generally is by means of simultaneous translation.

I have heard what the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) has said about nuances and so on, but, as I understand it, the translation service has improved considerably in recent years.

I can tell the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) that I am aware of the royal commission's recommendation on jury composition, but I have to remind him that it is only a recommendation. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will consider many matters relating to jury composition in the light of the royal commission's recommendations. However, the commission itself, as I think that the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, has stressed the difficulty of departing from the guiding principle of random selection, even in a limited way. I am sure that we will want to move with extreme caution in any matters relating to the selection of juries.

It is worth reminding the House that the Bill re-enacts the provision in the Welsh Language Act 1967 which gives the right to a defendant or another party at a legal hearing to give evidence in Welsh should he or she choose to do so. I was pleased to be able to table an amendment in Committee that further clarified the position of written evidence in the courts. In future, the Lord Chancellor will produce rules of court governing the submission of written evidence in Welsh. They will be able to cover detailed matters including the need to give notice and the need to protect the interests of parties to a hearing who do not understand Welsh.

Many hearings in Wales, particularly in magistrates courts, take place entirely in Welsh. That policy will continue, but is a matter that must remain at the discretion of court authorities. Therefore, the Government cannot agree to the proposal set out in the new clause that the matter be left to the discretion of the defendant or litigant.

I am pleased to be able to reiterate today the undertaking that I gave during Committee that the Lord Chancellor's Department will continue to seek to facilitate the use of Welsh in the court service wherever it is reasonably practicable and will not interfere with the efficient administration of justice. He must be able to have regard to all the relevant criteria in appointing judges and other legal officers in Wales. The Government do not, however, believe that it will be acceptable to restrict the discretion of the Lord Chancellor to make the most suitable appointments, as the new clause suggests.

In view of what I have said, and in concluding this short debate, I hope that the new clauses will not be pressed to a division.

Mr. Llwyd: The Minister says that he is unpersuaded. Frankly, I am unpersuaded towards his view. We shall beg to differ on that. In the light of the Runciman proposals in the royal commission report, if there were a change of practice following on that which I described earlier and of which the Minister is aware, will he reconsider?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am sure that when the Home Secretary considers the royal commission's recommendation he will take into account what has been said today on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Llwyd: In that case, I do not wish to press the matter to a Division, so I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 7

DISCRIMINATION (SECTION 1(B) OF THE RACE RELATIONS ACT 1976.

'It is hereby declared that for the purposes of section 1(b) of the Race Relations Act 1976 a person does not discriminate against another by reason only of the fact that such person applies to that other a requirement or condition that he or she be able to communicate in Wales through the medium of the Welsh language.'.—*[Mr. Wigley.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Wigley: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The clause deals with the way in which race relations legislation has been brought into matters relating to the Welsh language over the past decade. We had a fairly extensive debate in Committee and our feeling is that the issue was not satisfactorily resolved in Committee. That feeling has been strengthened by evidence that came to my notice before the Committee stage came to an end.

There was a case some eight of nine years ago concerning appointments to an old people's home in Ynys Môn, where, if I remember correctly, 29 of the 30 residents were Welsh speaking. When the jobs were advertised, a requirement was that applicants should be Welsh speaking. An attempt was made to bring in the Commission for Racial Equality on the basis that it was racial discrimination to include such a clause. I accept that there are many jobs where knowledge of a particular language is irrelevant—it does not matter whether people are train drivers, or perform a host of other jobs. However, there are many jobs where a knowledge of the Welsh language is important—broadcasting and teaching speak for themselves.

In constituencies such as mine, where Welsh is the main language of 84 per cent. of the population, it is important that those appointed to jobs dealing with the public can deal with them in whichever language the public wish. It is a matter of considerable offence if, when a local authority or any other employer—or potential employer—makes it a condition that the ability to speak Welsh or have an understanding of it is necessary for a certain job, it may be taken before the Commission for Racial Equality on the basis that it is acting in a racist manner. That is nonsense.

That was not the reasoning behind the legislation that set up the CRE. It is an abuse of the Race Relations Act 1976 to use it for that purpose. There has been continuing discussion about that over many years. From meetings that my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) and I had with the Minister of State, I thought that the Government would table an amendment, on Committee or Report, that would resolve the problem, and that there would be a change in legislation that would meet that, although perhaps not using the wording of the amendment—I think a Labour amendment—in Committee. We have tabled similar amendments.

I was flabbergasted when the Minister rejected the arguments outright in Committee. He said:

"I am pleased to reassure the Committee that current employment law provides the flexibility that we require."—[*Official Report*, Standing Committee D, 1 July 1993; c. 217.]

He said that it was not necessary. I checked with the CRE as to exactly its position.

7.30 pm

In a letter that I had this month from Herman Ouseley, the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, he says:

"In the past there was a conflict between the Commission and the Welsh Language Board over the issue but I am informed that a compromise was agreed in 1991. The agreed position now is reflected in the proposed amendment to Section 4 of the Race Relations Act 1976 in the following terms:"

He then details the specific agreed proposed amendment to that legislation:

"For the purpose of the Part of the Act a requirement or condition relating to ability to communicate in Welsh shall be justifiable where the person to whom it is applied would, in the course of employment to which the requirement or condition applies, deal on a regular basis with persons who normally use Welsh and the level of ability required is no greater than is needed to do so."

There is a subsequent subsection.

That wording is very similar to the wording of the Labour amendment in Committee. The chairman goes on to say:

"I hope this clarifies the position of the Commission."

The position is, therefore, that the commission has agreed with the Welsh Language Board that there is a problem; it has agreed on the solution and that it can be by means of amending legislation. So what on earth are we waiting for, I ask the Minister. Here is the vehicle for doing it.

I accept that the wording of our new clause 7 is not identical to the wording that the Commission for Racial Equality has before it. But, if that is indeed the position, I urge the Minister to accept new clause 7 now, and he can amend that in the House of Lords, when the Bill goes back there, by putting in the wording agreed by the commission and the Welsh Language Board. That is a simple mechanism that is open to him and enables him to keep his options open, in order to put right what is a very strongly-felt perceived wrong.

The question goes beyond the technicality that I have described. Here we have what is essentially the Government's own approach to how to deal with the Welsh language. We have the Welsh Language Board dealing with an institution—the Commission for Racial Equality in this case—and coming to an agreement. That is the whole basis of the Government's set of schemes and proposals enshrined in the Bill.

What happens, then, when there is an agreement and it is necessary for Parliament to put it into effect, as will be the case with many other schemes that flow from this legislation? If Parliament turns its back and says that it disagrees and will not implement the agreement, it blows asunder the argument that the Minister made at various times in Committee that the schemes can deliver the goods, and that the Secretary of State or the Minister will adopt an agreed position arrived at through negotiation and discussion between two interested bodies.

We have very clearly a test of the Government's own approach to legislation. The argument is conclusive. The attitude of the Minister in private discussions that we had in his office a few weeks ago showed that he had sympathy with what we were trying to do and it was a matter of having an agreed form of words. We now have an agreed form of words.

I therefore put it to the House that we should accept new clause 7, although it may be flawed, with the intention of the Government coming back in the House of Lords to see whether the agreed formula that I have had from the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality can be built in at that stage, and this long-running, long-festering ill can be put right once and for all.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I will certainly look into the point that the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) has just made about the agreement between the Welsh Language Board and the Commission for Racial Equality. If I heard him correctly, the proposal was for an amendment to the relevant legislation under the Race Relations Act 1976.

Mr. Wigley: I understand that the Minister has not had a copy of this letter. Had I thought in advance, I would probably have made a copy available to him. I apologise for not doing so. However, in the same way as new clause 7 amends section 1(b) of the Race Relations Act 1976, the proposed new amendment would put in a subsection (a) to section 4 of that Act. It is clearly in order for us to do that through this legislation, otherwise new clause 7 would not

[Mr. Wigley]

have been accepted for debate tonight. Using that as a basis, the question can be approached in another place and the argument taken on.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I certainly take on board what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I will look further into that matter. We have already had to look very carefully at the issue of stipulating Welsh as a condition of employment during the course of our preparations for the Bill. It was important, because one result of the Bill will be to require the presence of Welsh speakers in certain posts in the public sector in Wales. That is already the case for many jobs and it will remain the case in future. We therefore had to be satisfied that the provisions in employment law governing discrimination would not stand in the way of employment policies that aim to do no more than ensure that public bodies are able to comply with the terms of the legislation.

This is a complex area in which there seems to have been a fair degree of confusion in the wake of the Gwynedd case, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The confusion seems to have obscured the fact that employers are entitled to stipulate Welsh as a condition of employment so long as they are able to justify such a requirement. The law requires, not that an employer should demonstrate that such a requirement is absolutely necessary, but that it should be able to be justified. That, of course, is a lesser test. It would be for the courts to interpret in individual cases.

The amendment that was before us in Committee sought to define what the justification criteria amounted to. Earl Ferrers acknowledged in the debate in another place that this was an interesting way to approach the issue, and this was something that we looked at very carefully.

As I explained in Committee, the conclusion that we reached was that a formulation of this sort would not place employment policies beyond legal challenge. In particular, whatever we said in our domestic legislation would not necessarily remove such policies from challenge under European employment law. It would not be acceptable to pursue policies in this country which did not conform to European law. New clause 21, proposed in Committee, came closer to meeting these legal difficulties than does the present new clause, but I regret that neither is able to overcome them all.

The other important point that I sought to explain during the debate in Committee was that the introduction of Welsh language schemes would be an important factor in reducing the uncertainty that there might have been in this area. The Government's legal advice is that a public body is likely to be regarded as justified in requiring that an employee speak Welsh if, otherwise, there would not be enough Welsh-speaking employees in suitable posts to cope with the demand for Welsh language services. In other words, the introduction of Welsh language schemes will serve to give some indication of what is justified in this context, and will therefore serve to reduce whatever possibility there may be of employment policies being successfully challenged.

Mr. Rowlands: This has just begun to sink in to me —I am a bit slow this evening. Are we to take it from the Minister's remarks that he has not seen the draft amendment by the Commission for Racial Equality and was unaware of the discussions between it and the Welsh Language Board and of the agreed amendment?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I was not aware of the amendment. I gather that it was contained in a letter to the hon. Member for Caernarfon that he received fairly recently. I have said that I will certainly look into the matter further. I do not think that the House would expect me to go further this evening. I am trying to outline the situation as I see it, and the impact of this Bill on the subject under discussion.

The need for employment policies to be justifiable provides important safeguards. In particular, it reflects our view that the delivery of Welsh language schemes should not be dependent on every employee in the public sector being a Welsh speaker. We know that that is not the case. As I have said, much can be achieved through the use of translation and interpretation services.

Having looked at the matter very closely, I am satisfied that existing employment law, while not entirely removing the possibility of legal challenge, provides us with the required flexibility to put Welsh language schemes into effect.

Mr. Wigley: I have listened carefully to what the Minister has said. When he replied to me earlier, without the advantage of his notes, he was more sympathetic and warm than he is now that he has got back to his rehearsed script.

The Minister said in his earlier remarks that he is prepared to consider our proposal. If that assurance is to be meaningful—and if there is to be an agreed proposed amendment that requires legislation—he will need a hook on which to attach it in another place.

There is no other amendment under which the legislation can be included when the Bill goes back to the other place. If, after having looked at the matter, and having considered it with the Commission for Racial Equality and the Welsh Language Board, the Minister agrees that the change should be built into law, it would be sensible to accept new clause 7 tonight. That would provide the Minister with a vehicle to which he can attach the legislation. If, after having looked at it, he considers that there is no need for legislation, the new clause can be taken out in the House of Lords. That would allow him flexibility one way or the other.

If the Minister does not accept that, he is saying, "Yes, this is a form of words that I am willing to consider, but in practice I am closing my options now."

Mr. Rowlands: I think that the hon. Gentleman is being persuasive. We have all been here long enough to know that the Government are not likely to table an amendment to the Race Relations Act in the next parliamentary Session to deal with this particular point. The only chance is to use the Bill as a vehicle, and I hope that the Minister will accept that.

Mr. Wigley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. This is not of great party-political import. I suspect that hon. Members on both sides of the House want to avoid cases going to the Commission for Racial Equality, industrial tribunals and so forth.

The Minister said that we must act within both our employment law and European employment law. I accept that, but I remind him—very gently—that our earlier argument about status was that European employment

law was the bas's of the case taken to the European Court when a Dutch citizen objected to a language condition on a job in Ireland. That reminds me of his own words: he said that European employment law, the status of the Welsh language and the interplay of the Welsh language in United Kingdom legislation are vitally important, just as it is important in Irish legislation.

I believe that there is a way forward. I hope that the Minister will tell me either that there is another mechanism whereby this can be put into practice in another place—if he agrees to accept what the CRE and the Welsh Language Board want—or that he will accept new clause 7. If there is some other way of doing it, that is fine.

We want to make progress so that when there may be an element of racism—which exists in Wales, as it does everywhere else—the people concerned can legitimately go to the courts. The courts should not be tied by the use of this legislation for matters for which it is not intended.

Has the Minister any comment before I decide whether to press the issue? I would rather elicit an agreement to further consideration in the House of Lords than press for a vote that we might lose.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have had a great deal of advice on the Groener case, and I gave the essence of that advice earlier. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) referred to an agreement between the Welsh Language Board and the CRE. He will know that I do not legislate on the hoof, and that the matter is properly one for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment —whom I would certainly have to consult, as well as the Government as a whole, before I could give any commitment to legislate. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will examine the matter.

7.45 pm

Mr. Wigley: I do not want this to drag on—the guts of the argument have been adequately rehearsed—but unless something is done on Report to give the Minister a vehicle with which to legislate, the provision will not be put into the Bill in another place.

I asked the Minister to clarify whether there was an alternative way of handling the matter in another place. I assume from his silence that there is not. Unless a new clause such as this is introduced tonight, there will not be a hook in the other place on which the Minister can attach any new clause, such as the letter that I have cited suggests.

I understand that the Minister must discuss the matter with his colleagues, but if at the end of that he says, "Yes, fine, this is what is needed", he is going to close his option tonight unless he accepts the new clause, or he can tell me of some other way of handling it. Surely it is a reasonable way to make progress. It is the way in which the House should legislate. We should consider all the possibilities and see how they can be met. There is a consensus on what we want to do; it is a matter of how we do it. That gives us the possibility of doing something in the House of Lords.

Unless the Minister can give some indication of a way of handling this matter in the House of Lords, we shall have no alternative but to divide on it.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I can say nothing more about the hon. Gentleman's main point. However, he should not forget that every public body operating in Wales, including the CRE, will be obliged to produce a scheme. I think that the matters to which he has referred are likely to feature in such a scheme and that may well be the proper place for it.

Mr. Wigley: That may be the case; it may be something that is appropriate for a scheme. However, the CRE and the Welsh Language Board have reached an agreement that there should be a change of legislation. If that was the outcome of many of the other schemes—that discussions will take place between the Welsh Language Board and a host of other organisations in Wales—and bodies come forward and say, "Well, this and that needs to be done, Minister", and the Minister says, "No, I am sorry; you have reached an agreement but I am not going to do it", that would underline our fears about the way in which the board will work without any statutory rights.

The Welsh Language Board and the CRE have determined that there needs to be a statutory provision. The Government are apparently unwilling to use the Bill as a vehicle, even though it is an eminently suitable one. They are not even willing to keep the option open for the few days until the Bill comes back from the House of Lords, presumably next week. The Government are showing an unreasonable unwillingness in not allowing that facility to be kept open for the next few days.

If the Minister has said his last word on the subject and can add nothing further, we shall have no option but to divide the House. It is sad that we cannot take this step when it is what the Minister wants to do—in line with the conversations that we have had—when it is what the Commission for Racial Equality wants to do, when it is what the Welsh Language Board wants to do, when it is what the overwhelming majority of the people of Wales want to do and when, I suspect, it is what the majority of hon. Members want to do.

Mr. Morgan: May I, too, press the Minister, bearing in mind the fact that we have probably reached a crunch point in tonight's proceedings? The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) says that if new clause 7 is not accepted, the right hon. Gentleman will have pre-empted the possibility of the Government's accepting an agreement that appears to have been struck between the CRE and the Welsh Language Board. If the new clause were accepted, the Government would not be pre-empted from introducing a form of words in the other place when Commons amendments are considered there.

If the Government find that such a provision is not practical, that the agreement to which the hon. Member for Caernarfon referred does not exist or that the matter has been misunderstood, they can take action in the other place to remedy matters. But if the Minister does not accept the new clause tonight, there will be no possibility of using the Bill to enact the agreement that has been struck between the Welsh Language Board and the CRE.

Mr. Wigley: I was making that precise point. There is no alternative to what we are suggesting. If the new clause is not accepted now, the whole issue is closed. I urge the Government to examine the matter to ensure that the wording of the new clause reflects the point that we have in mind.

Mr. Morgan: They are frightened of losing face.

Mr. Wigley: If that is all it is, the Government are adducing the worst of all arguments. Leaving aside any question of saving or losing face, we simply want to get rid

[Mr. Wigley]

of a problem that all concerned agree exists. I repeat, if the Government find, after scrutiny, that the drafting of new clause 7 does not represent the way in which the Welsh Language Board and the commission wish to make progress, the provision can be removed or amended in the other place.

Mr. Flynn: Many hon. Members, including myself, are hearing the argument for the first time and are totally persuaded by what the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) says. Many accusations are made about the unreasonableness and elective dictatorship of the Government. The Conservatives have little support in Wales—32 seats out of 500 at the last election—and are being unreasonable tonight.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon is simply arguing that the options must be kept open. We had a vivid demonstration last night of the dominance of the Conservatives in the other place. It is clear that they will be able to do what they like when the Bill arrives there. They can remove the new clause or alter it at that stage. If they do not accept it tonight, they will be slamming the door closed until a future Government bring forward another Welsh language measure. That will probably not happen in the lifetime of any of us here now. If the Government do not accept the new clause, they will be acting against the wishes of the people of Wales.

Mr. Wigley: The hon. Gentleman voices my feelings. If the Government are not willing to keep their options open for a few days while they investigate the issue—knowing for certain that they can remove the provision in the other place if the wording is not acceptable—they will be seen as having been totally unreasonable in their handling of this legislation.

Accusations are already flying around in the context of the earlier debate, in which plenty of emotion was expressed. We have had a cool and calculated discussion of a matter which we all agree has been a problem. If the Government do not use the vehicle of this Bill to deal with the issue now, they will be open to all sorts of accusations in Wales.

I am trying to save the Government from themselves, although they seem determined to go down a different avenue. I urge the Minister and the occupants of the Treasury Bench at least to keep their mouths shut when the Question is put, so enabling the new clause to become part of the Bill.

Mr. Rowlands: I make a final plea to the Minister. It is astonishing that such a discussion could occur between the Welsh Language Board and the Commission for Racial Equality, resulting in a well-drafted amendment being produced in respect of a piece of legislation that has already been before the House, yet neither the Minister nor his officials knew anything about it.

We are old enough to know that, unless we take advantage of this Bill to put that matter right, the chances of the next Government or the one after that finding time to make such a change will be negligible. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to accept the new clause, thereby giving him time to examine the matter afresh, after which he can move to delete it or redraft it in the other place to reflect what has been agreed between two sensible organisations.

I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman must consult the Secretary of State for Employment, but as it seems that he does not oppose the idea and as the House would be willing to give it more than a fair wind, he should accept the new clause. As I say, the chances of passing a separate piece of amending legislation on the subject in the near future are slim.

I beg the Minister to prevent the House from dividing on the matter. We are all basically on the same side. Perhaps the Minister agrees with us, having had time to reflect on it, and will now accept the new clause. It would not involve him getting sacked. He has managed to survive for 14 years, so accepting it on the hoof, as it were, should cause him no problem.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I assure the House that we considered the matter thoroughly before the debate took place. We do not find the new clause acceptable. I have outlined the position in relation to employment law and the Welsh language. It is not Government practice to accept amendments in which we do not believe and which we think are incorrect.

The position is that there is agreement between the CRE and the Welsh Language Board. As far as I am aware, the Government have not been consulted about inserting that agreement in legislation. I hope that the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) will not press the matter to a Division, but, if he does, I shall ask my hon. Friends to oppose it.

Mr. Wigley: I make a final plea in a debate that has shed light not only on the subject under discussion but on the way in which the Government listen to our arguments and respond to them. I recall taking a deputation concerned with disability issues to see a Minister of lower rank than the right hon. Gentleman who has charge of this measure. That junior Minister listened to us and said, "The advice of my civil servants is that I must resist your request but, having listened to you, I shall accept it."

Mr. Morgan: I understand that a letter has been sent by the chairman of the Welsh Language Board on the matter to the Secretary of State or to the Minister of State. I wonder whether we might elicit some information about whether he responded to that letter.

Mr. Wigley: I, too, have seen the press reports this week. There seems to have been some confusion between what is understood in the Welsh Office and what is understood by the Commission for Racial Equality and the Welsh Language Board. As there was a report of that, in the *Western Mail* a few days ago, I should have thought that by now the Government would at least have found out what the position was. I should have been surprised if there had not been some correspondence.

8 pm

Mr. Rowlands: The matter is becoming more serious. The Minister made a clear and unequivocal statement that neither he nor his Department knew about that arrangement.

Mr. Wigley: That was the comment made earlier. Clearly, the Minister had not seen the letter I received, but I should have imagined that the contents of a letter sent to me as a Back Bencher would have been similar to any proposals that had been brought to the attention of the Minister.

Mr. Morgan: Has the Minister seen it?

Mr. Wigley: I also ask whether the Minister has seen the correspondence with the CRE. I understand that it is being checked out at the moment and I shall be interested to hear whether he has seen it.

If he has seen it and he is aware that there was an agreement, and yet he responded in the way that he did in Committee, he was misleading the Committee. If, however, the correspondence has arrived since the Committee, it is new information on which the Government should be acting. The response from the Minister is the same as that which he gave us in Committee. In other words, I am not quite sure whether Welsh Office Ministers have been on top of their act. It sems not only that they have not, but that they are not prepared to consider the possibility that there is other information and that they need a vehicle to find a way out of it.

The debate has continued long enough and the embarrassment of the Government has been exposed for all the people of Wales to see. I hope that there is some way in which the Government can do something in the House of Lords, but I do not believe that there is. I believe that the Government, by their shout in a few moments' time, will be closing the options to something that they believe should be done. It is an incredible reflection of the Government's behaviour.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I want to clear up one thing. I said that I had not seen a copy of the letter sent to the hon. Gentleman. I am aware that there have been discussions between the board and the CRE. We at the Welsh Office have been discussing these matters with the CRE for some time. We considered the amendment that he is now putting forward quite a long time ago, but we reached the conclusion that it was not an acceptable amendment and we have not changed our conclusion.

Mr. Wigley: I take it, therefore, from what the Minister is saying that he had seen the amendment to which the letter I received refers. If he had not seen it, he could not make that judgment. So he has seen it; presumably it was not a rushed decision as the judgment was made in 1991—two years ago—and there has been adequate time to find a way forward.

It is a portent of what will occur between the Welsh Language Board and the Government. There will be schemes that take months to agree between the Welsh Language Board and various parts of the public sector in Wales. They will be sat on for two years by the Government and then, at the end of the day, Ministers will refuse to accept the unanimous advice from Wales.

We had hoped that we could have supported the legislation. Our discussion tonight underlines why we believe that there is a central vacuum in the Bill; it contains no rights at all. All the rights are there, but the Government are not willing to use them and the people of Wales will suffer.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided:—Ayes 31, Noes 135.

Division No. 336] **[8.03 pm**

AYES

Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Betts, Clive
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Cryer, Bob
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Flynn, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Llwyd, Elfyn
Mackinlay, Andrew
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Rendel, David
Rowlands, Ted
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stott, Roger
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Cynog Dafis and
Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hampson, Dr Keith
Harris, David
Hawksley, Warren
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pickles, Eric
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter

Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Willetts, David
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert G. Hughes and
Mr. Andrew MacKay.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 10

RIGHT TO WELSH MEDIUM EDUCATION

'(1) Every local education authority in Wales shall provide for every child or young person of school age in Wales whose parents so desire, the opportunity to receive education in, and through the medium of, Welsh, within a reasonable distance of their home.

(2) The cost of providing education through the medium of Welsh in accordance with subsection (1) above shall be taken into account by the Secretary of State in determining the capital and revenue support requirements of each local education authority in Wales on an annual basis.'.—*[Mr. Wigley.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Wigley: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 9, in clause 5, page 2, line 32, after '(1)', insert

"Except as provided in subsection (2A) below.".

No. 11, in page 2, line 45, at end insert

'(2A) The scheme referred to in subsection (1) above shall not include measures in connection with the provision by a local education authority of education in the medium of Welsh.'.

No. 13, in clause 6, page 3, leave out lines 21 to 23.

No. 15, in clause 7, page 4, line 7, at end insert

'(2A) A notice under subsection (1) above may not require a local education authority to prepare a scheme in relation to the provision of education in the medium of Welsh.'.

Mr. Wigley: I hope that we do not take as long discussing new clause 10 and the associated amendments as we took to discuss the previous group. The new clause relates to the right to Welsh-medium education. Those who served on the Standing Committee will recall the considerable debate on that matter. As a result, the new clause that we tabled in Committee has been revised to give the right to Welsh-medium education to all children of school age.

The new clause contains a provision to meet the fears expressed by some Opposition Members that an additional financial burden would be imposed on Welsh local education authorities. Subsection (2) states:

"The cost of providing education through the medium of Welsh in accordance with subsection (1) above shall be taken into account by the Secretary of State in determining the capital and revenue support requirements of each local education authority in Wales on an annual basis."

That subsection should allay the misgivings genuinely and properly expressed in Committee, for which I had some sympathy.

I shall not rehearse the arguments deployed in Committee. I say only, in summary, that the provision of Welsh-medium education varies considerably from area to area. In Committee, I quoted examples of people in certain parts of Wales who had considerable difficulty in getting Welsh-medium education within a reasonable distance of their homes. That has aroused considerable passion in some parts of Wales. Of course, in other parts good and improving provision is being made.

8.15 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there are parts of Wales—his constituency may be one—where it is equally difficult to get English-medium education, especially at infant and primary level, within a reasonable distance of home?

Mr. Wigley: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman does not understand Gwynedd's education policy on primary schools. Its objective is to get every child to be thoroughly bilingual by the age of 11. If that is the hon. Gentleman's objective in what he is advocating in Dyfed, I salute that. There is a campaign in Dyfed by a small minority of parents who want to avoid any Welsh-medium education that would go anywhere near to making their children bilingual by the age of 11.

Mr. Williams: Will the hon. Gentleman give way again?

Mr. Wigley: I suspect that this will be a dialogue.

Mr. Wiliams: I had not intended to become involved in the debate. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in infant education, children aged between five and seven should have the right to learn to read and write in their mother tongue—that is, the language of the home? If that applies to Welsh speakers, it must also apply to English speakers if we are to uphold the principle of equality to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Wigley: There should be a facility within Welsh education to make all children thoroughly bilingual as quickly as possible. The most practical way to do that is by considerable immersion at an early age. Children aged five to seven are like blotting paper and they can pick up languages easily.

Mr. Williams: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wigley: No. I am sorry; the hon. Gentleman can make this own speech in due course. I am not being discourteous; I do not want to detain the House.

Children have the ability to pick up languages at an early age. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of children in my constituency speak only Welsh at the ages of three and four, but learn English at five and six and are verbally thoroughly bilingual by seven.

Over the past 20 years, there has been a tremendous growth in something known as the Welsh schools movement. It operates in the non-Welsh speaking, mainly industrial areas in Wales. A great deal of progress has been made in, for example, the old areas of Glamorgan, especially Flintshire. Great progress has been made in Cardiff, where Welsh-medium education is mushrooming at a tremendous rate. Although the parents are non-Welsh speaking, they want their children to be educated in Welsh, not just as a subject but through the medium of Welsh.

The way in which that has succeeded academically as well as socially has overcome some of the worries that I know many hon. Members had 10 or 15 years ago about building ghetto societies. We are not doing that. Society moves on in some of the English speaking industrial valleys in which a large proportion of young people—perhaps even 30 or 40 per cent.—are educated through the

medium of Welsh. That is the key to the ability of the Welsh language to gain tremendous new ground in this generation.

Such education should be available within a reasonable distance of every person's home. People should not have to travel 20 or 30 miles for it, and there certainly should not be generations of young people who did not have the opportunity at all, as, regrettably, happened in some parts of West Glamorgan. I hope that things are moving forward there now, but for a long time young people have missed the opportunity. Thousands of young people in Wales who could have been fluently bilingual by now, and whose parents wanted them to be, were denied that chance because of the lack of a statutory right.

I accept that the new clause is based on the statutory rights approach. I know that the Government do not like that approach for the Bill, but I do not see how, with a statutory right, it would be possible to safeguard the position through the Welsh Language Board.

Indeed, as the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) said, the Welsh Language Board and local authorities could be brought into tremendous conflict. I hope that that will not happen, but I can see the seeds of the possibility, and I would rather see a statutory right through local education authorities, with the Welsh Language Board being there to advise, to help and to come in where there are real difficulties. The basic responsibility should be laid on LEAs.

No doubt the Minister will say that it will be possible to develop schemes between the Welsh Language Board and local education authorities, and I accept that. But we heard in an earlier debate what happens when there is an agreement between two such bodies. The agreement can be two or three years down the line and still the Government do not accept it. They may have some reason best known to themselves why an agreement between two bodies in Wales is not accepted in Whitehall and Westminster. Provisions for schemes such as those suggested by the Government do not even begin to meet the requirement. There should be a statutory right in the Bill.

Mr. Rowlands: My amendment No. 11 has been grouped with the new clause, and I do not know whether I would have tabled it had I known that the two would be taken together, because I want to support whole heartedly the idea of a statutory right for parents to have their children educated through the medium of Welsh.

At the same time, for reasons that I have already explained and shall not repeat, I am deeply reluctant to allow the Welsh Language Board to become involved in the detailed development of education policy within communities, especially communities such as mine, which are sensitively balanced, with much genuine effort being made to achieve that balance and to avoid division and friction. I have a feeling that, accidentally—I do not mean this in any offensive way—the Welsh Language Board could bumble into such situations and create problems where there could have been harmony. I oppose the considerable extension of the board's activities into the details of local education authority policies.

As a quid pro quo, I certainly support the new clause, which gives parents a statutory right. I consider it far better to proceed by giving people rights and letting them exercise them. If those rights are denied people must have proper procedures for obtaining redress through the Secretary of State or the courts. The Welsh Language Board should not become involved in the arguments and be dragged in, whether it wants to intervene or not. One repeatedly sees people using the board as a means of appeal when arguments are taking place locally. Such a role would damage the integrity and status of the board, and the support that it should receive.

I thank the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) for withdrawing his original new clause as a result of representations from other members of the Committee, because subsection (2) was not then part of it. Now the new clause is balanced, and ensures that the resources issue will be tackled when we grant the right. I support the new clause, and if a vote is forced I shall vote for it, but I hope that that will be taken in conjunction with my considerable reservations about the prospect of the Welsh Language Board's having a major role and bring able to intervene in the development of individual LEA policies on the Welsh language.

Without opening too many divisions among ourselves, may I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) that in my overwhelmingly English-speaking community my children were brought up and educated through the medium of Welsh. I cannot remember my wife or myself having taught them English, yet I am happy to say that my eldest son has graduated in English, my second son achieved a grade A in English at A-level, and I hope that my daughter will achieve something similar a year hence.

Whatever pressures my hon. Friend may be under, let me tell him that, even in communities such as mine, we have managed to bring up children bilingually without the fear that they would not learn English as a result. Young children have an enormous capacity to learn and enjoy languages, and I believe that teaching them more than one language makes them more fluent, and more interested in sounds and in language itself.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: My hon. Friend's wife, who was born just outside my constituency, is from a Welsh-speaking background. That makes a vital contribution. It is much easier for children if they are educated in their mother tongue, so it was entirely natural for my hon. Friend's children to go to a Welsh-speaking school.

My hon. Friend referred to pressures that I may be under. I am under no pressure at all—or at least, the only pressure is my desire for there to be equality between the Welsh and the English languages in my constituency and throughout Wales.

Mr. Rowlands: I do not think that my hon. Friend's case will hold water. I do not want to point the finger, but my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), the shadow Secretary of State, sends his children to a school where everything is taught through the medium of Welsh, although I believe that neither parent is Welsh speaking. It would not have been possible to have made children bilingual in Merthyr unless such commitments had been made. The process did no damage whatever to the standard achieved in English. We should not set up bogeys, because they do not exist.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Of course I am delighted, and I know very well, that my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) has chosen a Welsh medium of education in the Rhymney valley for his daughter. However, the difference between that situation and the problems in my constituency is that my hon. Friend the

[Mr. Alan W. Williams]

Member for Caerphilly was in a position to choose. It was a matter of voluntary choice, whereas in my constituency, and in large areas of Dyfed and Gwynedd, parents have no choice other than Welsh-medium education. Surely that cannot be right.

Mr. Rowlands: It is sad that for a long time parents could not choose to have their children brought up bilingually. If I lived in Dyfed and my children went to a school that taught all subjects in Welsh, I am sure that they would also be taught English, and would emerge effectively bilingual—unless that did not happen for other educational reasons. I did not wish to start too much of an argument with my hon. Friend; I simply wanted to draw to his attention the experience of a household in an overwhelmingly English-speaking community.

I support the new clause, and I hope that the Welsh Language Board heeds the warnings that we gave in Committee, which I repeated through the vehicle of amendment No. 11. The board should tread warily when dealing with the detailed aspects of LEA policy. If it does not tread carefully, it could create tensions within the local communities. So long as the board listens to the messages that we have sent from this Chamber and from the Committee, we will have a sensible and balanced approach to these issues. We should support the idea of a right of the kind suggested in the new clause.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I also support the new clause. The advantage of a right is that it creates a corresponding duty. In my constituency, and throughout Powys, bilingual education has not been available in a Welsh-medium school. That has caused great anger among a large group of parents. The situation is simply unacceptable.

8.30 pm

The issue has been considered time and again by the local education authority of Powys county council. However, because there is no duty to make the provision, it has fudged the issue time and again. That is not acceptable. As a result, the anger of the growing group of parents who wish to have their children educated at a secondary level through the medium of Welsh has grown. A quite unnecessary political issue has arisen.

At the moment, a solution has at least been found for part of Powys. A proposal has been put forward for a building, which has been used as a special school, to be created as a Welsh medium unit for the first three, or possibly four, years of the Caereinion high school at Llanfair Caereinion. The matter is now before the Secretary of State for a decision. I want to take the opportunity of tonight's debate to urge the Secretary of State to reach a decision as soon as possible.

The last schools decision from the same valley—the Banw valley—which went to the Secretary of State took 10 months. That related to an application, which was eventually granted, by a primary school for grant-maintained status. I hope very much that the decision to which I referred a few moments ago can be reached in 10 weeks rather than 10 months. Even 10 weeks would seem more than long enough.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The hon. and learned Gentleman must recognise that Powys county council's proposal to the Secretary of State may well resolve certain issues in relation to the provision of Welsh-medium education in the hon. and learned Gentleman's part of Powys. However, given the immense geographical size of Powys, it will not be of any real assistance to parents in my part of Powys who are also seeking Welsh-medium education.

Mr. Carlile: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I was about to say that, even if that provision is granted and the application by Powys is allowed, that will not meet all the needs of my constituents in the part of Powys which is Montgomeryshire.

I should be much happier to see an entirely new Welsh medium school established somewhere reasonably accessible—perhaps near Newtown—to all those children who wish to be educated through the medium of Welsh or whose parents wish that for them.

The problem which the new clause raises is that if Powys decided to make such a provision, and it might well decide to do that on the merits of the case, it could not afford to do so. The Government should shoulder the responsibility of meeting the cost of that provision throughout Wales, or at least throughout those parts of Wales where it is reasonable so to do. However, in saying "those parts of Wales where it is reasonable so to do", I do not mean for a moment to dilute my belief that every parent in Wales should have the right to choose the medium of Welsh for the education of their children.

I would go so far as to say that this is one of the key issues in the Bill. Many of us will determine how we vote on Third Reading after listening to the Government's considered response on this point. If the Government refuse to give Welsh official status, as they have already refused tonight, and if they refuse to give a right, which sounds pretty reasonable, for children to be educated through the medium of Welsh, what is left in the Bill? All that is left is a Welsh Language Board which will no doubt produce some interesting schemes, many of which I suspect it will not be possible to enforce, and which will not have created a single worthwhile right which a single citizen in Wales can enforce through the courts of law. If that is what we are left with, it will look pretty threadbare.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: I had not intended to intervene in this debate. However, having heard the contributions of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), I felt that I had to point out once again that the socialist principle should apply.

I strongly support the spirit of the new clause and the opportunity for Welsh-medium education. The clause is fine and I have no problem with it. However, it does not carry with it the principle of equality. Throughout Wales, there should be the opportunity for Welsh-medium education and for English-medium education.

The Minister of State is aware of our problems in Dyfed. Those problems also pertain to Gwynedd. If English-speaking parents move to our rural heartlands of Llanelli, Llandovey and Lampeter from Swansea, Neath or Merthyr, they will find that the local primary school is mainly Welsh medium. It teaches children to read and write in the Welsh language.

Parents want to help their children, especially their infant children, when they are at primary school. It is impossible for English-speaking parents to help their

children to learn to read and write if the primary school teaches in the Welsh medium. That takes away a vital part of parenting and part of the enjoyment of being a parent.

It is amazing that that has happened. Over the past few years, there has been a rolling programme in Dyfed which has affected the rural areas. One hundred and eighty eight primary schools in Dyfed are mainly Welsh medium. That is fine so long as the children come from Welsh-speaking homes or if the parents choose that for their children.

I admire my hon. Friends the Members for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths). Although they are not Welsh speaking, they have decided to send their children to Welsh-medium primary schools. However, that should not be compulsory. In large areas of Gwynedd and Dyfed we effectively have compulsory Welsh-medium infant education. That cannot be right for children.

It was said earlier this evening that children pick up languages like blotting paper. That is simply not true. It is an absolute myth. Coming from a Welsh-speaking home, I was brought up with Welsh and English and I learnt them quite easily. However, I had the advantage of bilingual parents—they spoke both Welsh and English. Children can readily be brought up bilingual in a bilingual home. However, it is otherwise quite difficult and especially for average or below average children.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon referred in Committee to Europe and to trilingualism and quadralingualism and to a tremendous facility with language. That is not the case across Europe. It applies only to very small minority groups. Nearly all children in France are taught through the medium of French. Very few French people speak English or German. The same applies in Germany where there is one dominant language.

Mr. Wigley: There are millions of people in France whose first language is not French——

Mr. Alan W. Williams: No, a small minority.

Mr. Wigley: Yes, there are millions. A standard work refers to a figure of in excess of 10 million people who had a language other than French as their first language. A country like Holland experiences several languages running together because it is at the crossroads of Europe. When the Dutch football team was competing in the World cup finals, six of the 11 players could give interviews in four languages. There are times when some hon. Members cannot give an interview in one language. That is the reality of multilingualism.

Mr. Williams: The hon. Member for Caernarfon has started to believe some of his mythology. It is a case of repetition after repetition and then he believes myths. The vast majority of people in Europe are monolingual. It should be a fundamental right for all children to learn to read and write in the language of their homes—in their mother tongue—so that their parents can help them. That right is not available in large areas of Dyfed and Gwynedd. My difficulty is that the new clause does not relate to problems in my constituency.

Mr. Rowlands: It might sound a banal comparison, but if I were a younger parent, and we moved to Wokingham, I would not have expected my children to be able to learn in a Welsh-medium school. Therefore, if I as a parent lived in Dyfed or Gwynedd where the major provision is Welsh, surely I would have to accept that as a natural constraint because I had chosen to move there and accept the education facilities that are available there. My hon. Friend is making a wrong case.

Mr. Williams: Some schools in my constituency have been categorised as mainly Welsh medium, and 90 per cent. of the children come from English-speaking homes. In most of my constituency, 50 per cent. of people are from Welsh-speaking homes and 50 per cent. are from English-speaking homes. In rural areas, there is the deliberate exclusion of the English language between the ages of five and seven. *[Interruption.]* That is the case. The hon. Member for Caernarfon might have convulsions at the thought of that, but it is the reality.

Even though I support the spirit of the new clause, when there is no English-speaking education for many of my constituents, it does not address the problem of the Welsh language in education in my constituency. If the clause had been redrafted with the Welsh medium and the English available, it would have included the concept of equality.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon voted with us in the first Division this evening. We in Wales want a status for the Welsh language in Wales that is no less than the status of English, and the principle of equal status and equal validity. That is a two-sided coin, and hon. Members must accept that. Although we want the availability of Welsh-medium education throughout Wales, and I support that, we must also have English-medium education throughout Wales.

My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney talked about the appropriateness of the Welsh Language Board vis-a-vis local education authorities. He is right. Local education authorities carry the primary responsibility. It is a little odd to see education introduced in one new clause in respect of a 20-clause Bill.

Hon. Members must think more about this matter. We in Wales need to examine our education system in total and not just automatically adopt what is happening in England. We need a separate education Bill for Wales. Such a Bill could cover primary, secondary, further and higher education and find a place for the Welsh language.

I should like equality to prevail throughout our education system. That means the availability of the Welsh medium in infant, primary and secondary education throughout Wales, together with the availability of English medium education.

If the hon. Member for Caernarfon presses the new clause to a Division, I will not be able to support him because the principle of equality is absent. I would not vote against it, but I would abstain.

8.45 pm

Mr. Flynn: I will not repeat what was said in Committee when we discussed this matter at length. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) was an isolated figure in Committee, as he will be in the House, and as he is throughout most of Wales for his point of view on this issue. The reason is that he is fighting against the commonsense approach that has been adopted in every corner of Wales from Monmouth to Caernarfon.

No one has suggested that the same rules for the language—the same conditions—should apply for every part of Wales, just as no one would suggest that everyone

[Mr. Flynn]

in Monmouth could go to a school on the border and demand Welsh education. They would not get anywhere if they did that.

In Carmarthen, a certain line has been pursued by my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams). A tiny group of people have written to us—they are not the most rational letters that we have received. My hon. Friend has opposed the policy of the county council.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: My hon. Friend refers to that tiny group of people. Let me assure my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), because he referred to a similar matter, that when in Carmarthen town, Lampeter, Cardigan, Llanelli and towns in Dyfed there is a free choice between Welsh-medium education and English-medium education, the overwhelming majority of Welsh-speaking people choose Welsh-medium education and the large majority of English-speaking people choose English-medium education. It is not a tiny number. In rural areas, thousands of people are being deprived of the opportunity to educate their children in the language of the home.

Mr. Flynn: The tiny group I am referring to is called Education First. It is a campaigning group. I was about to say that elected representatives of the people of Carmarthen on Dyfed county council have selected a language policy which they regarded as right for that complex county. It was a different policy in different areas —just as it would have to be in every other county of Wales that has strong Welsh-speaking areas and areas in which Welsh is not the first language. My hon. Friend is trying to impose absolute equality on education, which is totally impractical.

We have accepted that we cannot ask Monmouth district council to do things that Dwyfor district council is doing. We have accepted the complex linguistic pattern of Wales. It is not sensible to talk about a socialist principle to do it that way. It is a very crude argument that my hon. Friend is applying which, in practice, cannot work either in education or in any other aspect of the language. We must temper what we are trying to do with much common sence and an understanding of the linguistic map of Wales.

Mr. Morgan: The House will be pleased to know that I intend to be very brief and that I do not intend to enter the hornets' nest that is raised by new clause 10 which relates to the transverse rights of English-speaking people in Welsh-speaking areas; nor do I intend to try to settle the problems of the Bretons and the Basques in France. I wish briefly to refer to a matter that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), which was the function or duty that will be given to the Welsh Language Board and how it relates to the duties of the Curriculum Council for Wales, which we will discuss on Monday.

In case the Minister of State has not seen it, I refer to the advertisement for the chief executive for the new Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales, although we are encouraged to refer to it by its Welsh acronym of ACAC. The Minister of State has already claimed not to have seen one document. I do not want to embarass him, but I am sure that he reads *The Sunday Times* and has checked the advertisement that was, I suppose, partially issued in his name, although it has come out through the PA Consulting Group on behalf of the Government to select the new chief executive, on the presumption that the Education Bill will pass through Parliament. The advertisement states that the ACAC

"will be, subject to the passage of the Education Bill through Parliament, the main central agency in Wales for taking forward the National Curriculum".

That is fair enough—there is no problem there. The advertisement then says:

"and developing Welsh language education".

One assumes that it is not simply confined to the teaching of Welsh as a core curriculum subject in Welsh schools; otherwise that is what it would have said.

Presumably, education through the Welsh medium is included. That is confirmed by the Welsh translation of the version where it refers to the duties of the ACAC as "Datblygu Addysg Gymraeg". That takes it into the area of Welsh language education generally, not merely the subject of Welsh as taught in schools—literature and language, as it were. Presumably it will be Welsh language education generally, including Welsh learner courses and, obviously, the way in which the Welsh language is used to teach physics and biology or any other subject that is taught in a school through the Welsh medium.

That raises the question asked earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney: which quango will do that job? Will we be subjected to turf contests between the Welsh Language Board and the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales over who will have the last word on Welsh language education matters, assuming that Welsh language education is not simply confined to the teaching of Welsh as a core curriculum subject?

Before the Education Bill comes back to the House on Monday, we should be clear about questioning whether it will be the Welsh Language Board, because it was not excluded. Indeed, in Committee, the Minister said that the board will be heavily involved in looking after the interests of education through the Welsh medium, but apparently the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales has been given the job. I hope that the Minister, on receipt of the advice that he is always able to get on such matters, will clarify the position before we proceed any further.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The debate has ranged widely and I shall try to be as much to the point as I possibly can. We all agree on the tremendous value of Welsh-medium education and the progress that has been made. What we tend to forget is that that progress has been made under the Education Act 1944. The strength of that Act is that it treats the English and Welsh-medium sectors even-handedly. My concern about new clause 10 is that, as the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) pointed out, it does not deal with the two languages even-handedly.

The Bill is about treating English and Welsh on a basis of equality. I do not believe that we would be treating the English and Welsh-medium sectors of education on the basis of equality if local education authorities were placed under a duty such as that in new clause 10 with regard to Welsh-medium education without there being a comparable duty concerning the provision of English-medium education.

The terms of the 1944 Act are admirably suited to reflect the difficult issues that can surround the most effective delivery of Welsh-medium education alongside the English-medium sector. The 1944 Act does not seek to

impose the same pattern of education in all parts of Wales. As I explained in Committee, it requires that, to the extent that it is compatible with efficient instruction and the avoidance of unreasonable expenditure, pupils should be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents. We propose that that statutory duty will remain unchanged as a result of the Bill. The success of Welsh-medium education in areas such as Mid Glamorgan is an indication that the 1944 Act is admirably suited to governing the conduct of LEAs in this respect.

The change that we propose to introduce is that the Welsh language scheme that LEAs will be required to produce should include their policy on the provision of Welsh-medium education. In preparing their scheme, LEAs and any school funding council that may be established will need to have regard to the guidelines that the board may produce on the subject and consult parents. Our intention is that the changes should ensure that, while recognising that the issue will often involve difficult and sensitive issues, the delivery of Welsh-medium education should be as closely attuned to the reasonable expectation of parents as possible.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) was anxious about the board's role with regard to education. While granting the board a role in education, we are not advocating that it should become responsible for the delivery of Welsh-medium education. That responsibility will remain with LEAs and any school funding council that is established in due course.

Mr. Rowlands *rose*—

Sir Wyn Roberts: I will spell it out for the hon. Gentleman, but I will give way if he wants me to. The board will have an important role to play alongside the LEA, but will not take the place of the LEA. For example, we do not foresee the board becoming involved in detailed issues concerning the delivery of Welsh-medium education in specific schools. That will be a matter of day-to-day management for LEAs and schools.

The board will simply not be in a position to become involved in such local issues. Its role will be to look at LEA proposals for Welsh-medium education covering the authority as a whole. It is only at that strategic level that sensible decisions can be made about whether the Welsh and English languages are being dealt with on the basis of equality.

Mr. Rowlands: The Minister started by telling us that an LEA or school will have to submit to the Welsh Language Board a scheme for the provision of education in the Welsh medium and the board must then approve that scheme.

That will inevitably mean that the board will get involved in the provision of education in a community. The moment the board gets involved, parents who are dissatisfied with the provision of Welsh-medium education will appeal to the board, and the Minister and the board will get dragged into that issue. Whatever the Minister says, the danger of that is considerable, and his explanation does not give me any comfort.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I reiterate that the scheme will not work out as the hon. Gentleman anticipates because the strength of the board is that it will be able to develop a breadth of perspective concerning the position of the Welsh language across all phases of education. That breadth of perspective can only serve to compliment the roles of the bodies that are charged with the delivery of Welsh-medium education.

Mr. Wigley: I listened to the Minister's description of how the board will have only a strategic responsibility for the provision of Welsh-medium education. How, then, will it in practice sort out the kind of problem that has gone on for years in Swansea, where it has been impossible to get Welsh-medium education?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I said that the board would work out with each local education authority, in the light of the guidelines that will be approved by the House, the precise scheme under which Welsh-medium education will be provided. In so far as such schemes will be matters of negotiation, arrangement and agreement between the board and the LEA, I can certainly foresee benefits emerging.

One must also remember that these schemes will be the result of consultation. We shall accept a Labour-inspired amendment later which provides for extensive consultation. It will affect non-Welsh-speaking as well as Welsh-speaking parents. We are looking to the board to achieve a beneficial influence in the local authority context to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The board has not simply a strategic role, but real strength, power and influence.

Without, therefore, interfering with local decision making in any way, the board will have an important role to play in education. It will be important that the board exercises that role with considerable sensitivity. In recognising the importance of the issue, I am confident that that is what the board will do.

9 pm

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) referred to the advertisement in *The Sunday Times* for a chief executive for the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales. The role of that authority, which we shall discuss further, is to develop the curriculum and carry out assessment in Wales. The authority will certainly have a role in developing Welsh as a subject in the national curriculum, both as a first and as a second language. It will have a role also in relation to assessment in Welsh and other subjects. It will also be responsible for the provision of teaching materials for use in Welsh schools. We may well have an opportunity of returning to the detailed provisions, powers and responsibilities of the authority.

Mr. Morgan: The exact phrase used in the advertisement is

"the development of Welsh language education".

The Minister may be telling the House that the advertisement is inaccurate and that PA Consulting Group should be given a rap over the knuckles for perhaps misunderstanding its instructions.

Surely "Welsh language education" would be construed by most people as going much further than simply Welsh as a curriculum subject, whether first or second language and whether curriculum or assessment. To most people "Welsh language education" would include education through the medium of Welsh, would it not?

Sir Wyn Roberts: Yes and, arguably, "Welsh language education" would extend right through further education into higher education, as the hon. Gentleman suggested earlier. We must remember that the hon. Gentleman is

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

referring to an advertisement for a particular post. Those who may be suitable to respond to that advertisement will know the proximate role of ACAC.

It will be for ACAC, the Welsh Language Board, the LEAs and all others concerned with education in Wales to work out their relationships. Certainly the authority will be expected to produce a scheme in much the same way as any other non-departmental public body will be expected to produce a scheme in Wales.

Mr. Wigley: I have listened carefully to the Minister, but I am far from convinced that the provisions of the Bill will answer the weakness of the Education Act 1944, on which he based so much of his argument.

In numerous places in Wales—although not a majority—it is impossible to get education through the medium of Welsh within a reasonable distance. There has not been a positive drive to do that. If the board succeeds in getting guidelines that meet that requirement, and thence local strategies, and can persuade people of the need, that is fine, but we know that if the Government resist the new clause—as they seem to do—there will be no statutory rights. Everything depends on good will, which may turn to ill will, as the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) said, and all sorts of in-fighting may result.

I hope to goodness that the provision of educational schemes in the Bill achieves what the Minister wants, but I have reservations, because, as the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) said, unless one has rights that create duties, there is no certainty that that will happen and no way of ensuring that it does.

I shall respond briefly to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams). Our objective in wanting Welsh-medium education to work thoroughly and to maintain the natural schools that provide Welsh in Gwynedd and Dyfed and parts of other counties is to create an integrated community; a community that is not divided by language, and where young people can speak both languages and, therefore, can apply for any job and take part fully in that community.

I am not persuaded by the hon. Member for Carmarthen that he is campaigning to ensure that the non-Welsh-speaking children in non-Welsh-speaking homes have the access to the language that gives them the opportunity to play a full part in the community in which they are brought up. There is a danger of producing an apartheid approach; of creating two societies growing up side by side, and never the twain shall meet. At one time, there was a fear of that in the south Wales valleys, but it has not turned out to be justified.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wigley: No. I am bringing the debate to an end.

That apartheid approach is a recipe for disaster, which is why I am so encouraged that few members of the Labour party go down that road.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 11

OBJECTIVE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE BOARD

'.(1) The Board shall have the objective of maintaining and expanding the use of the Welsh language.

(2) The Board shall—

(a) advise the Secretary of State on matters concerning the Welsh language;

(b) promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language in public business;

(c) advise persons exercising functions of a public nature in Wales on

(i) the use of the Welsh language in their dealings with the public; and

(ii) how they may best give effect to the principle that in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice, the status of the Welsh language shall not be less than that of the English language; and

(d) advise other persons on the voluntary use of the Welsh language in their dealings with the public.

(3) Subject to the following provisio. ., the Board may do anything which is incidental or conducive to the performance of its functions, and may in particular—

(a) make grants and loans and give guarantees;

(b) make charges for the provision of advice or other services;

(c) accept gifts of money or other property.

(4) The Board shall not—

(a) make a grant or loan,

(b) give a guarantee, or

(c) acquire or dispose of any interest in land,

except with the approval of the Secretary of State given with the consent of the Treasury.'.—*[Mr. Morgan.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments:

No. 23, in page 1, clause 3, leave out from beginning of line 17 to end of line 24 on page 2.

No. 18, in page 2, line 18, at end insert—

'(d) formulate and publish from time to time guidelines and codes of good practice as to the use of Welsh in commerce and other fields of activity as it may think fit;

(e) provide translation and interpretation services for Government departments, public bodies or other persons and organisations;

(f) commission and carry out research relating to the Welsh language and publish information obtained thereby;

(g) advertise and otherwise promote its activities.'.

Mr. Morgan: This is an attempt by our team of parliamentary draftsmen to redraft new clause 3 completely and replace it with a fallback position. We half anticipated that the Government would not make any concessions or movement towards us on the issue of official status in new clause 1. We thought that if that were to happen, the only way to put some meat on the somewhat threadbare—to mix my metaphors—structure of the Bill would be to insert a set of goals and objectives for the board by completely taking out the existing clause 3 and replacing it. We have retained some of the powers to give grants and so on that were in the original clause 3, but have said what the board is supposed to do.

The Bill will succeed or fail on the basis of the Minister of State's answer when he is asked, when eventually he gives up the reins of office, "What did you do for the Welsh language, Daddy?" As he may already be a granddaddy, he will probably be a great-granddaddy by then. He will

say, "I set up a quango for it". We want him also to be able to say what the quango was supposed to do. That is not clear from the Bill because the quango is not given any objectives. It is given a function, but it cannot test that function against an overall objective.

Our new clause states that

"the Board shall have the objective of maintaining and expanding the use of the Welsh language."

We want the Welsh language to remain a common language of fluent use in the countryside and in some of the few remaining industrial areas of Wales—in the anthracite coalfields, the tin plate areas of west Wales, the former slate quarrying areas of north-west Wales, and so on—where it may not be much of a written language.

We also wanted to expand the use of the Welsh language by adding written fluency as well as public and private sector use of the language. Clearly, in the spirit of the Bill, private sector use would have to be voluntary.

I mention that because page 50, paragraph 4.47, of the White Paper on public expenditure, command 2215, boasts about the constructive activities of the Welsh Language Board and says:

"It has achieved significant progress in a number of areas including the "Iaith Gwaith" (Working Welsh) scheme which encourages the use of Welsh in the workplace and the "CYSILL" Welsh-language computer spellcheck project."

Both those projects—mainly the first but to an extent the second—are of enormous interest to the private sector. But as the Bill makes no mention of the private sector we have added a reference to it and said that it should be able voluntarily to be included. The Welsh Language Board would therefore not be acting outside its statutory powers by getting involved with the private sector. Although there would be no compulsion on the private sector, the board would have every encouragement to spend its resources on schemes in the spirit of the "Iaith Gwaith" and "CYSILL" projects, about which the Government thought it worth while to boast in their most recent reference to why they were spending money on the Welsh Language Board while it remains non-statutory.

New clause 11 is infinitely superior to clause 3 because it gives an objective and a statutory basis to activities involving the private sector.

Mr. Rowlands: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) for introducing the new clause because it does at least endeavour to establish objectives for the language board.

I started out as a fan of the Bill, but, as the Report stage has proceeded, I have grown increasingly disillusioned by it. One of the reasons why disillusionment has crept in is that the Bill asks for a legislative blank cheque, which I have grave doubts about whether we should grant. For example, the Bill empowers public bodies to form schemes, but we have no idea of the character of those schemes. The Bill contains no illustrative ideas or draft models of the schemes. The schemes have no boundaries or content and we do not know the principles on which they are to be based. They must follow guidelines, but we have no idea what the parameters of the guidelines will be because they are not defined in the Bill.

The Bill also establishes a board, but we do not know how much it will cost because Ministers have refused to give even an estimate. Thus the Bill will establish a board costing an unknown sum annually to draft guidelines to be followed by public bodies drawing up schemes. But we know the shape and size of neither the guidelines nor the schemes. All that we know about the board is that 15 persons will sit on it.

It is time that the Minister gave us a clearer indication of the nature of those schemes and guidelines. Exactly what will the board propose? Until the Committee stage, I thought that I knew what the board was supposed to do because the invaluable document, "Guidelines to the Public Sector", gives an idea of the character of the present language board's activities. Based on the sensible, well-balanced view about the role and future role of the language and its promotion, I thought that I could support that excellent idea. We do not know if that is the sort of objective of the new statutory language board. We discover more and more that it will wander into all sorts of areas of activity that, in my opinion, will cause the board a lot of problems and will create a great deal of tension around its work.

9.15 pm

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West rightly said that we must better define the board's objectives, I shall ask the Minister two or three simple questions and this time hope for answers. What will be the likely average annual cost of the board? I asked him that question over and over again in Committee. If he cannot give us an estimate, will he tell us what estimate the present Welsh Language Board has given him? I understand that it has estimated the costs and has presented them to him. We are entitled to know what the Welsh Language Board, as the most authoritative institution on that matter, has estimated. Will the Minister give us that figure?

We are told that the Welsh Language Board will take over the responsibility for allocating some of the available grants, as set out under clause 3. Will the Minister specifically confirm that, under the provisions of clause 3, power to allocate grants will be given to the Welsh Language Board? As I understand it, most of the grants that we call section 26 money under the Development Board for Rural Wales Act 1991 and the bodies that receive them are listed on page 49 of the White Paper on Government expenditure. In total, £2·7 million of grants are listed which are given to a variety of bodies and organisations. Is the intention that the decision on who should receive those grants listed and their disbursement will be transferred to the Welsh Language Board? What percentage of the money that goes to the Welsh Books Council, for example, will be handled by the Welsh Language Board? Will the board be able to make such decisions?

The allocation of grants is an important function. Are we to transfer what is currently a Welsh Office responsibility lock, stock and barrel? If we are not, which grants that are currently paid under section 26 are to be administered and disbursed by the Welsh Language Board, which will therefore have the discretion to change and move such disbursements? Those are vital questions about the nature and functions of the Welsh Language Board. We were not given any answers in Committee and we deserve them now. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West has done a great service in trying to force the Minister to provide a better clarification of the character, nature and scope of the board.

Sir Wyn Roberts: New clause 11 largely replicates the terms of new clause 3. There are some significant

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differences that cause me concern, especially the recasting of the board's main duty. The alternative duties contained in the new clause serve to confuse what we intend the board to do and what we hope will happen to the Welsh language as a result.

The board's function of promoting and facilitating the use of Welsh has been deliberately cast in the most flexible terms possible. There is no restriction on the board's function, so that seems to be a fair description of the contribution that we can fairly expect it to make. It does nothing to clarify the board's legal duties to confuse it with matters that are ultimately outside its control.

We may all agree that one of the board's objectives is to maintain and expand the use of the Welsh language. That is not something that we can sensibly reflect on the face of the Bill. We shall, of course, want to agree objectives for the board and those will be matters to be discussed in the context of the board's corporate plan. We shall also need to be able to monitor whether the objectives have been achieved over a reasonable period. The outstanding characteristic of the objective proposed in the new clause is that it could be monitored only over a very long period. It would, therefore, be of little use in holding the board to account for its actions. The new clause does nothing to clarify the board's main duties and powers. It serves rather to confuse the board's actions with what we might hope would be the outcome of those actions.

As I made clear in Committee, I am pleased to be able to agree that each of the elements referred to in amendment No. 18 is an activity with which the board should have the power to become involved, although we see the board's role in translation and interpretation as that of an enabler and facilitator, rather than as a provider. The amendment could introduce legal uncertainty about whether the board had the power to undertake other promotional activities that are not specifically listed in clause 3(3). Keeping the list in the clause as short as possible ensures that whatever uncertainty may arise on that point is kept to an absolute minimum, thus allowing the board maximum flexibility.

To further that flexibility, clause 3 is deliberately restricted to listing the board's main promotional and advisory functions. That will ensure that there will be no legislative obstacles to the board's promoting the language whenever or wherever it is spoken. That reflects the arm's length nature that we intend should be a feature of the relationship between the board and the Government.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) asked me some specific questions. I understand that the board's estimate has been submitted to my officials. Of course, we have to study those estimates and the eventual allocation to the board will be our decision. It is too early in the day for me to give any further information on that point.

Mr. Rowlands: The Minister has an estimate. I do not seek to tie him down, because I know that the decision is for him, his Department and the Government, but will he tell us what it is?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The board has submitted an estimate. That estimate is subject to discussion between the Welsh Office and the board. We shall have to go over it. We have not agreed it as an accepted estimate.

Mr. Rowlands: What is the estimate?

Sir Wyn Roberts: It would not be proper for me at this stage——

Mr. Rowlands: What is the estimate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that seated interventions of that kind are to be deplored, however anxious he is for an answer.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Rowlands: Why is the Minister so coy? Before we approve the Bill which will establish the board, we are entitled at least to know what is the estimate of the present Welsh Language Board. Will the Minister just tell us? We are not tying the Government to a figure. Will the Minister please tell us what the board's estimate of the cost is?

Sir Wyn Roberts: It would be misleading for me to give a figure to the House because it might raise or decrease expectations. It would be misleading because the estimate that is under discussion may bear no relationship to the eventual allocation made. I cannot go further than that at this stage.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney asked me about responsibility for grants. The board will inherit from the Welsh Office some of the responsibility for making grants in support of the Welsh language under section 26 of the Development Board for Rural Wales Act 1991. It is envisaged that that will be a gradual inheritance to facilitate the smooth transfer to the Welsh Language Board of that important function. It is important that the Welsh Language Board learns to walk before it can run. With that in mind, the Welsh Office will for some time retain responsibility for the larger grants, including the Welsh Books Council, the National Eisteddfod, the Urdd and the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin.

The amount of money available to assist Welsh language initiatives during this year was £2·8 million, of which £2·2 million was allocated to the larger organisations. That leaves £600,000 to be distributed among the smaller grant recipients for which the board will be in future responsible.

Mr. Morgan: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 5

DUTY OF NOTIFIED PUBLIC BODIES TO PREPARE SCHEMES

Mr. Rowlands: I beg to move amendment No. 10, in page 2, line 45, at end insert—

'(2B) The scheme referred to in subsection (1) above shall not include measures in connection with the broadcast programmes or scheduling policy of the British Broadcasting Corporation in Wales.'.

The amendment relates to a specific piece of information of which I was not aware in Committee—an interesting document that gives the response by the Welsh Language Board to the consultation document "The Future of the BBC" that was published by the Department of National Heritage in November 1992.

In the submission by the Welsh Language Board, there are two statements which worried me. I have been consistently concerned about the degree to which the Welsh Language Board will interfere in issues for which

other organisations and bodies are statutorily responsible. Those organisations may have their own accounting procedures and degree of accountability.

Paragraph 3.1 of the document says:

"clearly the Welsh Language Board would see as one of its main responsibilities that the television service broadcast by S4C is properly protected from commercial and political pressures since it plays a vital part in both the strategic development and the promotion of language."

Under what power is the Welsh Language Board seeking to intervene in an organisation that was set down in the House in statute with its own board and its own systems of accountability that go through to Ministers and to the House? What will be the function of the Welsh Language Board in that regard? Is that an agreed objective of the board and, dare I ask after today's discussions, has the Minister seen the document? If so, does he agree that that is a proper function in which the Welsh Language Board should get involved? That was in relation to S4C.

Paragraph 3.5 contains a statement with regard to BBC Wales:

"The Welsh Language Board is mindful of the danger of creating a ghetto for Welsh language broadcasting which would negate the aim of creating a bilingual society in Wales. It is for this reason that the Welsh Language Board considers the totality of the BBC's programme services in Wales are its concerns, de facto and its Welsh language is its concern de jure."

What are we to make of that? The programming of BBC Wales, in both Welsh and English, is governed by its charter and its statutory responsibilities. It has its own advisory BBC council and, through that, its own chain of command and accountability through the procedures and structures laid down by the BBC. How will the Welsh Language Board establish both de facto and de jure responsibility and supervision over BBC Wales programming?

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have seen that document and it worries me. The hon. Gentleman will have seen within the document that the view expressed by the Welsh Language Board is that the functions of the controller of BBC Wales may be changed also. He will have seen paragraph 4.5, which says:

"The Welsh Language Board expects the future pattern of the BBC's services in Wales through the medium of the Welsh language to be incorporated in the scheme which the BBC as a public body will be required to submit to a new statutory Welsh Language Board under the terms of the Welsh Language Bill."

I have read the Bill and I do not think that the BBC is one of the organisations covered by it. In the circumstances, what observations would the hon. Gentleman like to make about that?

9.30 pm

Mr. Rowlands: I had not yet reached the paragraph in question—I was working my way down—but as the hon. Gentleman has drawn the attention of the House to it, I should point out that it is an extremely sweeping and rather frightening statement.

Systems of control are laid down by charter, but this is an example of the WLB gaining the capacity to interfere with the fundamental responsibilities of an organisation established, in the case of the BBC by charter, and in the case of S4C by statute. The hon. Gentleman has therefore raised an important point.

As for how the BBC will get caught up by the scheme-making powers, I assume that clause 6(1)(o) means that the Secretary of State will announce that the BBC and S4C will be expected to produce relevant schemes. If so, such schemes should certainly not involve the pattern of BBC services. That pattern and accountability for it are laid down by charter, with a clear chain of command and responsibility. We have a BBC governing body in Wales and a BBC advisory board, so how in the name of heaven does the Welsh Language Board have a right to crawl over and scrutinise the BBC's services in Wales?

I hope that the Minister will not answer me with weasel words and that he will give me an unequivocal statement to the effect that he will not endorse the right of the WLB to get involved in matters that are properly covered elsewhere by charter and in statute. I am afraid that this is another example of the WLB becoming improperly involved in issues of public life in Wales which are already provided for in other ways.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have a great deal of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's views. The views expressed by the Welsh Language Board in response to the Green Paper were those of the non-statutory board. Knowing the hon. Gentleman to be a reasonable man, I suggest that he has not, perhaps, paid enough attention to the requirement that the guidelines from which the schemes will result must be approved by the Secretary of State and must come before Parliament, when we are likely to have another opportunity of discussing the principles involved.

Of course, we would not expect the board to become involved in the detail of the BBC's scheduling policies. Including the BBC in the list of public bodies that may be required to produce schemes does not mean that the board will assume responsibility for the place of the Welsh language in the broadcasting system of Wales. The BBC's policies will remain a matter for it, determined under its charter and, after 1996, under its new charter. The board will not be able to interfere with the terms of the BBC's charter; nor will it be for the board to interfere with the BBC's obligation to provide 10 hours of programmes every week to S4C. The BBC does, however, fall into the class of bodies from which the board may require a scheme that illustrates how, in the context of its entire output, it gives effect to the principle of English and Welsh being dealt with on a basis of equality, when that is appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable. In proposing its scheme, the BBC will be able to reflect the complex nature of its responsibilities in Wales, which include its separate radio networks and television broadcast in English and Welsh.

Despite the importance and sensitivity of broadcasting, I am not persuaded that we would be justified in ruling out at this stage that the board should be excluded from that sector, but the detail of broadcasting policy will remain a matter for the BBC. It is worth underlining that it would not be the role of the board to express a view on any editorial matters. Schemes will be solely concerned with the principle of English and Welsh being dealt with on a basis of equality. To deny the board any role in that sector would be to deny the importance of broadcasting in the Government's overall policy of support for the language.

I suspect that we are all agreed on the influence that broadcasting, and television broadcasting in particular, has on any language, be it Welsh or English. Therefore, it seems only sensible that broadcasting should be included within the board's remit. I am confident that it is a task

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that the board will discharge effectively, and in a way that builds on the excellent contribution that Welsh language broadcasting already makes to the well-being of the Welsh language.

In that sector, as in so many others, the board will have to be sensitive and have regard and respect also for the other contractual or statutory obligations that apply to those bodies with whom it deals.

Mr. Rowlands: I listened with great care and interest to the Minister's considered statement. I hope that the new Welsh Language Board will hear the message that we want to send out from the House, that if it treads in those sectors, it should do so warily.

As we shall have the chance to consider the guidelines when they emerge, it must be made clear to the board that such guidelines should avoid the worries and concerns that I have expressed, which arise from the language used in the consultation document or in the submission by the old Welsh Language Board. If it heeds that lesson, I hope that such a problem will not occur. However, we should give the new Welsh Language Board more than a gentle warning that if it intrudes into issues of the kind that we have raised—the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) shares my queasiness—a big row will ensue. I hope that the new board will heed that message. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 10

APPROVAL OF GUIDELINES

Amendment made: No. 2, in page 5, line 7 leave out 'people who speak Welsh' and insert 'members of the public who may be affected by the schemes'.—*[Sir Wyn Roberts.]*

Clause 13

CONSULTATION ON PREPARATION OF SCHEMES

Amendments made: No. 4, in page 5, line 44 after first 'of' insert 'both'.

No. 3, in page 5, line 44 after 'Welsh-speaking' insert 'and other'.

No. 5, in page 5, line 44 at end add 'who may be affected by the scheme'.—*[Sir Wyn Roberts.]*

Clause 26

MEANING OF "PUBLIC BODY"

Amendment made: No. 6, in page 10, line 32 at end insert—

'( ) Where the powers conferred by this section are exercised in relation to the form of a document or a form of words, a reference in an Act or instrument to the form shall, so far as may be necessary, be construed as (or as including) a reference to the form prescribed under or by virtue of this section.'.—*[Sir Wyn Roberts.]*

Clause 35

REPEALS AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendment made: No. 7, in page 14, line 27 at end insert—

'( ) In the Appendix of forms in Schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983, in paragraph 2(a) of the directions as to printing the ballot paper, for the words from "except" to "and the" there shall be substituted the words "except the direction to vote for one candidate only and the".'.—*[Sir Wyn Roberts.]*

Schedule 2

REPEALS

Amendment made: No. 8, in page 19, line 11, at end insert—

'1985 c. 50.	The Representation of the People Act 1985.	In Schedule 4, paragraph 85(a).'.—*[Sir Wyn Roberts.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

9.38 pm

Mr. Wigley: It is with considerable regret that I rise to explain why my hon. Friends and I will vote against Third Reading of a Bill for which we have campaigned for so long—the best part of 10 years—and in such depth. The objectives of the Bill, as we have understood them, were to create a new framework of hope for the Welsh language and to provide mechanisms that would ensure that the difficulties that have been experienced in recent years would be overcome. We are unhappy about six parts of the Bill because of the way in which the Government have failed to deal with the issues in the House of Lords, in Committee and again on Report.

The first and overwhelming problem was the subject of an earlier debate—official status. There has been pressure from all directions on the Government on that. There is no doubt about the will of Wales. The chairman of the Welsh Language Board—a Government appointee, on whose work the Bill is based, and whose period of office is coming to an end—said in a letter to us about official status for the Welsh language:

"We believe that this should be stated in totally specific terms in the Bill. If it is not included, the debate will continue in Wales, quite rightly, about the failure of the Government to act on this matter—and that debate would be totally understandable—and this would devalue everything else which otherwise would be possible under this legislation. This can only mean that the Welsh Language Board will be under a disadvantage from the very start."

I pay tribute to the Welsh Language Board—to John Elfed Jones, to Winston Roddick for the work that he has done on the legal side, and to the chief officer, John Walter Jones, for his work. The Bill has let them down and I feel sorry for them. The central question of status, on which the Archbishop of Wales wrote to the Secretary of State only a few days ago, requesting a Government rethink, has not been dealt with.

There is then the issue of rights, and particularly rights to education, another subject on which we touched. The Bill has not provided rights for anyone other than the Secretary of State and the Government. There are no additional rights for Welsh speakers. The Bill has not given statutory rights on which people can base a claim to use the Welsh language. That is a major weakness in the Bill.

We have already had a debate on juries and the need for juries that understand what is transacted and spoken in courts. We have debated race relations and we exposed the way in which the Government have not tackled that

problem. After two years of discussion between the Welsh Language Board and the Commission for Racial Equality, the Government have not been able to introduce the change in legislation that both those bodies, and the people of Wales, want.

A matter that we discussed in Committee and that was debated at length in the other place was that part of the private sector which provides public services, including telephone, water and electricity services. We expected that those essential services would be included in the Bill, but they are not. There is no guarantee that information on the forms will be in Welsh. There are schemes and a bureaucratic mechanism that can go on and on, but that lack of a guarantee in the Bill is a missed opportunity.

I would rather that we came back with a Bill in another form in the next parliamentary year than put on the statute book now something that we shall no doubt be told has to last for another 25 years, with all those central weaknesses. The Welsh Language Board will find it immensely difficult to do its work when it is not underpinned by any principle, any right, any guarantees. There is a vacuum at the centre of the Bill where they should be.

I feel sorry for the Minister because he has undertaken a great amount of work on the Bill.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman should not feel sorry for me. I am the one who is sorry to hear him say what he proposes to do. Does he not realise that the Bill is an enormous advance for Welsh-speaking people and that he is risking that benefit to them by voting the way in which he intends to?

Mr. Wigley: I note the right hon. Gentleman's anger and I understand it. He has put an enormous amount of emotional commitment into the Bill and has tried to get a consensus. No doubt a consensus could have been reached, but he is a captive member of a Government that have little knowledge of what is going on in Wales and he has been unable to get his own way on matters such as status, on which he had based so much of his own hopes. Had he succeeded there, he could have got the unanimity that I think was available in Wales to support the consensus across party lines.

We made it clear at the start that we were looking for basic things to be added to the Bill as it went through Parliament—the sort of things that the Minister promised to the Welsh Language Board in December when its members were on the point of resigning because the Bill was so weak. These things were not forthcoming, in the House of Lords or in the House of Commons.

Then we had the Bill in Committee—a Committee packed with nine Tory Members from English constituencies to make sure that they got the majority in everything. The 70-odd amendments and the 20 or 30 new clauses that were put forward were just steam-rollered out of existence, with not an inch being given on any of them.

I do not hold this against the right hon. Member for Conwy, no matter how angry he may be with me, but there is sadness about the opportunity that has been lost. I do not know whether, by doing anything else, he could have persuaded the Government to do the things that the people of Wales want. All that we know now is that the Bill is woefully inadequate to do the job that was wanted by both the right hon. Gentleman and the Welsh Language Board. We are not getting it.

It is a sad night and, yes, I do feel angry about it. Not against the Minister of State—we have to know who our enemies are when it comes to the language—but against the system that tells Wales, despite the feelings of the overwhelming majority of Welsh Members on this issue, that we must have what a Conservative Government give us.

If ever there was an argument for us to have our own parliament, to make our own laws on matters relevant to our own country, this is it. If the Government think that this is the end of the story, my goodness it is not; this is the beginning of the story and the beginning of a campaign. On the way that we have been treated over this Bill, we will build the movement until we get our own government and our own parliament to pass our own laws in these matters.

9.47 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile: It is very difficult to follow so powerful and heartfelt a speech as we have just heard from the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). I agree with much of what he said on all the issues that he mentioned, apart from the matter of juries, on which I spoke earlier.

The Government will have their majority tonight, as the Minister of State knows; the Government will have their Bill. There is no risk to the Bill caused by those who protest against the Government's views by voting against it tonight, as I shall.

We see that a statutory Welsh Language Board is to be set up as a result of the Bill, and that really is the end product. I join the hon. Member for Caernarfon in praising the non-statutory Welsh Language Board, which has been remarkable, has covered a period of years and has devoted a great deal of thought to the issue and done much to benefit the language.

I offer all good wishes to the statutory Welsh Language Board, but I think, like the hon. Member for Caernarfon, that it will find itself frustrated by the limits within which it operates. It runs the risk, at least, of being not a great deal more than a paper tiger. I hope that it will express its views so strongly that they can rarely be ignored, particularly by many of the public bodies in Wales which in years gone by have shown a good deal of resistance to the march of the Welsh language, which most of us, including the Minister of State, welcome.

In my view, the real deficiency of the Bill is that, after all the years of discussion upon it, all the efforts of the Welsh Language Board, the debates here and in the other place, and the lengthy and detailed debates in Committee, not one citizen of Wales will have a single right that he or she can enforce by judicial review through the court, or by any other means. Not one organisation in Wales, apart from the statutory Welsh Language Board, will have a duty which the citizen can enforce against it.

That is a profound disappointment. It is a sufficient disappointment for me to advise my right hon. and hon. Friends to join the Members representing Plaid Cymru in the No Lobby a little later tonight.

9.49 pm

Mr. Flynn: For a brief period in 1988 I was my party's Front-Bench spokesman on Wales and the first subject that I raised was the need for a Welsh language Bill. Never did I foresee that, some years later, I would find myself having to vote against such a Bill. The former arch druid

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said that half a loaf is better than no loaf at all. Sadly, he overstated it. What we have left tonight is not half a loaf, but a few crumbs that have been given to us by our colonial masters.

In Committee, we had many hopes of what would come from the Bill, but every one of those hopes has been trampled on—not by our elected Members from Wales, where there has been an extraordinary unanimity, from the almost totally English part of Wales—where the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) has adopted a reasonable attitude to the Bill and defended his own position—to the almost totally Welsh language-speaking parts of Wales. The unanimity has been there.

When there was a vote as to whether Welsh-speaking defendants should have the right to elect juries that spoke their own language, that right was denied. That was a remarkable result. It is a basic right that exists in almost every corner of the world. By whom was it denied? By the hon. Members for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) and for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). Those are the people who have trampled on the Bill.

The Minister has a proud record and we all pay tribute to him. He is now in his 15th year of ministerial office and he has made great contributions to the Welsh language. He has been a great servant of Wales and we have all been generous in our contributions. That is why we feel angry tonight: he has turned down reasonable Opposition propositions.

The language raises strong passions in all of us, as it should. It is the most ancient language in Europe—a language that was spoken here in London many years before Anglo-Saxon, the mother language of English, appeared in these islands. It is a language that had rich literature and sophisticated poetry 2,000 years ago. That language has not been helped one jot tonight.

What we have heard all the time is "it may", "perhaps" and "there will be schemes". When the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) rightly argued tonight for the Minister to lose a bit of face and agree one minor amendment—which he could correct later, if he wanted to, in the other place—he trampled on that amendment.

What the Government have done tonight has inspired new nationalism in Wales. They have shown the people of Wales that we are a subject race. We are being abused by people who cannot be elected in Wales; who have been rejected time and again by the electorate of Wales. Tonight we have seen the arrogance of an elective dictatorship.

9.52 pm

Mr. Morgan: The problem with the Bill is that it suffers from the Secretary of State's St. Mellons syndrome: he visits a community and pretends to take a great deal of interest in the subject under discussion, but a week later he drops a large amount of organic mushroom fertiliser on it from a very great height.

The right hon. Gentleman has not fought the battles that he should have fought in the Cabinet. He and the Minister of State have visited the subject of the Welsh language, but when anything important arose he resisted the changes that were proposed and the compromises that were offered by the Opposition. There has been no give and take and he has not done his duty.

As for the St. Mellons syndrome, the Secretary of State should perhaps consider the Welsh language to be a single-parent language, and that duties of paternity have fallen upon him—which, in a way, he asked for by accepting promotion to the Cabinet. He has taken responsibility tonight for the state of the legislation, but he has not carried out his paternal duties and has left Welsh as a single-parent language, without the support that it should have had. The Bill should have done the job properly on the privatised public utilities, on jury trials in Welsh and, above all, on the question of official status.

That is why we feel that the Secretary of State has shown that he intends to use Wales simply as a political platform for his own long-term ambitions on the right wing of the Tory party. He has not repaid to Wales the debt he owes it by the fact that it has provided him with his first promotion to Cabinet status. That is why he has not done his job in the way that he could have done. He has not taken the opportunities that were available to him. So we have not received the equality of treatment that we might have expected had there been give and take on the part of the Government.

The right hon. Gentleman said that there had been some Government amendments. In the main, they have filled obvious omissions in the companies and charities legislation, not matters brought to his attention by the Opposition as concessions to be made. They were simply matters about which he had erred by not listening to the advice of specialist bodies. He has made some minor concessions to the Opposition, but one requires a microscope manufactured in a Welsh Development Agency Japanese factory in the valleys to see them. That is why we feel badly let down.

We on the Labour Front Bench are not recommending a vote against the Bill. We shall be abstaining tonight because we hope to have the opportunity before long to do the job properly. That will be done when we revisit the question of a Welsh language measure, when we are in government.

9.57 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. John Redwood): What pathetic heroic indecision on the part of the Labour party. Here was an opportunity for them to vote for a measure that will further the interests of Welsh language speakers and will be good news for the Welsh language. Yet there they sit on the Labour Benches—all four or so of them—not knowing what to do, gripped by indecision and quite unable to reach a conclusion.

I pay tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. He has worked tirelessly and well in the interests of the Welsh language and has brought good measures to the House—*[Interruption.]* I assure the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) that my right hon. Friend and I are entirely at one on this issue. We believe that it is the right Bill for the right circumstances and I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman intends to vote against it. How extraordinary for him to be voting against a positive and practical measure for the Welsh language. He will be voting against the interests of the people of Wales.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon said that there were no rights and opportunities in the measure. It contains numerous opportunities. It gives people the opportunity and right to enjoy the benefits of the schemes that will come forward under the legislation. Is the hon. Gentleman

really saying that he and his party wish to undermine the consensus that was being built patiently by many men and women of good will to further the interests of the Welsh language and the Welsh culture?

The hon. Member for Caernarfon must tonight answer the difficult questions. Why is he rupturing the consensus, turning down the olive branches offered by my right hon. Friend and throwing back into my right hon. Friend's face the hard work he has done and the good wishes he has put forward in the Bill for the Welsh language? That is what the Welsh people will want to know and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will realise what a mistake he is making tonight.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) suggested that the board will be a paper tiger. It will not and the board will resent his comment. It will do its job well and with distinction and it will get every encouragement from us.

I hope that when tempers have cooled a little after tonight's debate, the Opposition parties will think again and realise that there is something to be said for the Bill and that rebuilding the consensus is the way forward for the Welsh language.

It is important for Opposition Members to understand the feelings of the many people in Wales who do not speak Welsh, just as surely as it is important for them to understand the feelings of those who speak Welsh, and it is understandable that they should wish to look after their interests.

The Bill represents good progress. The Government have listened and have made 21 amendments. We have made a number of improvements to the Bill as a result of the work of the Committee and my right hon. Friend spelt those out in great detail. He also answered patiently all the points made, so I have no hesitation in recommending the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 123, Noes 19.

Division No. 337] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burns, Simon
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hampson, Dr Keith
Harris, David
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maitland, Lady Olga
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pickles, Eric
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Barnes, Harry
Betts, Clive
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Cox, Tom
Dafis, Cynog
Harvey, Nick
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Llwyd, Elfyn
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Rendel, David
Rowlands, Ted
Skinner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones and
Mr. Paul Flynn.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Appropriation (Northern Ireland)

10.11 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): I beg to move,

That the draft Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 7th June, be approved.

The draft order, which covers the main estimates for Northern Ireland departments, authorises expenditure of £3,116 million for the current financial year. Taken together with the sum voted on account in February, that brings total estimates provision for Northern Ireland departments to £5,492 million, an increase of 9·6 per cent. on 1992-93 provisional outturn.

It is customary on such occasions to highlight the main items in the estimates, but I shall be very brief, and shall not comment on each vote. I draw the attention of the House to the Department of Economic Development's vote 1, in which £148 million is for the Industrial Development Board. That will enable the board to carry out its role of strengthening Northern Ireland's industrial base and to meet its existing commitments, primarily in the area of selective assistance to industry.

In vote 2, £37 million is for the Local Enterprise Development Unit, Northern Ireland's small business agency. That will allow the agency to maintain and build on the success that it achieved during 1992-93, which was one of its most successful years.

In vote 3, £193 million is for the Training and Employment Agency. That includes £47 million for the youth training programme, to support some 12,500 training places, and £52 million for the action for community employment programme, to provide 9,500 places for long-term unemployed adults in projects of community benefit. A further £21 million is for the job training programme, which offers training and work experience to unemployed adults, and £12 million is for the company development programme, which will increase to 300 the number of companies assisted to improve their competitiveness in external markets.

Token provision of £1,000 has been included in vote 4 to cover expenses to be incurred in the privatisation of the Northern Ireland electricity supply industry. A supplementary estimate covering the actual expenses and proceeds from the sale will be presented to the House later in the year.

I now turn to the Department of the Environment. In vote 1, £176 million is for roads, transport and ports. This includes some £144 million for the roads service. Department of the Environment vote 2 covers the important area of housing. Some £193 million will provide assistance mainly to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and to the voluntary housing movement. When net borrowing and the Housing Executive's rents and capital receipts are taken into account, the resources available for housing will be some £552 million. This is an increase of some £2 million over 1992-93. This substantial sum will support the continued improvement of housing conditions.

Department of the Environment vote 3 covers expenditure on the water and sewerage schemes. Gross expenditure in 1993-94 is estimated at £174 million, an increase of some £27 million over 1992-93 outturn. Also, £77 million is for capital expenditure and £97 million for operational and maintenance purposes. I will not comment further on the Department of the Environment votes.

The estimates for the Department of Education seek a total of £1,253 million, an increase of 2·5 per cent. over last year. Vote 1 includes £772 million for recurrent expenditure by education and library boards, an increase of £23 million over 1992-93. This includes £407 million for school teachers' salaries, which is sufficient to maintain the pupil-teacher ratio at present levels. Also included is £250 million for other expenditure on schools and on further education services and £115 million for libraries, youth, transport and administration.

Vote 1 also includes £39 million for boards' capital projects, including provision for new laboratories and technology workshops to enable further progress to be made on education reforms. In addition, £8 million is for integrated schools, and £129 million for voluntary schools.

The next set of votes relates to the Department of Health and Social Services. Total net provision of £1,209 million in votes 1 and 3 will maintain and improve the standard of the Province's health and personal social services. This is an increase of £74 million over estimated outturn for 1992-93.

Also, £1,127 million in vote 4 is for a large range of social security benefits administered by the Social Security Agency. This represents an increase of more than 6 per cent. on last year.

Finally, I turn to the Department of Finance and Personnel. In vote 3, over £4 million is for the community relations programme, reflecting the importance that the Government continue to attach to community relations.

In my opening remarks, I have briefly drawn attention to some of the main provisions of the estimates. In replying to the debate, the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), will respond to points raised by right hon. and hon. Members. I commend the order to the House.

10.18 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I welcome the Minister of State, Northern ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), to the Dispatch Box. When Members of Parliament are appointed as Ministers to the Northern Ireland Office and when hon. Members are appointed as shadow Northern Ireland Ministers, some of our friends tend to think that we are between a rock and a hard place. In some cases, that is probably true. However, the more that the right hon. Gentleman settles into his brief, the more he will find that the majority of people in Northern Ireland are honest, decent, law-abiding citizens who want nothing more than to live in peace with each other. I wish the Minister well in his difficult brief.

We again refer to the Government's allocation of resources among spending Departments within Northern Ireland. As on former occasions, this debate should have been a welcome opportunity for hon. Members to express their concerns about a wide range of problems affecting Northern Ireland. Because of the hour—I do not blame our Welsh colleagues for their deliberations—we are limited once again to a very short debate. However, I am given to understand that the usual channels have agreed that we can return to the subject for a much longer period

when the House reconvenes in the autumn. Therefore, I hope that hon. Members from Northern Ireland will forgive me for delivering my prepared speech.

In spite of what the Minister has told us about the amount of money that the Government are allocating to Northern Ireland, unlike what happened on former occasions, tonight's proceedings take place with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury waiting in the wings before taking centre stage and delivering a series of swingeing cuts. It seems that the Government expect the most vulnerable people in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom to foot the bill for their financial ineptitude. Sadly, the Government's incompetence is starkly evidenced by the overall rate of unemployment in Northern Ireland, which is still the highest of any region in our islands—13·7 per cent. of the work force, compared with 10·3 per cent. in the rest of the United Kingdom.

I take this opportunity to welcome the recent decrease in unemployment in Northern Ireland. I also welcome today's announcement of the recent decrease in unemployment in the rest of Britain. However, I remind the Minister that the Northern Ireland figure remains shamefully high. Unfortunately, the overall figure of 13·7 per cent. unemployment in Northern Ireland is dwarfed by some of the most appalling statistics revealed in travel-to-work areas. Cookstown and Derry, from which I returned yesterday, continue to suffer more than 18 per cent. unemployment. In Strabane, 23 per cent. of the work force is unemployed.

I hope that the Minister appreciates that a seasonally adjusted fall in unemployment of 1,500 is certainly welcome, but it allows no room for complacency. However, this month's announcement by the Department does not include the unacceptable number of long-term unemployed concealed within the monthly figure. For the Minister's benefit, I remind him that 53·9 per cent.—more than half the unemployed in Northern Ireland—have been out of work for a year. What hope can the Minister give them? Perhaps he will tell the House how far the order will go towards getting the long-term unemployed in Derry or Strabane back to work. They represent 59·5 per cent. and 64·5 per cent. respectively of their area totals.

What is more worrying about the Government's plans to find spending savings by attacking the poorest in Northern Ireland is the effect upon the already high number of people in the region who are living in or near poverty. In the 1930s, Joseph Rowntree discovered widespread hardship, squalor and suffering in areas such as York and Liverpool. Like Northern Ireland, parts of Merseyside hope to receive objective 1 status. As we approach the end of the century, research carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on household budgets and living standards in Northern Ireland has shown that for a couple with two children current income support meets only 74 per cent. of their basic minimum budget. In addition, income support and children's allowances were found to meet only 43 per cent. of the amount needed to provide adequate living standards. Frankly, in the latter part of the 20th century, those statistics are a scandalous indictment of the Government's failing.

The hardship that many Northern Ireland families are currently experiencing is mirrored by the difficulties that the region's young face. The annual report of the Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux states:

"High levels of unemployment mean that young people can no longer confidently look forward to securing a job or apprenticeship. The best opportunity secured by upwards of 15,000 young people every year is a place on a Youth Training Programme."

What a waste of young talent and potential.

If the Government continue merely to dump young people in poorly paid schemes and refuse to utilise the greatest resource available to them—and the people of Northern Ireland—we will begin to see more than 50 young people present themselves every week to the Housing Executive as homeless. We will begin to see lengthening queues of unemployed young people joining the 8,000 who are already unable to find a place on youth training programmes and who consequently must live on £23·90 a week.

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the young people to whom he is referring—those in virtually every part of Northern Ireland and especially those in the cities and towns—are the same young people who, when training schemes come to an end, are cynically exploited by paramilitary organisations? They find themselves sandwiched between the paramilitaries and the inevitable confrontations between security forces. In many ways, they are lost and find their way into prison or at the end of a gun, taking someone's life or being killed themselves.

Mr. Stott: There is a great deal of truth in what the hon. Gentleman says, as someone who has a great deal of experience in such matters. If we could give those young people a proper job, and if there was hope for them in terms of employment provision, that would help them immeasurably not to fall into the arms of the paramilitaries. Unemployment and the lack of hope are probably the greatest recruiting sergeants for the paramilitaries.

In short, we will see further increases in the level of debt, homelessness and poverty among all sections of society in Northern Ireland, all of which will be a direct result of the policies promulgated by the Conservative party. As has been made clear by further leaks and speculation, the Secretary of State for Social Security is impatiently sharpening his axe before taking it to the benefits that are paid to those who have no other form of income.

The Minister will know that, of all the regions in the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland has the highest rate of people with disabilities—a total of 17·4 per cent. Seventy five per cent. of them rely on the social security system for part or all of their income. If the Government take their intended sideswipe at those who claim invalidity benefit, the Minister and his colleagues will consign three quarters of the disabled adult population in Northern Ireland to further hardship and anxiety. Therefore, the Minister is faced with a large number of potential victims of any Government spending cuts in Northern Ireland. How can he possibly justify an action that will result in 201,000 adults with disabilities in Northern Ireland being forced to pay through their meagre benefits to restore the Government's political fortunes?

I welcome the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) to his new post in the Northern Ireland team, although he is not in his place. I am sure that he is aware that his predecessor set in motion a review of education administration in Northern Ireland. I hope that he will

[Mr. Stott]

give such a wide-ranging review equally extensive consideration and that he will not reach any hasty conclusions.

As I said earlier, I returned from Northern Ireland yesterday. I had spent some time visiting Meanscoil in Belfast. The school does not have state funding and is consequently seeking a commitment from the Minister As its name suggests, Meanscoil teaches the curriculum in the Irish language and has been doing so since 1991. It is funded by parents and the community. It is the only school in the whole of Northern Ireland to provide Irish-medium education to those pupils who have already received their primary education in the Irish language. It seems to me that the school satisfies the necessary requirements. Will the Minister consider its case sympathetically? I shall write to him about it tomorrow morning.

Dr. Hendron: The subject of Meanscoil Feinte is dear to my heart, as the hon. Gentleman knows. The only Irish-medium secondary school is in my constituency. The Government have already accepted their responsibility for the Irish language in primary school education, so I hope that they will look positively at this secondary school in west Belfast.

Mr. Stott: I know that my hon. Friend recently visited the school and that he is as concerned as I am to ensure that the Irish language is fostered and maintained. I understand that four primary schools teach in the Irish language. From the age of 11 no school other than this one teaches the curriculum in Irish for children up to the age of 16. We have just had a big debate on the Welsh language. It is important that cultural links and the language are preserved and protected. I hope for a sympathetic response from the Minister.

The education service as a whole ultimately depends on the quality of its teachers and lecturers for the achievement of the required standards and the implementation of the changes that the Government have introduced. Although most face the added pressure of education reform positively, the changes are demanding so much energy and commitment that the quality of the provision for pupils and students in schools and colleges is in danger of being lowered. As someone who is married to a teacher in this country, I can confidently tell the Minister that education changes have caused great difficulty to the teaching profession.

If that possibility is to be avoided it will be necessary to employ not only the most effective forms of in-service training and advisory and support services to assist teachers in implementing the changes, but to win the vital endorsement and support of parents, teachers and employers for the service that the teaching profession in Northern Ireland provides.

The Government have decided in their wisdom that Belfast international airport is to be privatised. The people who work there are concerned about their futures, their job prospects and pension provision. On Tuesday morning I spoke to a number of trade unionists who represent the work force there. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) and I have been extremely concerned about the police force at that airport. They are not members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary; they wear a different uniform. Nevertheless, they are sworn constables under a magistrate. If they are to be transferred to the private sector, their concern is about their operational impartiality and duties.

I wrote to the Minister of State on 17 June asking him whether a representative of the police force at the airport, the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) and I could meet him to discuss the police force's concerns. The Minister has not responded to my letter but I hope that he will respond positively so that that important organisation —the police force at Belfast airport—can put its genuine and serious concerns to him.

If the perceived advantages of the European single market are to be realised, it is crucial, because of the island of Ireland's peripheral geography to the rest of mainland Europe, that industry, commerce, tourism, transport and energy policy are harmonised on an island basis

In its crudest terms, Northern Ireland has benefited from additional EC funding as a result of objective 1 status. But welcome as such investment is, compared with the funds granted to the Republic, Northern Ireland still receives a disproportionate part of the cake. As has been said, a comparison with the Republic on the basis of a head count shows that Northern Ireland is granted only one third of the sum to which it might otherwise be entitled. That illustrates an unfortunate consequence of the European Community viewing Northern Ireland's economy in simple regional terms rather than addressing the needs of the island of Ireland economy as a whole.

Two weeks ago, during the recent debate on the renewal of direct rule order, we heard how difficult it will be to get an agreed constitutional settlement for Northern Ireland. I do not doubt for an instant that it will be difficult but it will not be impossible. By contrast, however, making the island of Ireland economy work is an opportunity, not a problem. I am sure that all Members representing Northern Ireland will work together to ensure that full advantage is taken of any potential increase in cross-border aid.

In his speech in Dublin last year, Dr. George Quigley, chairman of the Ulster bank, reinforced the concept of "Ireland, an island economy". I recommend all hon. Members who have not read Dr Quigley's paper to do so because he describes how businesses in the north and south are working closely together. He said:

> "As Chairman of Ulster Bank, which is in the fairly unique situation of doing 50 per cent. of its business in the South and 50 per cent. in the North, I find no difficulty with the proposition that Ireland is—or should be—an *island* economy. Both North and South would have signally failed to give substance to the 1992 concept if, occupying a small island on the periphery of the EC, they neglected or were unable to function as a single market. The Bank's fortunes are intertwined with the prosperity of both parts of the island".

Hon. Members will be aware that the Secretary of State for Transport recently granted the American airline, TransAir, a licence to fly directly from Belfast international airport to New York. I warmly welcome that move and am pleased that my representations in support of the licence did not fall on deaf ears and that I finally have my baggage back from Riga. The new link between Northern Ireland and the United States will attract extra valuable inward investment and begin to counter the isolation to which Dr. Quigley referred in his speech.

Now that business has set the agenda, the specialist Government agencies in the north and south have an important role to play in consultation with the business

community. A seminar in Northern Ireland formally confirmed the agreement of the International Development bank and the Irish Trade Board to work closely together to increase the number and range of products supplied within the island of Ireland. A series of jointly organised sourcing exhibitions will encourage companies to supply goods currently imported from outside Ireland. Equally important are the planned initiatives in conjunction with the Confederation of Irish Industry and the Confederation of British Industry to open up areas of public procurement in the island in a way that strengthens companies so that they can bid successfully for public sector procurement contracts in the rest of the European Community.

I agree with Sir George Quigley's analysis that for far too long the economic orientation of both parts of the island has been along a horizontal rather than a vertical axis. In a global economy, it is essential that we continue to look outwards towards the rest of Europe and beyond. It is crucial that both Governments do not neglect the potential that exists within the vertical axis, the strengthening of which will create a more solid springboard for growth within the island of Ireland and for conquering markets within the European Community. Making the island economy work is essential. It is an opportunity; it is not a problem.

10.40 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I shall make a brief comment about the speech by the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott). Before I do so, I wish well the new Minister, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), and also his new colleague, the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). I trust that in the right hon. Gentleman's arduous duties, especially in regard to the prisons of Northern Ireland, he will have the benefit of bringing his experience to bear on problems that are vital to the best in the community.

The prisoners, who come from both sections of the community, run right into the community. There is a great need today for there to be an understanding of how the families feel and an understanding of what is happening in the prisons of Northern Ireland. I am sure that the House wishes the Minister well as he tackles a difficult and continuing problem in Northern Ireland.

It comes as no surprise to hear the hon. Member for Wigan talking about an island economy. I have the document that has been much talked about and that programme is set forth in it. Level 1 is:

"Co-operation between Departments and institutions on both sides of the border."

Level 2 is "Harmonisation of policies". "Integration of administrations" is level 3. That is what we heard from the hon. Member for Wigan tonight.

I have experience in Europe. I have been an elected Member of the European Parliament continuously since I was first elected. I have topped the poll at every election to the European Parliament. I have been there. I have never once seen the deputies, as they call themselves, from the south of Ireland voting for anything that was of benefit to Northern Ireland. Not once. I have challenged them about that. I have voted in the European Parliament for things that were of benefit to the south of Ireland, as long as they were not detrimental to the north of Ireland. Those deputies have never done the same. I am sick of the talk about them being all for this island economy.

I was in Strasbourg this week. I heard the deputies demanding £8 billion. Never once did they mention Northern Ireland. There was not a cheep about it. They never even said once that of course Northern Ireland deserves the treatment that we demand. In fact, they told the European Parliament that they were good Europeans. As the predecessor of the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) said in the House of Lords this week, "Yes, they are good Europeans as long as you pay them well." Six million pounds a day and they will be good Europeans. It ill becomes the hon. Member for Wigan, the spokesman for the Labour party, to read to us tonight a lesson about the glorious co-operation that we shall have from the south of Ireland.

As for Dr. Quigley, I happened to meet representatives of the business community in Northern Ireland at a meeting known as the meeting of the seven. I am sure that other Northern Ireland Members have been to such meetings, too. I took up Mr. Quigley there on something that he had said. Faced with his own business men around the table, he backed off. I told him that it was all very well singing the praises of his own bank—with 50 per cent. of its business in the south, it profits the bank to go in for co-operation with the south—but such co-operation certainly does not profit Northern Ireland, since businesses in all sectors of the economy in the south are trying to undercut the competition from Northern Ireland.

It is a pity that the Minister had no time to tell us about the structural fund and what additional money will result from it. The House should realise that something strange has happened to it——

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that, it is disgraceful that the Northern Ireland Office sends out the documentation on the structural fund to every Tom, Dick and Harry in Northern Ireland, and to every community organisation and tenants association there, but has not, to date, sent it to Members of Parliament?

Rev. Ian Paisley: It is indeed. I happen to have a copy because I am a member of the European Parliament, but I do not see why colleagues here should not have been sent a copy.

To return to the structural fund: the cake has not been enlarged, but the number of those wanting a share of it has increased. Germany will get the largest slice, because it has achieved objective 1 status for east Germany. Belgium and France are to receive money, and Italy will too—even though it was not able to spend the money that it has already been given. Presumably Italy will proceed to hoard the money, or perhaps it has been stolen by the Mafia, or perhaps the Italian Prime Minister stole it.

All these Governments are demanding a slice of the cake, so our slice will be smaller. Merseyside and the highlands and islands are also to get a share, and rightly so, but I should like the Minister to tell us how much we are likely to get. Demands for £8 billion from the south have been cut to perhaps £7·5 billion, but those who are to get that much are not satisfied. I wonder how much will be cut from our money. Will we get £1 billion, or less?

This week I talked, with my European colleagues the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and Mr. Nicholson, to Commissioner Millan. He said that, when the figures are announced, there will be some surprises: they are all to be reduced.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

So, far from getting anything out of the cohesion fund, we will be paying into it——

Mr. Stott: Maastricht.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Everyone knows my attitude to Maastricht, and the official attitude of the Labour party, so the pot should not call the kettle black.

The four poor countries—Portugal, Greece, Spain and Ireland—have all put their hands in the cohesion fund kitty, which is a quarter as big again as the structural fund. So the taxpayers of the United Kingdom—of Merseyside, of the highlands and islands, and of Northern Ireland—who are crying out for money as objective 1 areas will find that they are putting their pounds into the pockets of the countries I have mentioned. Dublin is shouting loud and already has £3 million a day, and will soon be getting £6 million. That fact will shortly come out in the wash.

We need to hear what the Government think they will get. The last time that we had structural pay-outs, what did Northern Ireland get as an objective 1 area? It got an increase of 8 per cent., which hardly covered inflation. The south of Ireland got an increase of between 80 and 90 per cent. Spain, Portugal and Greece got an increase of over 100 per cent. When Ministers were negotiating, why did they not ask for double the money because we lost out before? The Commissioner has told me that Ministers asked for no increase, just for their crunch of the money. The Northern Ireland Office must come clean and tell us exactly what it feels it will get from the structural fund, and where the money will be spent.

I read the debate in another place, and I would like the Minister to hear something that was said there. Lord Cooke of Islandreagh raised the matter of the structural fund, and the Minister answering said:

"the Government will fully accept the additionality requirement."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 July 1993; Vol. 547, c. 1656.]

Will the money we get, whether it is a little or a lot, be additional, and where in the appropriations will it be spent? The Minister must address that question in his reply, although we know that we shall not have much time for a reply.

There are other matters of great interest that I would have liked to have dealt with tonight, but, as we know, we have only a limited time. I thought that the hon. Member for Wigan would have curbed the length of his speech, as we are curbing ours, but he did not, because he was so interested in the school that teaches Gaelic. I rather laughed at that, because the census figures tell us that only about 5 per cent. of the people in Northern Ireland speak Gaelic, and even fewer read and write it. It is not like Wales. I spent part of my life in Wales, and every church I preached in had both a Welsh and an English service in the morning. That does not happen in Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, only a small percentage of the Roman Catholic population speak Gaelic. The situation is not on a par with that in Wales—I understand the deep feelings of Welsh speakers, which were expressed so well earlier tonight. To argue about that is to get into minutiae that we should not be getting into.

Mr. Stott: I appreciate that we have a time constraint on the debate. The hon. Gentleman will recognise that, in the four years that I have had this responsibility for the Opposition, I have cut my speeches short on every appropriation order debate. This evening, I thought that it was important to flag up what I and my party consider to be important issues. I do not need any lessons from him about the length of the speeches that I make from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Oh, shut up and sit down!

Mr. Stott: And I need no lessons from that hon. Gentleman either.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am very sorry that I gave way to the hon. Member for Wigan. It is ridiculous; we are limited for time, and he is trying to justify himself. I welcome the fact that we are going to be able to discuss this matter at a later date. We need to do that. I regret that the hon. Gentleman took all the time he could, because there is not only the SDLP; there are also the Popular Unionists, and their voice should be heard too.

10.56 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): First, I welcome the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir. J. Wheeler) to the Government Front Bench as a member of the Northern Ireland team. It is no insult to him, or indeed to me, that my colleagues who are in the building tonight have deserted this Bench as a protest at the intolerable way in which the business that relates to Northern Ireland has been handled, not for the first time, but for the second time that we have tried to have this debate.

There are so many areas of administration that must be dealt with in the scope of this ridiculously short debate that it is impossible to do any of them justice. Those of us who represent constituencies in Northern Ireland are obliged to try to summarise our year's work in a very few minutes, to draw on that experience and to seek to expound reasonable alternatives where we feel that there is inadequacy, right across the scope of the Northern Ireland Office administration.

Our English, Welsh and Scottish colleagues have the benefit of both a meaningful stratum of local government, which helps to relieve the burden of parochial responsibilities that Northern Ireland Members have to deal with, and of being able to address various departmental issues within debates dedicated exclusively to the function of those Departments. We, on the other hand, are obliged to paint our picture with a great broad brush that can do little to capture the nuances and attitudes pertaining to the area in which we live.

Nor do we have the benefit of inside knowledge, which can be ascertained only where there is either direct involvement or an adequate system of checks and balances —a system that would be enhanced by having a Select Committee on Northern Ireland to examine and monitor Northern Ireland matters. The first is unobtainable because we are a small Opposition party; the second because there has been a stubborn unwillingness to concede even a degree of openness about the way in which Northern Ireland is governed.

Yet, when anything goes wrong in Northern Ireland, there are those who invariably contrive to create an impression that Ulster Unionists are to blame. Whatever is wrong, the responsibility lies with a succession of

Governments who have had sole and unbridled power in the Province for the past 21 years, and that certainly is not the party to which I belong.

My colleagues and I have some ideas about how progress can be made, and I believe that that is amply demonstrated in terms of the work that is done by our district councillors, where they have managed to claw back responsibilities to themselves despite the resistance of some departmental musclemen and quango placemen.

At a time when the community in Northern Ireland is more ill at ease with itself than it has ever been during my 10 years in the House, it is becoming increasingly important to create at least an atmosphere of social and economic continuity and stability. I am not suggesting that there is anything in this life that cannot be improved upon, but I am tired of the Government going out of their way to mend things that are not actually broken. We are assailed, year in, year out, with far too many fanciful ideas that are far too costly and disruptive, and that in practice do not work the way that they were intended to. Paper exercises are too regularly failing in practice.

In this respect, I want to turn to the Department of Health and Social Services and question whether the present piecemeal policy of rationalisation of acute hospital services is in the best interests of the consumer. I have had to endure the trauma of trying to defend maternity and paediatric services in the two hospitals in my constituency. These two hospitals—the Erne and Enniskillen and the South Tyrone in Dungannon—are administered under separate health boards, and each board, one assumes encouraged by the Department, embarked on its own programme of rationalisation in isolation. No one appeared to think that, if amalgamations proved necessary, it might be sensible to consider the overall delivery of maternity and paediatric services throughout Northern Ireland.

The case of the Erne has been won, but South Tyrone's case—after nearly two years—is to be held in limbo for possibly another year. It appears that, if administrators have a cock-eyed idea that cannot be sustained, they merely give themselves time to move the goalposts and hope that the constructive opposition will go away.

I hope that the Minister will understand that, in the case of the South Tyrone, we are not going away. We know that the motivation for the proposed changes in the delivery of maternity and paediatric services has to do with the arbitrary figure of 2,500 births per unit per year. That may or may not be justified in hospitals that serve large mainland conurbations, where consumers live in a small geographical area. However, it has little relevance in a rural area of Northern Ireland, where average income is lower and distances greater, but where that is offset by a high degree of family support. In such cases, accessibility means a great deal.

My hospitals are as financially efficient as larger units, and the units dealing with between 900 and 1,000 babies per year have a low perinatal death rate that many larger units would envy. The system simply is not broken, either in financial or in safety terms; I beg the Minister not to allow the boards to mend it.

It is much more urgent, however, for the Minister to ensure that community care services are put in place in time to meet the demands resulting from shorter post-operative hospitalisation and the increased number of day-surgery treatments. I ask him to consider carefully how such services can be delivered with the community as distinct from to the community.

He may protest that it is perhaps too early for me to try to argue conclusively that the new health boards—devoid of any elected representatives—are ineffective; but I believe that the breadth of professional talent that was hoped for is missing. There are clearly a few excellent people, but they are a minority, and the non-executive members are largely and understandably dominated by those with an executive role.

The latter—also a mediocre bunch—seem preoccupied with finance and organisation, to the detriment of the health service itself. They are preoccupied with glossy brochures and business consultants' reports. Surely it is better to put finite resources into shortening waiting lists and waiting times, and maintaining a hospital and community care infrastructure that is accessible to the consumer.

Before leaving the subject of health and social services, I must ask whether the Minister intends to do anything about the inequity in medical and other services that we in Northern Ireland appear to provide on demand for citizens of the Irish Republic. That country neither reciprocates nor provides those services for its own people.

We have already been presented with examples of the high cost of providing third-level education scholarships for students from the Irish Republic; it has often been cited in the House. Now the Minister has informed me, in answers to parliamentary questions, that 15 per cent. of private nursing home places in Fermanagh are occupied by residents who came directly from the Irish Republic.

I was disappointed to learn that the Northern Ireland Office cannot tell me what that means to the Western health and social services board and the Department of Health and Social Services in terms of social security and general practitioner costs. However, it can be deduced from the cost of in-hospital treatment—over £32,000 last year—that a good deal of money is involved. That money should be spent on providing better home help and other services for my constituents. Is it not scandalous that Cavan general hospital in the Irish Republic discharged 21 patients directly to our private nursing homes, one with such horrific bed sores that special equipment had to be bought by the Erne hospital?

About 12 per cent. of my constituents are over 65 years old, and I want the finite resources available to my health boards going to improve their quality of life. Why should we be subsidising the parasitic Government in Dublin, who would presume to lecture us on political proprieties?

Nor does the extortion end there. There is clear evidence that it is easier for someone from the Irish Republic to get a public authority house in Northern Ireland than it is for someone born in the Province who has perhaps lived his working life in England and wants to return home to retire. In matters relating to education, the social services and housing, can we afford to finance Eire's spongers to the extent that we do?

The Minister has already told me that he will not increase the funding available to the Western health and social services board to compensate for the demands of the Republic's elderly who come into my area. Will he tell me when he intends to put a stop to that abuse?

Let us consider some activities of the Department of Economic Development—in particular, the way in which

[Mr. Ken Maginnis]

its industrial development board operates. I do not fail to recognise the difficulties enshrined in job creation, and I pay tribute to the good work being done in the Department and the IDB. But it would pay dividends if the efforts to attract inward investment and business opportunities in places such as the United States were more equally divided between officials, who work directly for the IDB, and contracted agents, who would have the advantage of working on home ground.

It is not possible, however bright and able the Department's nominees may be, for them to cover enough ground in the time available and to maintain the follow-up on promising leads. The indigenous agent who knows the territory can be of immense value if he or she is properly tasked, targeted and rewarded. On the other hand, if not productive, he or she is more easily expendable than a civil servant who has been encouraged to uproot family and home to undertake the task.

Local councils have a role to play in promoting businesses from within their own areas, targeting clearly defined regions of, say, the United States from an exporting, joint venturing and inward investment perspective. Four councils representing County Tyrone have come together to do just that in the mid-west of America and hope to be able, with IDB co-operation, to make use of, and task, an agent in that area so that he may identify opportunities. I hope that the Minister will see that as a practical, tangible opportunity for cross-party, intra-community co-operation, in contrast to some of the more ethereal schemes that exist, and I hope that he will give the initiative his support.

At home, I will only urge him to ensure that there is unity of purpose between the Departments of Economic Development and of Agriculture in sorting out the urgent need to develop our agrifood industry before it is too late. I leave him with the challenge that we must protect and develop realistically our milk-based industry.

I draw attention to the way in which the modicum of democracy which at present exists in the education and library boards is threatened in the Department's paper on reorganisation, although it is noticeably lacking in any reference to the need to rationalise the Department's headquarters. I hope that the Minister will set my mind at rest about that.

Education must never be taken out of the hands of parents and teachers. Sadly, since I left the classroom just over 10 years ago, I find a profession which had maintained the highest standards, not least in the primary sector, very demoralised, with teachers falling over themselves to retire early.

I am glad that the Minister with responsibility at the Department of Education for Northern Ireland has recognised that, and has decided to slow down the pace of proposed change and look anew at the whole question of curriculum content. I congratulate him on that decision. It is time that teachers were restored to their proper role, and that someone got a grip on the inspectorate, which represents executive authority gone mad.

I must express disappointment at the limited funding available for new capital projects. While I welcome two major projects in my constituency in the voluntary sector, and I am pleased to have been involved in pressing for one of them, I am horrified to discover no major provision listed in the controlled sector. The Minister would be offended if I whispered, "Discrimination," but I would simply be reflecting how that has been interpreted in some quarters.

Some rural primary schools in my constituency are more than 60 years old, and there is pressure to rationalise because of falling rolls, but no one appears to have considered it a good idea to group those schools within a new rural school to sustain my rural community, or to take cognisance of the excellent study of the future of primary education commissioned by the Rural Development Council, which was broadly in favour of clustering.

While the Department has been mending things that are not broken, it has left the urgent matter of adequate infrastructure on the proverbial long finger. Will the Minister make it his priority to find extra cash to make an impact on that area? In a region of high unemployment, our children's education must have precedence.

I shall refer briefly to the Rural Development Council. There should be urgency to develop a coherent rural policy, but it will not happen unless the council is given greater authority and influence. It currently lacks teeth and plays second fiddle to every other Government Department and agency. Planners continue to be systematically destructive towards the rural community, and take little notice of its needs or rights.

I am running out of time, so I shall conclude by telling the Minister that Northern Ireland should be governed with continuity and stability; by consent rather than by diktat; by sustaining what is good and improving on what is imperfect, but never by trying to mend things that are not broken.

11.12 pm

Sir James Kilfedder (North Down): I join in welcoming my right hon. Friend the Minister on his first appearance at the Dispatch Box. He will find that the Ulster people are kindly, hospitable and friendly. No matter how their representatives in the House may sound, there is a big heart in the majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

It is impossible to deal with the order in the short time that is available, so I shall mention just three points. This is the European year of older people and it is appropriate to draw attention to their problems and their needs. They are seeking not sympathy or pity, but fair play, justice and proper consideration of their plight. Most of them are living on relatively small incomes which, in many cases, have been reduced as a result of the lowering of interest rates on, for instance, their building society accounts. Unfortunately, the majority of them are just above the threshold of eligibility for state benefits.

The cost of living in Northern Ireland is greater than in any other part of the United Kingdom. Some of our senior citizens are endeavouring to eke out their pensions by eating less or buying cheaper items. Some even try to save on the cost of heating by restricting it to one room or one bar of an electric fire. Therefore, imagine my surprise and alarm when the Government announced in the Budget the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel and power. Everyone in the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, will have to pay that tax—those who are earning enough to be obliged to pay income tax and those who are not.

In that sense, it is an unfair tax which will hurt, in particular, the retired people who do not receive state benefit, which I understand would then entitle them to some compensation, although I am not sure what will be available. It is well established that during winter there is a substantial increase in the number of deaths among pensioners. I fear that this harsh tax will cause more suffering to our senior citizens and expose them to greater danger of death through hypothermia. There is still time for the Government to abandon the tax on domestic electricity, oil, gas and coal.

I am deeply concerned about the welfare of elderly people in residential care homes, whose numbers have mushroomed. Some homes are excellent, some are not, according to the complaints that I have received from the relatives of the elderly residents. It is all very well for the Government to state that registration may be refused if the health board considers that the applicant is not a fit person to operate a residential care home, but frequent visits should be made every year and without notice. Relatives should be given leaflets inviting complaints and stating where they should be made. Telephone numbers should be provided so that someone with a grievance can immediately contact an official, who can then immediately go and check that home.

I understand that some residents who are supported at public expense in residential care homes are not being given by the owners the statutory allowance of £12·65 a week—or, at least, not being given the full amount. I am deeply concerned about that. Often, those residents are vulnerable and cannot look after some aspects of their affairs. I hope that there will be an investigation into that throughout Northern Ireland, as we must ensure that they are receiving the money to which they are entitled.

I deplore the moves by the Department of Health to close state residential care and nursing homes, which provide the standards by which private homes can be judged. I urge the Government to preserve, in particular, the Banks residential home in Bangor, which was purpose built and provides an excellent and homely atmosphere.

In speaking of the elderly, I think of the loving care shown by the nurses who look after them, either in residential homes or in hospitals. I pay tribute to those nurses, male and female, who, by their dedication and hard work, make life more comfortable for patients of all ages in hospital. Young people in Northern Ireland who have the vocation should be encouraged to train as nurses. It is annoying and perplexing that, in an area of high unemployment, young people who are eager to become nurses are discouraged. It is ridiculous that some nurses are made redundant when it is clear that the nursing staff in hospitals are overworked. We need nurses as well as doctors to ensure the highest possible standard of patient care.

For years, I have been fighting the various plans to reduce the number of beds in the Ulster hospital in Dundonald and in the Bangor hospital and the transfer of essential services to other hospitals in Belfast.

Here in London, the movement is the other way round. The Secretary of State for Health maintains that money and facilities should go to densely populated areas outside the capital. That makes sense. But the Eastern health board, which covers North Down and Belfast, moves the beds from my constituency into Belfast, thus depriving the dense and growing population of North Down of its rights. That is a form of discrimination, and I resent it. In the name of the people of North Down, I challenge the Eastern health board to play fair. The people in my constituency deserve the best hospitals. The doctors and nurses demand them, and certainly the patients deserve them.

I should like to mention many other matters, but, in fairness to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), who wishes to speak next, I shall stop here, adding only that it is unfortunate that the people of Northern Ireland, through their representatives, do not have an adequate opportunity to examine the issues set out in the draft appropriation order. I look forward to the day when we shall have a truly democratic forum.

11.21 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity, albeit brief, to participate in the appropriation debate. First, on behalf of my party, I welcome the new Minister of State, who introduced the debate, and his ministerial colleague the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, whom I have already welcomed on a previous occasion. I hope that their endeavours in Northern Ireland will be for the benefit and welfare of all the people there and, on that basis, we promise our co-operation.

It is appropriate to put on the record the fact that the shortness of the time allowed to us tonight will allegedly be compensated for by extra time in the autumn, when the debate will be reconvened, as it were. On the understanding that that is a firm undertaking, I feel that it would be inappropriate to deal at this late hour with many of the broader issues that the appropriation debate would normally involve. I shall therefore restrict my remarks to the matters that cannot wait until the autumn to be debated and acted upon.

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

The first such issue concerns the Department of Agriculture. I welcome the potato feedstuffs scheme, which was introduced to alleviate the financial plight of potato farmers in Northern Ireland. The Department succumbed only after five months' pressure but, although it is late, the scheme is still welcome. The danger is not yet over. Many of the potato farmers, who form the bedrock of the agricultural scene in Northern Ireland, have been so financially devastated in the past year that despite the scheme they still require assistance in the new planting season, so I hope that some effort will be made to provide that, by means of either the structural fund or the special potato board funding.

One peculiar circumstance now affecting the farming community may cause some mirth, because it is the fact that cattle have no passports. Nevertheless, that circumstance is causing some distress along the southern border. Cattle that have been imported from the Republic of Ireland do not get any identification, so they are ineligible for cow and beef premiums in Northern Ireland. I ask the Department of Agriculture and the Minister to make representations to the appropriate department in the Republic of Ireland so that there can be co-operation over the certification and identification of animals that travel across the border.

It will not surprise the Minister if I touch briefly on the crisis in the fishing industry, because two of the three ports in Northern Ireland are in my constituency.

The fishing industry, like the potato farmers, has been devastated. It has been devastated not by the weather, but by Government policy and legislation. In that regard, I refer particularly to the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act and the follow-on from that, the Sea Fish Licensing (Time at Sea) (Principles) Order 1993. They represent the most devastating revision of the common fisheries policy since 1983 which is having a tremendous effect on the environment and the economic environment of the hinterland of those two ports and of Portavogie.

There is no doubt that the so-called Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 has nothing to do with fish conservation and that it will not achieve the objectives that it set out to achieve. It is incapable of performing that function. That point was debated at the time and there is no point re-examining the issue tonight. The more important, immediate and urgent point relates to sea fish licensing.

As a result of pressure, the implementation of that proposal has been postponed until 1 January 1994. That is an indication of the difficulties that it is causing. The fishermen of Great Britain and Northern Ireland seem to be the fall-guys for fish conservation policies in Europe. It is evident that other countries fishing around our waters do not abide by conservation and licensing matters.

It is particularly galling when one can stand, as I can in South Down, and see the fishermen from the Republic of Ireland putting out just a mile across the water virtually without restrictions and with a policy of an enhanced fishing fleet, when the fishermen of Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie cannot do that. I urge that the licensing time at sea provisions be re-examined to assist those fishermen.

The real way to achieve conservation is through decommissioning. However, the Government have turned their face away from a meaningful decommissioning scheme. The efficient and modern vessels will go out of action and that will leave an inefficient and non-modern fleet to carry on fishing. The decommissioning scheme should encourage those with the largest quota drives to set aside, if they so wish, like the farmers, part of their endeavours to provide for conservation.

I must briefly refer to the Department of Health and Social Services, as I am sure all hon. Members would, because of our dramatic experiences in Northern Ireland as a result of the changes imposed by the Department. There seems to be an attempt to centralise even the most modest acute services in the conurbations.

As the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) said, we are a rural community and we must have reasonable access to acute facilities. We are not looking for anything other than that. One of the most galling aspects of all this is that we had a so-called consultation period. However, when representatives of the community or of the duly elected councillors of Down and Mourne went to the Eastern health board, they found that there was no consultation.

When those representatives asked the board what was meant by acute services, by midwifery-led maternity services and by emergency and casualty services, the board bluntly refused to define what it meant. How can we have consultation in respect of a paper when the authors cannot explain what they mean? That is happening right across Northern Ireland. We have not had the required consultation.

One of the most interesting events in health and social services in Northern Ireland in recent times has been the intervention by the Department in the contractual goings-on of the Eastern health board vis-à-vis the Royal Victoria hospital. For the first time, the Department has admitted that ultimate responsibility is with itself. Until now the Department has said, "No, you cannot consult us at this stage; that is all to do with the administration on the ground at board level." We always knew that ultimate responsibility was with the Department itself.

I ask the Department to intervene to ensure that acute facilities are left in the area which is broadly covered by Down and Mourne health authority. There were three hospitals in the area. One has already been closed, one hospital in Banbridge is threatened, and Kilkeel hospital will be closed. Only the Down group of hospitals will be left.

I take the point about the so-called maternity services throughput of 2,500. The last I heard, it was 2,000. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has clearly said that that is not the case and that it is a departmental figment. It would be quite happy with a proper liaison group. Throughput could be as low as 500 and there could still be an effective maternity service. That is what the rural populations of Northern Ireland require.

I must finish, to be fair to the Minister, but I should refer to the closure of statutory residential homes. The Department says, "Cut 12 per cent." It does not matter whether 12 per cent. of beds is a realistic figure for the demographics of an area. It is a balance sheet exercise of cutting 12 per cent. If the Minister would listen for a moment, we are talking not about closing beds but about closing homes. The rooms are people's homes. They are not beds, they are the homes and environment of old people. We must take great care. Already, two homes in

Newcastle have been closed and people have been shuffled off to three other homes which are about to be threatened with closure. I ask the Minister to review that matter.

I see you looking at me, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I take the hint very clearly. However, we have only scratched the surface of the topic. Will the Secretary of State tell the people of Northern Ireland what will happen to the European fund to which the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) referred in great detail? The Northern Irish people are disgusted by what is happening. We would like to know what new instructions, if any, are being issued to the Minister and the negotiating team in the Council of Ministers to ensure that Northern Ireland deprived region No. 1 gets a reasonable funding allocation to enable it to sustain a measure of economic growth.

11.32 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Robert Atkins): I have but seven minutes to try to respond to the debate. I therefore agree with comments about the shortage of time to examine several important and urgent issues for hon. Members who represent the various strands of opinion within the Province.

I thank the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) and others for their kind words about my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) and my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who recently joined the team. They appreciated those comments and they look forward to working, as I and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and my noble Friend the Earl of Arran have done for some months, with such a friendly bunch.

Several issues have been raised. I will write to hon. Members on matters that I cannot address in my brief reply—or encourage my ministerial colleagues with certain responsibilities to do so. Perhaps I shall touch on matters that are my responsibility within the Department of Economic Development and the Department of the Environment, and conclude, if I have the time, on matters relating to structural funds, about which there is concern and a need for clarification.

The hon. Member for Wigan made several comments and referred to the problems of unemployment. I agree that there are still a great number of concerns. Much of the unemployment is endemic for reasons that the hon. Gentleman and all other hon. Members understand. It is my task and that of the Industrial Development Board and other organisations to do what we can to create new jobs and encourage new companies to come to the Province and provide opportunities for new employment. We had a successful year in 1992-93. Nearly 2,000 jobs were created in new major companies around the Province. That task continues with the tacit and often overt support of hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies who do a great deal to assist in that respect.

I pick out the point raised by the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) about his activities and those of the organisation in his constituency with the delightful name of TEDI. Other hon. Members and organisations are also encouraging links between various parts of the United States and, indeed, other parts of the world. The work done by those organisations, properly constituted, is valuable and is appreciated by IDB and others.

There is always some concern when there is a potential conflict between the activities of local councils and the IDB when they are not properly controlled. If they are not properly controlled, we get conflicts and difficulties. Essentially, if the organisations are properly set up, they do a great deal of work.

The hon. Member for Wigan raised a point about the airport. I will be delighted to see him and anyone whom he wishes to bring. That matter is important. I am sorry that he has not yet had a reply, but he should get one—I make a pledge now.

I agree with the points raised by the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. They were sensible and thoughtful and I will try to implement them as soon as possible. He made some points about planning in rural areas. Hon. Members know my view on planning in rural areas, but let me put it on the record now. I am entirely in favour of industry in rural areas—I am not against it. However, it must be recognised that there are pressures on rural areas when that happens.

Let me repeat that I am entirely in favour of housing in rural areas. It is essential that those who work in agriculture and other small industries have the right to be housed, especially if they have a family connection that involves them wanting to stay in the area in which they live. I have no argument with that. The only discussion —I suspect that hon. Members share this concern—is perhaps about the quality of the properties.

I spent a delightful day with the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) in his constituency. We looked at a number of planning concerns. We found—perhaps to his astonishment, if not to mine—an identity of purpose and understanding about what is happening there. Hon. Members will understand that there is an interest there.

I shall conclude my brief remarks—I want to return to a number of issues, perhaps through correspondence—by referring to the points raised about the structural funds, which are exercising all hon. Members, not least the hon. Member for Antrim, North. To answer his question, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and others have fought hard for not simply a significant increase for Northern Ireland. We have asked for a significant increase on what was requested last year plus inflation, so that pressure is firm.

The hon. Gentleman and others will have heard on the wireless this morning comments from Commissioner Millan who made it clear that the British Government, through my right hon. Friend, have been fighting extremely hard for the cause of Northern Ireland and, indeed, the United Kingdom. This morning, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State spoke directly to Commissioner Millan on the telephone. He made clear to Commissioner Millan, who was receptive in this regard, the importance of Northern Ireland maintaining its objective 1 status, but having no more than its fair share.

We must recognise that there is pressure on EC funds at present. I think that everyone understands that. We recognise that the specific pressures are coming from the former eastern part of Germany, parts of Portugal, Greece, and so on. I make the point—this shows how hard we have fought for Northern Ireland—that Northern Ireland's gross domestic product per capita is about 76 per cent. of the EC average, which is well above objective 1 status figures in other parts of the EC. We have fought hard against the odds to ensure that Northern Ireland gets

[Mr. Robert Atkins]

a fair crack of the whip. If hon. Gentlemen are fair, and I know them to be so, they will understand that. We must continue that fight as Northern Ireland is entitled to a fair share of these moneys. My right hon. and hon. Friends in my Department and in the Government pledge that we will do so.

We have had an all-too-brief debate. All the points raised by hon. Gentlemen will be considered. We will respond as urgently as we can on the details of health services and residential homes—a subject which my hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Sir J. Kilfedder) raised. He speaks with great care for the elderly in his constituency. I hope that we can talk about these matters again after the recess and at some length so that hon. Members on both sides of the House and the official Opposition have the opportunity to raise matters and I, as a Minister, and my colleagues have the opportunity to respond.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 7th June, be approved.

PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That Mr. Paul Channon be discharged from the Select Committee on Procedure and Mr. Andrew MacKay be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

PETITIONS

Post Office Services

11.40 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I rise to present a petition which is signed by my constituents who are concerned about Government plans to privatise the Post Office and to transfer VAT payments from post offices to banks. This has been an extremely contentious issue and the House may be astonished to know that in a little over six weeks I have secured no fewer than 11,490 signatures from my constituents in suburban and rural areas. My hon. Friends have similar petitions to present. I shall read the material allegations.

The Humble Petition of the undersigned presidents of Gordon sheweth that we express deep concern that the Government proposes to privatise post office services and compulsorily transfer social security payments from post offices to banks, and we oppose these measures jointly and severally as they threaten the very survival of rural post offices and deny the efficiency and convenience of the present system, especially in rural areas.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will do everything possible to impress upon the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and Social Security the need for an autonomous post office service in the public sector and to abandon plans for the compulsory transfer of social security payments to banks.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

11.41 pm

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I have the honour to present to the House a petition from the residents of Argyll and Bute regarding their concern that the Government might remove their right to receive pensions and benefit payments at local sub-post offices. If that happens, it will undoubtedy threaten the survival of sub-post offices and rural village shops, with which they are so often connected. That would cut deep at the heart of these communities. The signatures were collected throughout the length and breadth of Argyll and Bute and I pay special tribute to the sub-postmasters and mistresses and all involved, both young and old, who helped collect them. The petition is signed by more than 9,500 of my constituents and I support it. It concludes with the following words:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will do everything possible to impress upon the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and Social Security the need for an autonomous post office service in the public sector and to abandon plans for the compulsory transfer of social security payments to banks.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

11.43 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The petition that I present is signed by my constituents in Orkney and Shetland, by others in other parts and by constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston). It is in similar terms to those presented by my hon. Friends the Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie).

The signatures have been collected in a relatively short period of time. I echo the thanks to sub-postmasters and mistresses who have helped to collect them.

The Government have said that they will not go down the road of a compulsory transfer to banks, but they still encourage payment of benefit into bank accounts. That could lead to the destruction of the network of sub-post offices throughout the country, which is a valued rural service.

The total number of signatures on the petition, including those of my hon. Friends and myself, amounts to 42,000, which makes the message loud and clear.

Wherefore your petitioners pray

That your honourable House will do everything possible to impress upon the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and Social Security the need for an autonomous post office service in the public sector and to abandon plans for the compulsory transfer of social security payments to banks.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Defence Industries (Chelmsford)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

11.44 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): My constituents and I are grateful that I have an opportunity to raise an important issue in Chelmsford and in the constituencies of my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) and my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale).

The background to this short debate is somewhat contradictory, because, in the past two months, Chelmsford has benefited from a fall in unemployment, in both the local authority area and the parliamentary constituency, of 551 and 384 people respectively. Unfortunately, however, the good news created by those substantial and consistent falls in unemployment has been lost because of last week's announcement by Marconi Radar that, sadly, it had to make a further 300 people in Chelmsford redundant.

We have paid a heavy price for the peace dividend and a more peaceful world. It is ironic that those who are most critical of defence-related redundancies advocate even more defence cuts. The Labour party has consistently voted for a 27 per cent.—£6 billion—cut in the defence budget. The Liberal Democrats would like to see defence spending cut by 50 per cent.—half the defence budget—over the next seven years. Both policies would have an even more traumatic effect on defence industries in my constituency.

To understand the impact of the redundancies in defence-related industries in Chelmsford in the past 12 to 18 months, it would be sensible to put into context the history of the manufacturing base in the town. Chelmsford has always been associated with the Marconi companies, and many people in Chelmsford consider them to be synonymous. Twenty years ago, the Marconi companies and English Electric Valve were the town's major employers, providing jobs for 11,000 people with thousands of back-up jobs reliant on their success.

The 1989 census of employment shows that three quarters of Chelmsford's manufacturing jobs were in the standard industrial classification group 3, which includes engineering and vehicles. Employment in that group was dominated by the GEC companies: Marconi Communications; Marconi Radar; and English Electric Valve.

In the past 18 months, there has been an all too dismal repetition of job losses in those companies. In January 1992, 150 jobs were lost at Marconi Communications; in March 1992, 140 jobs were lost at Marconi Phone; in June 1992, 600 jobs were lost at Marconi Radar when it moved its manufacturing to Leicester; in June 1992, 225 jobs were lost at Marconi Communications; in September 1992, a further 300 jobs were lost at Marconi Communications; in February 1993, 95 jobs were lost at English Electric Valve; and now 300 jobs have been lost at Marconi Radar.

Almost 2,000 jobs have been lost in a relatively short time. I do not need to remind the House of the misery that that causes to the men and families directly involved, to the companies, which do not enjoy making people redundant, and to the town because of the knock-on effect those redundancies have on suppliers, back-up staff, shops and the area's commercial life.

[Mr. Simon Burns]

The men who have been made redundant are highly trained and desperate to be in work, contributing to our nation's manufacturing base and using their skills to the utmost degree.

There are two reasons for that dismal catalogue of redundancies. First, the ending of the cold war and the subsequent peace dividend, coming as they did so swiftly and unexpectedly with the crumbling of the Berlin wall and the iron curtain, have meant that we live in a relatively more peaceful world. Consequently, the Government have rightly had to reassess the defence requirement of this country.

Secondly, we as a nation have an excellent record in defence industry exports, but the peace dividend has coincided with a worldwide recession, which has meant that the market for defence equipment and communications worldwide has contracted, and that the competition has intensified. As part of the need to remain competitive or lose out even more, the Marconi companies have had to take drastic action.

What of the future? I have a number of suggestions, which I am pleased to make, to help to alleviate the short-term problems facing my constituents and to try to help to improve long-term prospects for defence-related industries. I welcome the fact the Government have signed up to KONVER, the European Community programme to provide financial assistance to areas suffering from redundancies in defence-related industries.

Chelmsford will compete for that money to help with reskilling and retraining. However, under the EC rules, two thirds of the money is designated on a criterion under which Chelmsford would not usually be able to compete. That is farcical. A recent university of York report for the European Commission on the economic and social impact of reductions in defence spending and military forces on the regions of the Community identifies Essex as the second worst-hit area in the EC.

First, it is imperative that the criterion is changed so that Essex can bid in all the categories of the KONVER funding. I know that work is being done at county level to come up with an excellent idea to use some of that money directly to help over the long term companies facing problems from a contracting defence market.

Secondly, the companies must continue to broaden their base by diversifying into non-military products. The companies have long recognised that, and for a number of years they have been doing all that they can to diversify as quickly as possible. Marconi Communications has had an ambitious programme of diversification for a number of years and has met success in supplying communications equipment to the BBC, to the Independent Broadcasting Authority and to clients worldwide.

Similarly, Marconi Radar and English Electric Valve are channelling their energies into diversifying while recognising that there will still be important defence contracts to be won. It should not be forgotten that the defence market has not disappeared, but has simply been reduced because of changing circumstances.

It is important for diversification that it is remembered that it is a slow process and means either moving into new markets against well-established competition or investing heavily and speculatively in trying to develop niche markets. Neither can be achieved overnight, and it is imperative that, during the period of uncertainty and realignment, the Ministry of Defence and the defence industries work closely together. At the end of the day, their needs are mutual. I am pleased that both the companies and the Ministry recognise that they need to co-operate because of mutual interests and mutual future benefits to both sides.

Thirdly, it is crucial that, whenever feasible, British contracts go to British companies to protect British jobs and British expertise. Once again, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister and his predecessor on ensuring that more than 90 per cent. of our defence contracts go to British companies. That is only right, because we must look after our own, as one can rest assured that no one else will.

In that respect, I make a plea for Marconi Radar with regard to the RAF tactical radar project. It would give a vital opportunity to put the Ministry of Defence seal of approval on an excellent new product with £300 million of export potential, which would protect jobs. It would also provide an opportunity to preserve unique skills and technology in this country. I fully appreciate that my hon. Friend the Minister is not in a position directly to comment on that, but in passing I wanted to make a constituency plea for the contract.

When the Ministry of Defence puts out tenders for contracts, it is important that they be dealt with swiftly —contracts for new products, for repair and maintenance, for spare parts or for updating and uprating equipment and services. I appreciate that this is a difficult area, because the Ministry has a duty to secure value for money for its paymasters, the taxpayers, but any speeding up of the process would help defence industry companies. If anything can be done to expedite the awarding of contracts, that would be warmly welcomed by the industry and by the country at large.

Lastly, it is important that everything possible be done to help redundant people to re-skill and get back into work as soon as humanly possible. All the companies in Chelmsford are continuing to do all they can to relocate workers within the GEC group, but that is difficult in today's economic climate. They are also doing all they can to help with counselling and setting up advice units to help these people over an extremely traumatic—in the short term—time in their lives.

It is extremely heartening to see how the Essex training and enterprise council has moved swiftly to respond by trying to help, and by contacting the companies concerned —in this instance, Marconi Radar in particular—to see what it can do to alleviate the problems in the town. I know that everyone is grateful to the TEC for that response, and to the company for considering proposals put to it by the TEC for joint initiatives to tackle the problem.

We must continue to ensure that all possible help is given to re-employ these people and to protect our manufacturing base, which has thrived for so long in Chelmsford. Above all, it is crucial that these men should not be forgotten. No one in Chelmsford can forget their plight because for too long we have had to live with the problems that they are facing. I certainly cannot forget the trauma through which they are going, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree and my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon cannot forget them either, because their constituents are similarly affected.

It is important that these men appreciate that everyone is on their side, that we are not prepared to forget them, and that we are all prepared to work together for them. We must lobby the Ministry of Defence for contracts, and work with Essex TEC and the companies concerned to put together packages to help with re-skilling. I hope that the Government will do what they can to ensure that the recovery continues at a sustainable pace so as to create demand, especially in non-defence-related industries. When that demand picks up, companies will respond by taking on skilled workers to meet it.

All these factors amount to a package. We must work together to get workers back into manufacturing as quickly as possible, because there is nothing more debilitating or demoralising for people who desperately want to work than to be unable to use their skills owing to what is happening to defence industries and contracts, here and in the rest of the world, because fortunately we now live in a more peaceful environment.

11.58 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) not only on his good fortune in winning the ballot and raising this important subject for debate but on the convincing and compassionate arguments that he marshalled on behalf of his constituency.

My hon. Friend's constituency has had a long association with the defence industry, and particularly with GEC-Marconi and its predecessors. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the way that he has been so consistently energetic and assiduous in promoting the interests of his constituents, particularly in the defence industrial sector. He made a valuable contribution to the major debate that was held in the House in May on the defence industrial base, and he frequently tables parliamentary questions, writes to me and lobbies me and other Ministers in the Ministry of Defence on behalf of his constituents.

In this context, I should also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), who is here tonight. Many of their constituents also work for GEC-Marconi, and they champion the interests of their constituents. The defence industry workers in that part of Essex are fortunate in having three such doughty fighters for their interests in the House.

The backdrop to, and the reason for, tonight's debate, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford has acknowledged, is the profound recasting of the strategic environment caused by the collapse of the former Soviet Union, and the disappearance of the Warsaw pact. Our recently published defence White Paper, called "Defending the Future", shows in more detail than ever before the way that we have remodelled our forces to take account of those great changes. Immense though the benefits are to our security and economic well-being, those changes are bringing in their wake painful reductions in some parts of the defence industry.

The outcome of the 1992 public expenditure settlement means that, between 1990-91 and 1995-96, the defence budget will reduce by around 12 per cent. in real terms. Sadly, the equipment procurement programme is bound to diminish in absolute terms, even if not proportionately. However, those reductions start from a high base line, and we shall retain a substantial defence equipment programme. As my hon. Friend was good enough to say, it is certainly not disappearing.

It will still include highly sophisticated and technologically innovative equipment, which will sustain many thousands of jobs in the defence industries, as well as permitting our armed forces to receive the best and most up-to-date equipment. If one adds together our British domestic procurement budget, defence export annual sales, and the opportunities that exist for defence industries in market testing, one gets a total defence cake of well over £13 billion. That shows that there is still plenty for the defence companies to go for, despite the downturn.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford was most concerned about the recent job losses at GEC-Marconi. I pay tribute to the company for the way that it has made, and is continuing to make, a major contribution to Britain's defence effort, for which we in the Ministry of Defence have been most grateful. I recognise that in recent years, and for a number of reasons, the level of employment in the company in Chelmsford has fallen considerably. I was sorry to learn of the most recent announcement of job losses by GEC-Marconi Radar and Control Systems.

The company employs 1,400 people in Chelmsford on the design and development of radar equipment, primarily for defence applications. The business in Chelmsford is relocating, partly to new premises elsewhere in Chelmsford and partly to another site. The proposed reduction of 300 jobs is in part because a number of jobs needed to run the old site will no longer be required at the new premises, and partly because the company is also reviewing its structure to reduce operating costs and improve its competitive position.

It is of no comfort to those who have lost their jobs that such restructuring is necessary, and indeed vital, if companies are to survive in the new tighter competitive environment. I understand the deep personal distress that those changes cause to individuals and their families. I thought that my hon. Friend was most eloquent on that point, and I can only add my personal sympathy to what he said.

It is right to emphasise that, in the last five years, my Department has placed a large number of contracts with GEC companies in Chelmsford, 20 of which are each worth over £1 million. The total value of contracts placed with GEC companies in Chelmsford over that period is over £100 million.

Among the substantial contracts carried out for my Department in Chelmsford in recent years have been contracts with GEC-Marconi Communications for the supply of satellite communications equipment, and Triffid Army radio link communications equipment; with English Electric Valves for image intensifier tubes; and with GEC-Marconi Radars and Control Systems for tracker radars for the Sea Wolf missile system. These products make an important contribution to our nation's defence effort.

My hon. Friend referred to two projects in particular. The first of these is the programme for the conversion of type 911 tracker radars. We have surplus type 911 trackers as a result of a cancellation of a previous programme.

[Mr. Jonathan Aitken]

There is an opportunity to use these to meet the requirement for vertical-launch Sea Wolf on type 23 frigates, but they require some conversion work.

Marconi Radar and Control Systems are already involved in supporting the radars used in several Sea Wolf point defence missile systems. Complex negotiations have now been taking place with Marconi for some time. I can assure my hon. Friend that we are pursuing these vigorously, and hope to be in a position to place the contract by October.

The second programme my hon. Friend asked about is the tactical radar replacement programme for the Royal Air Force. The competition for this requirement, for which GEC-Marconi is one of four contenders, is now in progress. Although the order is a comparatively small one by Ministry of Defence standards, we recognise the importance which both the United Kingdom firms bidding for the work attach to winning it.

I know that my hon. Friend will understand that, until the evaluation of the tenders has been completed, it would be inappropriate for me to discuss in detail the merits of any bid across the Floor of the House, but I can assure him that the eloquent points he made will be taken into account in the final decision, which we hope to be able to announce by the end of next month.

I hope that these indications of contract announcement dates will be helpful to my hon. Friend and to all who work at GEC-Marconi.

My hon. Friend referred to a study published by the European Commission which showed Essex as an area of the Community with the second highest dependency on employment in the defence industries. This study was based on work carried out by the centre for defence economics at the university of York. There is no doubt that a substantial proportion of industrial concerns in the county are defence-related, but I have to say that we are not entirely convinced that the comparisons in that study between regions in different member states have been done on a like-for-like basis.

This is not just an academic point, as the study's assessments of overall defence dependency have been used by the commission as the basis for allocating funds under the KONVER programme, to which my hon. Friend referred tonight, and also in his speech in the industrial base debate in May. The KONVER programme is a matter for which the Department of Trade and Industry is primarily responsible.

As my hon. Friend knows, the Government have some strong reservations about such schemes, because they represent a partial approach to industrial adjustment. We have also taken issue with the basis of allocation of funds between member states. But, having entered these caveats and reservations, the Government intend to take advantage of the scheme in order to help constituencies such as my hon. Friend's. I take on board his point that the criteria need to be changed, and will bring that argument to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry.

I was glad to hear my hon. Friend speak of the success of GEC-Marconi in diversification matters, and in particular its sales to the BBC and to other institutions and companies in the export field. We are delighted when defence companies diversify into new markets, and it makes good sense for many companies to do so.

But it is important to say yet again that it is not for the Government to direct companies to diversify. Our interest is in seeing a profitable and competitive defence industry. It is for companies to decide how best they can be profitable and competitive—and if that means diversifying, so be it. I am glad to hear that GEC-Marconi has done so well without any intervention or orders from Government.

I know that my hon. Friend shares my lack of enthusiasm for a defence conversion agency—a distaste which I feel on grounds of both principle and practice. I will not here rehearse the familiar arguments why this is really another socialist interventionist scheme dressed up in new clothing. I think that we all agree that the Government should give what useful advice and help they can, without in any way being an interventionist Government with taxpayers' money.

The Department of Trade and Industry's recent publication "Changing Tack" provides step-by-step advice for defence companies wishing to diversify, backed by the expertise of professional management consultants Touche Ross. In that way, we assist and encourage management flair, rather than stifling it with regulations, bureaucracy or ill-targeted subsidies paid for by the taxpayer.

I was grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that British defence contracts support British jobs and expertise in some 90 per cent. of cases in which we award contracts. We believe in fair and open competition, but the fact that more than 90 per cent. of our contracts go to British firms shows where our heart lies. We do not wish to neglect the importance of Britain's home-grown defence industries.

Let me say a little about our relations with industry generally. It is important that my Department and the defence industry work together closely. We do not believe that relations are in any way unhappy at present; indeed, I was pleased to note that the defence manufacturers gave a cautious welcome to the announcements in the recent White Paper.

I acknowledge that, two or three years ago, there was a feeling—born of the uncertainty of the time—that, during the period of deliberation on "Options for Change", the Department was not as open with industry as it might have been; but I think that my right hon. and hon. Friends who have held ministerial office experienced difficulties at that time. They had to formulate defence-policy parameters and set the priorities—duties which, possibly, are for Government alone.

Once decisions were made, however, we made strenuous efforts to provide industry with all the information necessary to enable it to make sound commercial judgments. Our aim was, and is, to enable companies to remain competitive and successful in both domestic and overseas defence markets. The GEC group as a whole, and GEC-Marconi in particular, have certainly done that.

We are trying to provide the defence industries with as much knowledge of our requirements as possible. There has always been a significant flow of information from the Ministry of Defence to companies right across the spectrum from top-level committees such as the National Defence Industries Council and the Chief of Defence

Procurement's regular meetings with the trade associations, down to the informal contacts between individual companies and MOD officials. The work that hon. Members such as my hon. Friend can do in strengthening that bridge of information and understanding is considerable.

We are doing all that we can to provide defence companies with more and more information. We shall soon publish a comprehensive list of endorsed staff targets and staff requirements, which we shall update annually. Those documents are the driving force for procurement action on all projects in which we expect to spend at least £5 million on development or £10 million on production. We hope that the publication of that comprehensive list will be helpful to all actual and potential defence contractors, including GEC-Marconi.

The process of managing the defence budget is dynamic. Inevitably, we must make painful adjustments to certain programmes from time to time, because of the changing international strategic situation, to which my hon. Friend referred. We shall continue to fine-tune the programmes, but I think that industry understands the difficulties created by the changes in the world security environment. Although there are bound to be tensions and problems, I think that on the whole there is an amicable and constructive dialogue between my Department and industry.

I feel that, in general terms, we should welcome the more stable international situation that now exists. Of course there are still some trouble spots in the world, such as the former Yugoslavia; nevertheless, we have been able to shift some of our national resources away from defence. I recognise that that is only a modest comfort to those who work in the defence industry, and I sympathise greatly with the plight of the workers in Chelmsford described so eloquently by my hon. Friend. Sadly, it is a fact of life that there will be fewer MOD orders in the future than in the past; that is why companies such as GEC-Marconi are having to adapt accordingly.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Friday 16 July 1993

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Police

9.34 am

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I beg leave to present a petition that has been collected by Elizabeth Mary Lambert, a redoubtable lady of the constituency of Chesham and Amersham. She and nearly 3,000 petititoners wish to give more support to local police forces in relation to criminal damage to private and public property. They are appalled by decisions of the Crown Prosecution Service and believe that decisions not to prosecute are demoralising to the police. They want us to give more support to the police throughout the country.

The petition ends:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will take the aforementioned into consideration.

To lie upon the Table.

Social Security Fraud

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

9.35 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): I am pleased to introduce this debate. My first task is to give the apology of the Liberal Democrat spokesman on social security, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), who told me last night that he would be unable to attend this morning. As we know, we arrange our business only a few days in advance, whereas sometimes business for other parties is arrranged much further in advance, and that is why the hon. Gentleman cannot be here this morning. I know of his interest in this subject, so I thought it best to record his apology. He has also taken the trouble to speak to the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley).

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): In the context of that apology, perhaps my hon. Friend could place on record the Liberal Democrats who have attended today in their leader's absence?

Mr. Burt: During the morning, we shall see whether any Liberal Democrats attend. My hon. Friend makes a valid point and during the day we will see whether any hon. Members travel the Liberal Democrat Benches.

It is a year almost to the day since the House had an opportunity to debate the important subject of social security fraud. On that occasion, at a considerably less civilised time of the day, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) secured an Adjournment debate to which my hon. Friend who is now the Under-Secretary of State for Employment responded.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary asks and receives no quarter. She brings a vim and vigour to the Dispatch Box which she displayed to the full in those debates. Indeed, a debate between her and my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield on the subject of fraud and social security abuse could sell more tickets than a gala night for "Jurassic Park". She takes that spirit to her new Department, and all her colleagues in the Department of Social Security wish her well in her new appointment.

Since the previous debate, the subject of social security has rarely been out of the public eye. Many facets of the benefit system are currently being subjected to scrutiny and welcomed public discussion. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has made it one of our priorities to bear down on fraud and abuse in social security, as every penny misappropriated means less for those in real need.

Today, the House has an opportunity to hear about the prevention, detection and deterrence measures that we are taking to tackle fraud and abuse in the system, and I propose to make that the focus of my remarks today.

The sheer scale of spending on social security means that it is in everyone's interest to maintain and preserve the integrity of the system. This year, spending on social security will be in the region of £80 billion—a massive amount by any standards, amounting to nearly a third of general Government expenditure and over 12 per cent. of the country's gross domestic product. To the taxpayer, that represents an enormous financial commitment—about £13 for each working person every working day.

[Mr. Burt]

Without doubt, the vast majority of people claiming benefits are fully entitled to them. Social security exists to help those who genuinely need it, which is why we spend over £15 million a year on publicity to ensure that people have the information they need to enable them to claim what they are entitled to.

Regrettably, however, there are some people whose behaviour and actions bring the social security system into disrepute. They are cheats, pure and simple, whose exploitation of the system is costing the taxpayer dear; cheats because they effectively deprive the needy and vulnerable by claiming money from the public purse to which they are not entitled; and cheats are disliked by all fair-minded people in society.

Let us be quite clear about it; social security fraud is a crime—and a very selfish one at that, since every pound claimed fraudulently is a pound less available to people who are genuinely in need. It has been estimated that social security fraud could amount to more than £1 billion a year —in other words, the fraudsters are costing at least £1 a week for every working person in this country.

When people go down to the pub tonight, or visit the supermarket at the weekend, they should look at the prices and think about the extra pound that they could have had in their pocket. That pound has been taken from them by someone who has cheated.

No responsible Government can ignore fraud and abuse on such a scale. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has placed his commitment to bear down on fraud and abuse alongside our other priorities of making sure that help is focused on those genuinely in need. I stress that that commitment on fraud and abuse is made alongside our other priorities on behalf of the needy and the vulnerable in the system.

We have taken a number of measures to ensure that benefits are more effectively focused on people in need. For example, the Employment Service, which administers benefits paid to unemployed people, has in place procedures to test that those signing as unemployed are available for work and, moreover, are actively seeking it. Only this week, we have tightened up the income support rules that apply to people who come into this country from non-European Community member states so that they no longer have entitlement to benefit.

Our intention is to make sure that those people who are entitled to help get what they are entitled to—no more, no less. My essential message for the House is this: those who deal with us honestly and who are in genuine need have nothing to fear; but those who try to cheat the system will be caught, made to repay and could end up in court and earn a criminal record for themselves.

I recognise, of course, that the battle against fraud must be tackled on a number of fronts. On the one hand, there are claims that are fraudulent—either from the outset, or arising from a failure to disclose a material change in circumstances. Some people deliberately set out to defraud the system in this way; there is a worrying element in the criminal fraternity that has developed rackets involving multiple claims and false identities.

Others, however, seemingly drift into fraud—perhaps even unwittingly at first—for example, by simply forgetting to report a change in circumstances. But later, when they reflect on the cost of rectifying what started as a small lie, they turn a blind eye and perpetuate the falsehood, and, before they know it, a substantial overpayment has arisen. The boundary between forgetfulness and fraud has then been crossed.

Another area of fraudulent activity relates to the misuse of order books. To put this in context, in 1991-92 some £230 million worth of social security order books were recorded as lost or stolen, and 35 per cent. of those, worth approximately £85 million, were shown to be fraudulently encashed. A further £16 million was lost through fraudulent encashment of girocheques. Against that backdrop, it must therefore be right for the Government to take measures, first, to prevent fraud occurring, secondly, to detect fraudulent activity and thirdly, to deter would-be fraudsters from committing fraud.

In short, we are minimising the opportunities for fraud; we root out fraud when it occurs, we stop it from continuing and we recover amounts overpaid and prosecute offenders when appropriate.

Prevention is therefore at the heart of our anti-fraud effort. The social security system has always incorporated internal security and management checks—they are essential to prevent both internal and external abuse—but we owe it to the taxpayer to keep a tight system of validation and verification checks in operation to prevent abuse. We are constantly looking at ways in which to make those more effective through comprehensive assurance checks and an audit trail analysis to help us identify inconsistent or dubious pieces of information.

In this respect, technology plays a crucial role. The DSS and its agencies have been developing comprehensive and ambitious plans for fraud-resistant computer systems. We have already installed new computers to help fraud managers to identify patterns of crime, monitor performance and deploy resources in the most effective manner.

We are not only tightening up systems within the DSS. In recent months, significant progress has been made in combating order book and girocheque fraud through close co-operation and joint working with the Post Office—yet more proof, if it were needed, of the importance of the Post Office to the DSS.

A whole variety of improvements are now beginning to emerge, including, first, new, clearer guidance to Post Office counter clerks to help them spot various types of fraud which can occur—for example, bogus payees or manipulated and counterfeited payments. Secondly, an illustrated anti-fraud handbook has been produced for counter clerks called "Foil Fraud", which has been reinforced by a series of articles in Post Office Counters' internal magazine. Thirdly, the DSS and the Post Office have ensured more secure delivery of order books, safer storage and tighter control of order books once delivered. Fourthly, methods have been introduced to prevent encashment of order books reported missing.

That last intitiative is known to us as the ALERT project. It is particularly exciting, since it involves the use of new technology and the reading of bar codes printed on order books. Trials in the London area have already shown some impressive results, and an extension of the project is planned for the autumn.

The House will also know that we have been encouraging people to opt for automated credit transfer, ACT, because it is a safer, more cost-effective means of making benefit payments, and is far less prone to fraud and abuse than order books or girocheques. Hon.

Members on both sides of the House have recently made clear the importance they attach to preserving choice in the method of payment, and we have reaffirmed our commitment, as I did today, to maintaining a network of post offices. But the fact remains that ACT is less susceptible to fraud, and our policy will continue to be to encourage people to opt for it.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): When we debated ACT, there was some confusion about the financial implications for the Post Office of a large-scale move to that method of payment. Can the Minister give a further guarantee that, should that happen, no post office will be financially disadvantaged to the point where the savings the Government may make on ACT will mean that the post office network is no longer financially viable? Can he guarantee that the financial consequences of that policy change will not lead to the closure of post offices?

Mr. Burt: I am quite assured that the DSS's encouragement of people to opt for ACT is not a threat to post offices. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the financing of post offices is a complex matter, involving contracts with other Departments. We need a network of post offices, because they help us in so many ways to deliver benefits. We therefore believe that ACT, on its own, will not harm the post offices. I assure the hon. Gentleman that that is not the intention of the DSS.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Does my hon. Friend accept that Opposition Members—there is only one here—are aware that people who want to opt for ACT can do so of their own accord? No Government on earth can force them to do so. The Opposition have whipped up a campaign of hysteria.

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend is right. It is a great shame that, all too often, policy ideas with many good intentions behind them can be unhappily distorted for purely party political ends by the Opposition. As a result, people are genuinely scared about matters that pose no threat to them. It is essential that we put our commitment on record. My hon. Friend is right that it is a great shame when those who should be more responsible fail to act in that manner.

As my hon. Friend has said, people will still have the option to receive payment at the post office and, for those who choose to be paid by order book, we are introducing this month a new design of order book, which contains a number of new security features. It will make illicit copying more difficult, with more secure watermarking and a variety of other complex design features aimed at decreasing the incidence of fraud and abuse.

The old order book had remained unchanged for many years. With new, modern printing technology, it is now easier for us to produce an order book. In addition to security arrangements, the new order book will combine a more user-friendly, easier-to-read format, which represents a significant step forward in our commitment to the customer, as well as illustrating our determination to prevent abuse and keep ahead of the fraudster. We shall continue to make the best use of design and print technology, introducing—without warning—new, subtle design changes from time to time to frustrate the efforts of criminals.

Our determination to root out fraud and abuse is perhaps best demonstrated by the sheer scale of the resources that we have dedicated to tackling fraud, the significant savings that they achieve, and examples of the kind of cases that have been identified in recent months.

This year, the Secretary of State has set a target of savings amounting to some £1 billion to be saved through the intervention of fraud teams working in the Benefits Agency and local authority housing benefit and council tax departments.

The Benefits Agency alone employs just over 3,000 highly effective and professional fraud staff. Most are employed in the 168 fraud sector teams, and 250 specialist staff based in London and other major cities are dedicated to the investigation of organised fraud, including cases involving stolen, altered or false proof of identity to make multiple claims; counterfeiting order books and giro-cheques; bulk or systematic theft and the buying or selling of instruments of payment; and pledging order books to moneylenders in exchange for cash loans.

In 1992-93, the organised fraud unit alone made 1,400 arrests and secured £42 million worth of savings.

The House should be under no illusion about the kind of determined fraudster we are up against today. Some are sophisticated, while others are plain brazen. The House will have seen or heard of the results of the operation in south-east London yesterday morning. I am assured by the team involved that it was not staged with a view to helping us out on this debate, but the publicity that it has usefully generated this morning has brought to the public's mind, first, the skill and determination of our fraud teams, to which I pay due tribute, and, secondly, the scale of the problems involved.

I shall give a couple of examples to colour in some of our people's activities. Some investigations start with a tip-off delivered on a scrap of paper. After nine months' investigation, Operation Rolling Stone led to the arrest and conviction of five men who had defrauded the benefit system of more than £500,000. In that case, the suspects were also being investigated by Customs and Excise for their part in a multi-million pound VAT fraud.

The gang used complex anti-surveillance techniques to evade the investigators, frequently changing journey patterns en route to the benefit office. After much painstaking work, our investigators could construct the pattern of the journey and gather crucial evidence of the criminal activities.

Our investigators must sometimes go to great lengths to pursue their quarry. In that case, they had to spend six hours in a seedy pub in a most undesirable area, with just a pint of shandy between them, and even had to join in the dancing. A final irony came when one of the team, sitting observing outside, found two of the offenders coming out of the pub. Unaware of the presence of the investigator's van, they kindly leaned against the vehicle and had a long chat about the identities that they had just used and where they were going next. Walls have ears, and so do vans.

Another case involved following a man who had claimed income support using different identities. His routine was relatively tedious: café for breakfast; benefit office; and finally the pub, where he would fall asleep. On one occasion, he varied the routine to visit the local cinema, where the film "Basic Instinct" was being shown. To maintain surveillance on that occasion turned out to be less onerous for one of our investigators. The fraudster in that case was convicted, and sentenced to four years' imprisonment.

[Mr. Burt]

Another case in south London resulted in 50 minicab drivers being found to be claiming benefit. That operation saved £165,000. One individual was found to be using false documents and identities and an empty property was being used for income support claimants, with a driver travelling more than 200 miles from his home area to work. I sometimes think that if people put as much time and energy into an honest day's work as they do into fraud, they would be pretty effective.

It is not uncommon for our investigators to locate a number of counterfeit order books in premises. A recent case, Operation Hammer, unearthed 90 order books, 450 counterfeit books, credit cards, cash cards, and blank birth certificates. Some £2·4 million was saved in that operation.

Naturally, work extends to co-operation with local authorities over housing benefit fraud. In one case, a claimant and a landlord were found guilty of conspiring to defraud the DSS and a local authority. The prosecution arose as a result of a regular cheque delivery exercise conducted by the local authority's benefits investigations team. From the authority's visit to deliver the benefit cheque, it appeared that the claimant did not live at the address for which he was claiming benefit.

Further investigations by the police showed that the gentleman had a variety of different identities, for which he had housing benefit claims at two different addresses. The police also found a letter from the landlord to the claimant, warning him that local authority staff were hand-delivering girocheques, and that therefore the landlord would be preparing a room for the claimant to show that he had lived at that accommodation. For that conspiracy, the claimant received a sentence of four years and the landlord a sentence of two years.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Is my hon. Friend aware that the crackdown on fraud is happening nationwide? Only this week, 70 police officers were involved in swooping into properties in the Fishergate area of Preston, where more than 34 people were investigated and many were caught defrauding not only the DSS but housing benefit.

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend makes a good point. All over the country, officers are working in close co-operation with other enforcement agencies like the police and local authorities, to find those who are defrauding the system. I am sure that my hon. Friend would like me to pay tribute to the officers involved in that operation, and to thank them for the savings that they have made on behalf of everyone else.

While discussing detection, I should stress the importance that we place on liaison with both the Employment Service—with whom we have entered into a joint agreement to improve liaison and conducted 200 fraud drives last year—and with local authorities.

That brings me to the much-improved arrangements for local authorities to help them step up their efforts against housing benefit and council tax benefit fraud. My Department already provides, free of charge, fraud training for local authority investigators. From April this year, we have provided fresh financial incentives for authorities to investigate benefit fraud.

Without the intervention of local authority fraud staff, housing benefit and council tax benefit fraud would remain undetected, and payments would continue to be made week after week to people who were not entitled to them. More anti-fraud efforts by authorities will therefore result in significant savings to the public purse, in which local authorities can now share. In addition to housing benefit and council tax benefit savings, authorities will also share in any associated savings in income support which they discover and which result from a successful investigation.

As a further incentive for authorities, full-rate subsidy is now payable on overpayments of benefit which result from fraudulent claims. Authorities will still be able to retain any overpaid amounts they recover. That presents an opportunity for authorities, as well as taxpayers, to benefit from increased efforts against fraud. Authorities stand only to gain. Once they achieve their baselines, there is no limit to the amount of financial benefit that authorities can receive from central Government under those arrangements; the more they save the taxpayer, the more they receive in additional subsidy.

We are also considering further measures that authorities can employ to prevent benefit fraud. For example, my Department has commissioned a study into setting up a central register of housing benefit claimants. The register's purpose is to prevent individual claimants and unscrupulous landlords from making multiple claims to benefit in one or more local authority.

The Government have put in place a package of incentives that has been widely welcomed. I have been much reassured by the spirit of co-operation that prevailed throughout lengthy consultations with the local authority associations on these issues, and I pay tribute to them. We now look to local authority and Benefits Agency fraud staff to work together, making the best use of their resources, to ensure that benefit is paid only to those with a genuine entitlement.

Finally, I should say a few words about what we can do to deter fraud. I have an important message for the fraudster, "Whatever sort of benefit fraud you are engaged in, not only will you get caught, but we shall require you to repay the money, and you could well find yourself in court facing a criminal record."

No one who commits benefit fraud can be sure of getting off without criminal prosecution. Our policy is to select the most appropriate cases for court action, and we have an almost 100 per cent. success rate. More than 5,000 people were prosecuted last year alone.

Increasingly, social security fraud cases attract high-profile publicity, such as we have seen this morning in some of the national newspapers. People are rightly disgusted when they see what cheats get up to, and the sense of moral outrage is understandable, particularly when every pound lost by fraud means a pound less to spend on the needy and vulnerable.

It is right that people should be outraged by social security fraud, so I also have a message for people who know someone else who is committing fraud: "If you know someone who is abusing the system, you are having to foot the bill, not the Chancellor—not me, not my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and not the Government, but you, the ordinary law-abiding citizen of this country." I believe that publicity can act as a powerful deterrent, and I can assure the House that social security cheats will increasingly find themselves under the spotlight.

I thank those national newspapers that take the trouble to expose fraud and which cover—not just the incidents,

but the convictions and sentences. In London, the *Evening Standard* has been running a campaign against housing benefit fraud, and a variety of national newspapers are also doing their best to help in the fight.

Ultimately, the Department of Social Security intends to ensure that, where there is no other means of support, the most vulnerable are protected. To do so, we need the support of the public and the taxpayer for what we do. We owe them a duty to ensure that the provision for others is spent not only wisely and fairly, but honestly. Those who seek to cheat on that support rob not just the Government, but every man and woman in this country—and up with that we will not put.

10.3 am

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): I welcome the Minister's opening speech, and the moderate and generally factual way in which he presented it. As the debate unfolds, I hope that the Jurassic tendency does not creep in, and that we can keep to the facts.

I wish to place on record immediately that the Labour party is as committed as any other party or the Government to rooting out fraud. We certainly support the measures that the Government have announced to ensure that the fraud crackdown continues.

We must place the issue in context, and I can do no better than quote the Secretary of State for Social Security, when he said that most social security claimants were

"as honest as the day is long".—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1993; Vol. 217, c. 9.]

That does not mean that we must not root out fraud. I agree with the Minister that every £1 of fruad means £1 less to spend on genuine claimants in genuine need. We must be sure that all social security money is used for the right purpose.

The Minister briefly outlined some of the measures taken to combat fraud. They include financial incentives to encourage local authorities to fight housing benefit and council tax fraud, the allocation of additional resources to allow the Benefits Agencies to employ more specifically trained investigators and make greater use of information technology to identify fraudulent claimants, and the allocation of additional resources to fight fraud.

This morning, the hon. Gentleman has also outlined some new measures, partly based on the Comptroller and Auditor General's report, on the Government's investigation into combating organised fraud. I am pleased that the Minister has given more details on that measure.

I have a copy of the CAG's report. I found that the first recommendation involved the effective allocation of resources to meet the known fraud risk. The second consisted of four stars, as did the next. The following recommendation involved changing forms and the order books—an issue which the Minister dealt with this morning.

When I looked to see what four stars signified, I found that the information was not available on grounds of confidentiality. We are meant to be enjoying the spirit of open government, but it is fairly difficult for the Opposition to comment on some of the Government's measures, because we do not know what they are. I understand the reason for the confidentiality at one level —clearly, some of the actions must be confidential—but it is difficult to comment on all the work undertaken if some of it is kept secret.

I shall comment on the some of the work already under way and then widen the debate to include the general issues of fraud and the other side of the coin: ensuring that claimants receive the benefits to which they are legitimately entitled. Much work has been undertaken in recent months, particularly by the Benefits Agency working in conjunction with local authorities. It must be stressed that local authorities have been as keen as the Government to crack down on fraud, particularly in respect of housing benefit,and council tax.

Example after example throughout the country has shown that local authorities of whichever political persuasion are attempting to crack down on organised fraud. That fraud is often organised by unscrupulous landlords, who make bogus multiple cliams for housing benefit on behalf of individual tenants who do not exist.

We must praise the Association of London Authorities, which has worked with the London treasurers in establishing a London fraud unit in local government. That fraud team will ensure the sharing of information on fraud across boroughs and assist in preventing and tracking down large-scale fraud operations across London.

The team's activities have obtained some publicity, and I hope that this morning's debate will generate further publicity for its excellent work. I have read the detailed proposals of the work to be carried out by the Association of London Authorities in conjunction with other agencies. I commend its attempts to crack down on fraud across London.

My local authority in Manchester pays £130 million in housing benefit each year. An inquiry in 1991 showed that there was a high level of fraud among local landlords. Now, two fraud investigation teams have been appointed in the audit department specifically to deal with organised fraud involving housing benefit and individual fraud to ensure that loopholes are closed as quickly as possible. I commend local authorities throughout the country for the way in which they are seriously tackling the issue to good effect. Rooting out such fraud is in the best interests of genuine claimants.

There has been a change in the way in which local authority subsidy is arranged. The fact that local authorities received only 25 per cent. of the total cost of the money that they recovered through investigating fraud was unsatisfactory, and we welcome the fact that those authorities are now able to receive all the money obtained. An immense amount of work has been undertaken in recent months on the subject, but there is a feeling that many of the changes are being introduced too fast, without proper guidelines to ensure that the officers are fully briefed on the actions they should take.

The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux questioned the adequacy of training given to fraud officers who, it said,

"often appear to be ignorant of the law and of claimant's rights and appear to be responsible to no one".

There seems to be a lack of accountability in some of the systems set up to undertake interdepartmental agency work. I hope that the Minister will look at some of the guidelines to ensure that adequate training is provided.

There is a feeling that the recovery targets set for local authorities are unrealistically high. I know that there is a lower level and a higher level, but my investigations across the country convince me that many local authorities find it extremely difficult to hit even the lower targets—not

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because of a lack of will to undertake the work, but from a feeling that the Government have set the targets unrealistically high. They should be reconsidered, to ensure that local authorities are given a realistic incentive to investigate fraud.

I make this point because local authorities have to allocate dedicated staff to undertake the investigations. Because of the tight budgets under which they operate, they want to be sure that the training and transfer of staff for fraud work will be cost effective. They must therefore be given, as promised, proper incentives by the Government to hit their targets by investing money in such work and getting it back when they actually hit the targets.

The fact that the Government, I understand, are looking again at the shape of the incentives regime is being viewed with some cynicism. I hope that the Minister will confirm today that there will be no negative change, and that local authorities will not be penalised for pursuing fraud. Local authorities must be able to gain benefits from investigations of this nature.

The Minister commented on the targets for fraud savings that the Government are setting in the social security budget. The Secretary of State has clearly said that he hopes to save £1 billion in the financial year by cracking down on social security fraud. The Employment Service has a separate target: 63,000 claims withdrawn following investigation.

That is a great hike compared with savings from previous years. In 1986-87, the target was £144 million, in 1990-91, it was £332 million, and in 1991-92, it was £433·7 million. So the target has been doubled in one year. We should continually bear in mind the fact that, in the context of the overall budget, even £1 billion is not a large amount. The overwhelming majority of claimants are honest and receive their just entitlement to benefit, as I have already said. In terms of overall expenditure on benefits, £1 billion is barely more than 1 per cent.—a tiny figure.

Clearly, every pound has to be used effectively—we do not deviate from that position—but let us always remember the context so that we do not get things out of proportion. In any case, Government targets do not always have to do with real money. Rule changes in 1989 expanded the number of items that can be counted as fraud savings.

In particular, the new rules included irregularities, not necessarily proven fraud, and they provided for notional savings from cases where an investigation might have found an irregularity without recouping any cash. Moreover, the figures are arrived at by multiplying recorded fraudulent claims savings, real or notional, by a factor of 32, based on the belief that, if a fraud had not been discovered, it would have taken at least 32 weeks before it was later discovered.

Thus, many target figures are only notional, not hard cash savings. They are extrapolations which the Government use to arrive at their £1 billion-worth of savings.

There is some danger of overstating the amount of fraud in the system. The Benefits Agency admits that it has no way of determining the true level of fraud:

"There is no fraud targeting of specific groups of people whether by race, region or national origin or by social status."

The agency emphasises:

"We do not keep statistics on benefit fraud broken down by nationality or by immigration status, including asylum seekers."

It therefore seemed a little strange that the Secretary of State should say in Brighton last year:

"We have tightened up on bogus asylum seekers. Already nearly 20,000 have evaporated into thin air."

We are not arguing that bogus asylum seekers or people claiming social security benefits illegally should not be clamped down on; but I hope that, when the Government give statements to the press or the House, they will talk about actual figures and cases, and not make generalised statements that can be misconstrued. The problem, after all, is small.

I hope that we will remain cautious and not use emotive language when dealing with cases of fraud. Quite a number of welfare rights groups have expressed their concern about the treatment of certain groups who appear to be subject to special scrutiny and unreasonable testing, in the form of DSS identity checks in local offices.

I want absolute assurances from the Minister that fraud will be dealt with case by case, not by lumping together groups of people and making assumptions about whether they are more likely than others to put in fraudulent claims. We must ensure that investigations are done sensitively by well trained officers—and case by case, not judging by people's circumstances or status, be they homeless, young or any other type that the Government may want to pursue.

Mr. Nicholls: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that welfare rights organisations themselves should perhaps come out and make the point that it is no part of their remit to make light of fraud? Given the consensus between us on this occasion, it might considerably help the public debate if they made the point clearly that fraud is unacceptable, and if they urged their members and those whom they look after to co-operate as fully as they can in stamping it out.

Mr. Bradley: I am not aware of any welfare rights organisation that has publicly condoned fraud or that has not undertaken its duties with the highest professional competence. These organisations ensure that they do not assist bogus claims, and they carry out crucial work to make certain that everyone entitled to benefit receives the benefit for which he has sought assistance. These organisations also ensure that all the benefits to which people may be entitled are properly administered on their behalf.

As I have said, we must be careful not to be emotive or to generalise. I hope that we will not fall into the trap to which the Minister alluded—in previous debates some of those who have spoken have done no credit to themselves. They did not further the cause of ensuring that the debate is taken seriously.

The Secretary of State's speech at last year's Tory party conference had more to do with rallying his supporters and perhaps strengthening his position in the Cabinet than addressing the issue of fraud. *[Interruption.]* I shall take that as a sedentary comment. Would the Government Whip like to intervene?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. We will obey the rules here.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman spoke about conduct in debates. My hon. Friends can speak for themselves, but I

can say that no Minister has ever done anything less than full credit to himself in fraud debates. It is the Government's duty to make it plain to the House and the country how we feel about fraud. It is entirely right for us to express our views on fraud in strong terms.

Mr. Bradley: I shall leave others to judge the intemperate nature of those debates by reading them.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Fraud is obviously wrong, but does my hon. Friend agree that it would be useful to have in Government time a debate on tax evasion in the City of London, and major fraud by major companies?

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend anticipates the next part of my speech. It is important to adopt an even-handed approach to fraud, and to examine it from all sides. To get a proper perspective, we must examine some high-profile fraud cases, expecially those involving tax evasion.

The Minister waved today's editions of the papers. By chance, I looked at yesterday's *Evening Standard* which states:

"Whitehall caterers cooked the books in £1 million fiddle."

We cannot look at social security or local government fraud without looking at fraud in Government, industry and private enterprise. High-profile trials have included Guinness, Blue Arrow and Maxwell. Those and many others have cost taxpayers billions of pounds.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members that, although it is perfectly in order to make a passing reference to issues that may appear to be germane, the debate must centre on social security fraud.

Mr. Bradley: I accept your ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I wonder how many people who have been convicted of tax evasion and fraud are now on social security. According to the Government's estimate, tax evasion costs the taxpayer up to £4 billion a year. That places in context the Government's £1 billion target for social security fraud. That is a passing reference, and I shall say no more on the matter.

Mr. Corbyn: Is my hon. Friend aware that in many cases involving tax fraud and companies going bankrupt in rather, shall we say, curious circumstances, there is often a great loss to the national insurance fund? That hits people who contribute to that fund, and it is important that that aspect of company and City fraud should be followed up as assiduously as any other kind.

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend is right. We are debating the loss of taxpayers' money that could be used for other purposes, and especially to help those in the greatest need. Any loss of revenue disadvantages the country generally. We should clamp down on tax fraud and general fraud wherever it appears.

Mr. Nicholls: Crime is indivisible, and should be punished. Why does the hon. Gentleman seek to distinguish between the two types of fraud? Is he afraid of the tendencies of his hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)?

Mr. Bradley: The hon. Gentleman was clearly not listening. I have made quite the opposite point—that the issues are not separate, and that we should look at the total loss of revenue. We should be even-handed in stamping out social security fraud or fraud in any other aspect of public or private life.

The debate has concentrated on organised fraud, which is the cause of most of the abuse. As the Minister rightly said, individual abuses often occur because of ignorance or mistakes in filling out forms. Only a small part of the saving of £433·7 million was due to the recovery of payments made as a result of error rather than overpayment as a result of fraud. I appreciate that when a claimant realises that he has made an error, it has to be rectified immediately. However, social security officers have a duty to give claimants the maximum help to ensure that they claim correctly.

Some valuable work has been undertaken to simplify claims forms, but more needs to be done, because, for many people, the forms are complex. Staff training, and officers who are sensitive in their dealings with claimants, will help to ensure that claimants do not encounter difficulties in filling in the forms.

I am sure that many hon. Members have taken up cases on behalf of constituents and, on making representations to social security officers, have found that mistakes in administering the forms have caused the difficulties. Money is repaid to the claimants, but we must ensure that claimants' errors that can be built into fraud statistics are balanced by statistics on administrative errors. That will ensure that benefits are properly calculated, and that people receive them when they need them rather than at some later stage.

The other side of the clampdown on fraud is an assurance that people will receive the benefits to which they are entitled. A high take-up is essential to ensure that the poorest in our society receive the meagre income to which they are entitled through the benefits system. In the wider context of the public expenditure debates, it is worrying that, in the *Financial Times* this week, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is quoted as saying:

"The reason why public spending is rising remorselessly is . . . partly the increasing take-up of benefits. The latter factor was a desirable thing but had to be re-examined in the light of public borrowing".

I should like an assurance from the Minister that there is no intention to "re-examine" the take-up of benefits, or to limit take-up by people legitimately entitled to them. It would be scandalous if it were to be looked at in that context. His words may have been truncated, but what he said was clear. We have to ensure that everyone receives their just entitlement from the benefits system.

The latest Government figures show that, in 1988-89, some £1·6 billion of benefit money went unclaimed. Figures compiled by the DSS and International Social Service for the main means-tested benefit show that a quarter of people entitled to income support do not claim that entitlement.

Over 30 per cent. of people entitled to housing benefit do not claim it, and approximately 50 per cent. of those entitled to family credit do not claim it. Take-up of family credit is now higher, at 64 per cent., as shown by a report from the Policy Studies Institute for 1991. Even so, many families are not claiming the benefit that the Government see as the crucial one to protect and support families in work.

Mr. Nigel Evans: While I accept that those who are entitled to benefit ought to receive it, the counter-argument is obviously true: those who are not entitled to

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benefit should not get it. That is the main thrust of our debate. Is not the hon. Gentleman's problem with the debate the comments of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) last year in the *Daily Express*? He said:

"Labour has been linked to freeloaders for too long. I was brought up on a council estate and know ordinary folk expect rewards for hard work. They have no time for people who lie in bed when they are fit and able to get a job."

What is the hon. Gentleman's view of that?

Mr. Bradley: I have made the Labour party's position clear, and it does the hon. Gentleman no credit to undervalue the need to ensure that people who are justly entitled to benefits receive them. The figures that I have quoted clearly show that there is a vast amount of under-claiming of benefits.

Mr. Corbyn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bradley: No, I will not give way at the moment, as I must continue with my speech. I hope that the Government——

Mr. Nicholls: We want Jeremy.

Mr. Bradley: I am sure that my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) will be able to make some salient points later. I am representing a vast number of Members of Parliament here this morning, and my hon. Friend will be helping me considerably.

I seek from the Minister an assurance that the publicity campaign to ensure that people receive their entitlements is not undermined by the need to reduce public expenditure. As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North has already mentioned them, perhaps now is the time to pay tribute to the work that welfare rights officers undertake throughout the country, not only with individual claimants but in taking up campaigns on benefits to ensure that all those in their locality are receiving the benefits to which they are entitled.

I am anxious that, through the multi-agency approach adopted with the clampdown on fraud, more work should be undertaken to ensure that there can be a one-stop method of claiming benefits. More resources must be put into computerisation of benefit records so that, when claimants arrive at one agency to claim a certain benefit, there is an automatic link-up with records from other departments and other agencies to ensure that they are quickly alerted to the fact that they may be entitled to other benefits.

The link between local authorities and the DSS is important in that process, but I know that local authorities would like more resources to develop internal computer systems—so that, for example, when individuals claim housing benefit, they are immediately alerted through the computer link-up to other local authority benefits to which they may be entitled, such as free school meals. That ensures that claimants do not have to trawl around different departments in the local authority to make different assessments and different claims to ensure that they are getting their entitlements.

More work needs to be done on such systems, and I hope that the Government will look at that with a view to putting additional resources into that aspect of local authority and other agency work, so as to simplify the system and ensure that people do not lose out on their benefits. The take-up of benefits is not satisfactory, and we must ensure that people receive their just benefits.

Another benefit that is not being properly considered by the Government is the social fund. The annual report of the social fund came out only last week, and it is a great sadness to millions that the Government have refused to reform it, despite many reports, such as that in March by the Social Security Advisory Committee describing it as "an appalling lottery".

Because of cash limits, even if a cause is judged deserving, a person may be refused help if the budget has been spent. The problem with the social fund has always been that the time of year when one walked through the door influenced whether one received help from it.

Many cases involve two people in identical circumstances, one of whom makes a claim from the social fund on 1 April, at the beginning of the year, and the other who claims later in the year, say in January or February. Because of the cash-limited nature of the social fund, the latter claimant does not receive money from the fund, because all the money has been spent. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that the Government have not recognised the vast amount of research and work on the social fund that shows the faults in it, and that they have refused to accept those criticisms.

Richard Berthoud of the PSI calculates that the social fund distributes half as much——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues—perhaps he knows what I am about to say—I should say that it seems to me that the point that he is making is the reverse of fraud. The burden of his argument is that entitlements are not being dealt with. I hope that he will not pursue that any longer, because it is not strictly germane to the debate.

Mr. Bradley: I understand whay you are saying, Madam Deputy Speaker. I can only say that many of my constituents who have been to see me over lack of access to the social fund have said that they feel that it is fraudulent that they have not been able to receive help from the social fund. Within that broad context of fraud, I am discussing the inadequacies of the social fund. The Secretary of State said in the annual report on the fund that, in 1992-93, 45,491 people were refused a loan to buy essentials or were too poor or in debt to repay the loan. That does not bolster confidence in the social security review.

I accept that that may be slightly wide of the mark of the debate, but I hope that the Minister will urge the Secretary of State to look again at the organisation and administration of the social fund. It is a sad commentary that people are too poor to receive the help they so desperately need from the one source of money that may be available to them. Although they have to pay that money back, it is the only way that many people with short-term problems can gain access to funds over and above the meagre level of income support.

On top of that, the other sector where claimants feel that they may have been fraudulently dealt with is within the stiffer targets that have been introduced this year to reduce the number of people getting unemployment benefit.

The Department of Employment said that 9 per cent. of initial claims should not be pursued by civil servants——

Lady Olga Maitland: (Sutton and Cheam): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is not the hon. Gentleman's speech far wide of the subject of social security fraud? Should we not now return to the main point?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Lady can safely leave that matter in my hands.

Mr. Bradley: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall be brief on that point.

We must ensure that, in the pressure to root out fraud, we do not also root out genuine claims, whether for unemployment benefit, social fund payments or any other benefit.

One worrying aspect of the changes in working practices within the social security benefit offices is the move to market testing. The social security fraud division of the Benefits Agency is a candidate for privatisation next year under the Government's market testing programme. During the feasibility studies, staff of the Benefits Agency expressed the fear that without direct accountability within the agency, there could be blackmail and abuse.

One study actually stated:

"The scope for abuse of this type of information is enormous and must be regarded as a very high risk area in the context of market testing."

I put that on the record so that the Minister can respond to it this morning and assure us about the way in which market testing and privatisation of the benefits system will be organised, especially in the most sensitive area of a crackdown on fraud.

I have made absolutely clear—and put clearly on the record—the Labour party's commitment vigorously to pursue fraud, not only in the social security system but wherever it may occur, and especially tax evasion. At all times, we must deal with the other side of the coin and be equally committed to ensuring that everyone receives his just entitlement under the benefits system. The system is complicated and complex, and a minefield for many individuals seeking help.

We must ensure—through the resources that we put into the system, the training of staff, the way that claim forms are considered and efficient administration—that each claim is dealt with carefully. The purpose of the staff must always be, as I am sure it is, that each individual receives the benefit to which he is entitled.

It is a worrying time to read in the public expenditure review the statement that I have already mentioned. We must not place the burden of that statement on the poor who are desperately trying to make ends meet through an inadequate system.

I repeat that the Labour party's commitment is to stamp our fraud, but it is also to ensure that each individual receives the entitlement that he so justly deserves.

10.44 am

Mr. Vivian Bendall (Ilford, North): I want to discuss two aspects of social security fraud—first, in the minicab sector and, secondly, in housing benefit. I must first declare an interest as I represent the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association. That interest is recorded in the Register of Members' Interests.

A great deal of information has been collated by the association. It wrote to the Employment Service inspectorate setting out evidence given to the Public Accounts Committee. I want to draw the attention of the House to some of the facts and figures of cases analysed by the association. The first case, code name Operation Met 999 Special, occurred in 1991. Officers from the Metropolitan police and inspectors from the social security fraud squad interviewed 159 minicab drivers at Heathrow airport, of whom 62 were found to be claiming unemployment benefit. The result of that investigation was a benefit saving of £73,018.

The second case, Operation Icarus, also involved Heathrow. In July 1992, 150 minicab drivers were questioned, of whom 107 were found to be fraudulently claiming income support. There was a resultant benefit saving of £161,357. In April 1993, Operation Achilles—again at Heathrow—was run over three days. Of the 150 minicab drivers questioned, 50 were found to be claiming unemployment benefit. There was a saving of £45,000. More recently, on 25 June and 1 July, during an operation in London's west end, 89 minicab drivers were questioned of whom 26—30 per cent.—were found to be claiming unemployment benefit.

The Government estimate that there are 38,000 to 40,000 minicabs in the London area. Taking the first three cases, a total of 459 drivers—1/87th of the London total—were questioned, with a total benefit saving of £279,000. If the figures are representative of fraud within the minicab sector, £24 million in benefit payments could be saved. That is not an inconsiderable sum. Of course, fraud does not stop at London—it is occurring in many cities, such as Glasgow, Cardiff and Leeds. It does not need much imagination to realise that an enormous amount of money is being fraudulently claimed by minicab drivers.

I have been carrying out some investigations with the help of the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. Although it has not been stated, it appears to me that not enough money is being made available for the number of investigations required. Strangely enough, at this very moment a major operation is under way at Heathrow involving the Metropolitan police and social security fraud inspectors. However, the operation is time constrained because of financial restrictions.

My plea to my hon. Friend the Minister is that where it is clear that fraud is occurring—as investigations have proved a great deal of fraud is being perpetrated in the minicab sector in London and throughout the country—the appropriate action must be taken to stop that disgraceful practice. Not only are ordinary taxpayers footing the bill for that fraud, but minicab drivers are collecting fares and tips on which they are not paying tax. Enormous losses are therefore occurring across the board. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to make more finances available to combat that.

I crave your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, in deviating from the main issue to emphasise that enormous problems confronting the legitimate cab trade because of illegal touting—most of it by minicabs. If they were put off the road and prevented from operating, that would also stop fraudulent benefit claims.

If one wants to receive housing benefit, it is the easiest thing in the world to acquire from any letting agent the details of a property and then to receive housing benefit. Letting agents are becoming a little cute, and a letting agent may have the benefit paid direct to the landlord or to himself. I declare an interest, as a partner in an estate agency—so I know what happens.

[Mr. Vivian Bendall]

If a landlord or letting agent is not cute enough to have the occupier's housing benefit paid direct, more often than not—after the deposit and first month's rent has been paid—that is the last that either will see of rent on the property. Arrears rapidly accrue and, because of assured tenancy legislation, the occupier cannot be taken to court for two months. Even then, another two months may elapse because the courts are so busy. It may be five months at the earliest before the property can be repossessed, at a cost to the landlord of £3,000 or £4,000.

Of greater concern is the fact that an occupier may have pocketed the money he or she received as housing benefit and not passed it on to the landlord or agent. Just as the bailiffs are about to go in, the occupant may do a moonlight—and then move on to another London local authority. Because no check is made, that individual can then proceed to do exactly the same.

That happens time and again. The property world knows very well what happens to housing benefit, but how can that problem be stopped?

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Is my hon. Friend aware of another problem that particularly affects popular holiday areas where there is a need for affordable rented accommodation? I know from personal experience that if one has a capital gains tax problem, one can roll it over into holiday accommodation but not into rented accommodation for social purposes. The agency that handles my property has 6,000 properties, mainly in the west country, that are let out for holidays—often for that purpose. Does my hon. Friend, with all his professional experience, agree that, instead of making such a distinction, it would be better if more properties could be let at reasonable rents, preferably to local people? It all boils down to supply and demand.

Mr. Bendall: I cannot see any reason for that distinction. It would be advantageous to free such properties for permanent rather than holiday lets. The more property that is available for letting, the more likely it is that rents would be set at a sensible level, because the public would have a greater choice. I certainly agree with my hon. Friend in that respect.

For far too long, claimants have been arriving in one London borough from another, or from another part of the country, expecting to be rehoused. In the 1980s, when there was high employment in London and the south-east, such a policy might have worked to the benefit of people moving from the north, north-west or north-east, but now that unemployment is highest in London and the south-west, encouraging people to move from other parts of the country to London only makes the situation worse and produces inflated rents.

If more rented housing were made available in those other areas, at lower rents than in London, the rents in London would also be more sensible. The time has come for the Minister responsible—and that is not my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt)—seriously to examine that possible means of solving the problem of social security benefit fraud. A spin-off would be an easing of pressure on school and hospital places and on other social services.

As to stopping fraudulent claimants moving from one authority to another, no housing benefit should be paid to tenants; it should be paid only to landlords or their agents, and the landlord should be registered with the local authority. If a tenant left and the landlord failed to declare that change, the local authority would know where to find the landlord and there could be no nonsense.

Substantial savings can be made just by ending fraud in housing benefit and among minicab drivers, and hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, rightly, that those savings could be used to benefit genuine, less fortunate claimants. A good start would be to help pensioners and those in the poverty trap, just above income support level, who will be hurt most by the imposition of value added tax on fuel. Much benefit can flow from the right action against fraud. Ways can be found of dealing with that fraud and it can be stopped if there is the will.

10.57 am

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): I begin by telling the House about Jack O'Nory. I refer not to the well-known children's television programme but to the individual of that name, who submitted a claim for unemployment benefit last year—along with Count Dracula, Donald Duck and Gary Lineker. Their discovery contributed to the Department of Employment saving the taxpayer £34 million.

The Department of Social Security has a much larger problem combating fraud, and my hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced that he intends to deal with it this year, to make savings of £1 billion. In view of money that would make available to the DSS to spend on other benefits, it is surprising that no Liberal Democrat Members are present for this debate. I assume that they are all in Christchurch, telling pensioners there how much Liberal Democrats care about social security issues. Those of us who are present for this debate will not fail to remind our constituents of the absence of Liberal Democrat Members and of their apparent complete lack of concern about social security fraud.

Blackpool and the whole Fylde coast region is an important area for the Department of Social Security. It is, after all, the centre of the administration of the Benefits Agency. It is also, unfortunately, a national centre for social security fraud and benefits abuse. Blackpool is by no means unique. It has a number of problems in common with other tourist resorts and it seems to act as a magnet for such activities for two reasons.

First, there is a thriving black economy in the town. There is much seasonal work available and that seems to attract one type of social security fraud. Secondly, by far the most important reason is the many hotels, guest houses, hostels and houses in multiple occupation which encourage large-scale housing benefit fraud. Blackpool, after all, has more bed space than Portugal and 2,000 properties that are what is commonly described locally as DSS hostels. That is extremely damaging for Blackpool's reputation as a tourist resort.

Blackpool seems to act as a magnet for fraudsters from all over the north of England and, unfortunately, fraud is conducted on a grand scale. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Mr. Bendall) said, that often results in landlords—or, in my case, mostly landladies—being defrauded. What is most disgraceful is that there is sometimes connivance by the landlords and by some employers at the two types of social security fraud.

Those who make money at the expense of the town's genuine tourist trade by providing cheap, unregulated and below-standard accommodation for DSS customers are often prepared to turn a blind eye to housing benefit fraud. I hope that the Minister will accept that tightening up on fraud, especially in tourist areas and especially on housing benefit, has been and will be widely welcomed by all good, law-abiding citizens of towns such as Blackpool. They recognise that it is genuinely good for tourism, for business and ultimately for employment in those towns. It stops the drift into tattiness and seediness which is becoming a problem in so many of our leading tourist resorts.

I am delighted that the Benefits Agency especially is taking fraud in Blackpool seriously. In the year ending 31 March 1993,the Blackpool fraud sector, which covers the whole area from Lytham St. Anne's up to Knott End-on-Sea, carried out 2,158 investigations of which 914 cases resulted in a weekly benefits saving. Some 304 cases produced an instrument of payment saving and overpayment was detected in a further 304 cases. It is estimated that, because of that, there were gross savings last year of £2.5 million.

During the past couple of months, the Benefits Agency and the Department of Social Security investigations squad have launched Operation Sea Breeze. As part of that, the fraud support team investigated 1,600 claimants. Some 20 per cent. of them were found to be making false claims for housing benefit and income support. During the past few weeks, the squad conducted a dawn raid on four DSS hostels in my constituency. It found that of 70 claimants at those premises, more than half did not live there or had moved on. That is a shocking statistic. People locally were shocked by the sheer scale of fraud and it brought home to them what the scale of the problem is.

Mr. Sykes: Like my hon. Friend, I represent two tourist resorts, Scarborough and Whitby. We, too, have a growing problem with DSS hostels. Does my hon. Friend agree that they are the centres of crime and fraud? Does he also agree that the Department of the Environment could play its part in solving the problem by changing the use class orders so that local councils could make decisions about where the DSS hostels should be?

Mr. Elletson: I agree with my hon. Friend. I have no doubt that the overwhelming number of people who, unfortunately, are claiming DSS benefits and living in temporary accommodation are genuine people with genuine problems. However, there are many who are not genuine. In tourist resorts such as mine and the one that my hon. Friend represents, there are now so many of these places that they are having an extremely damaging effect on the tourist trade. As I said, there are 2,000 such places in my constituency and I am sure that my hon. Friend has similar numbers in his.

I have to say that various Departments seem to be passing the buck. The buck must stop at the Department of the Environment, which must take the issue seriously. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will pass our serious concern about the matter to the Department of the Environment and that he will ensure that it does something about the problem.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My hon. Friend has chosen an important and worrying subject to raise in this debate. I am sure that he is aware that this phenomenon occurs not only in Blackpool or Scarborough. I fear that all over the country, claimants who go to boarding houses usually have no connection with the area in which they are temporarily residing. They come from other parts of the country and they cause crime not only in the immediate vicinity, but in the hinterland, as has happened in the south-west. There is considerable fear in the south-west that some of the crimes there are committed by people from such areas.

Mr. Corbyn: What is the evidence?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he cannot intervene from a sedentary position. There is a proper way in which he can do so

Mr. Elletson: I fully agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson). There is plenty of evidence which the police will, I am sure, be delighted to provide to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). My conversations with the police in my constituency suggest that they are deeply aware of the problem. That is why they have done so much recently to investigate it.

I especially agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton about the number of people coming from other areas into towns such as Taunton, Blackpool and Scarborough, often because local hoteliers advertise in places such as Scotland and Liverpool for people to come to collect their DSS benefits, to register and to live in sunny Scarborough or sunny Blackpool. That cannot be good for them or those towns because we do not have the employment infrastructure to support them. It is a serious problem and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to take it seriously and to pass on our concern to the Department of the Environment.

I also urge my hon. Friend to continue the clampdown that he has launched, which has been so successful in Blackpool and in other areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) mentioned the recent clampdown in the Fishergate area of Preston. Those activities are having a seriously good effect in such towns, as Operation Sea Breeze has had in Blackpool, and I hope that they will continue. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister and all those involved in them.

Mr. Knapman: Will my hon. Friend take the point made by our hon. Friend the Member for Taunton a little further? Genuine people with genuine claims would receive prompt service from Government agencies if there were fewer fraudulent claims.

Mr. Elletson: I agree absolutely. I cannot begin to estimate the time and finance involved in dealing with fraud. That must have extremely damaging consequences for those who have genuine problems. That is the whole point.

The scale of the problem nationally is alarming. In 1992-93, DSS investigators discovered that almost 250,000 people were cheating the system. The Department reckons to have saved about £500 million by stopping fraudulent claims last year. However, the Exchequer is losing about £2 billion a year through social security fraud. This year, we aim to save £1 billion through anti-fraud activities. It is vital that we concentrate on that. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, every pound lost means less for those who are in real need.

Earlier this year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security said that the increase in benefits

[Mr. Elletson]

that he was able to announce in extremely difficult economic circumstances was made possible largely because of the savings that had been achieved through cleaning up fraud. It is vital, therefore, that we should continue to do so.

I shall elaborate on a few of the points that have already been made about what else could be done. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North suggested that we should pay more attention to minicab fraud. He was absolutely right to make that point. As he said, it is not a problem which affects London alone. It is prevalent throughout the country, certainly in my constituency and others like it. The Secretary of State and the Minister of State are absolutely right to say that we should make fraud a priority. Earlier today, the Under-Secretary suggested that the priorities should be to prevent, to detect and to deter fraud. I hope that he will look at other specific areas where I believe we could make great inroads.

First, I urge the Under-Secretary to target tourist resorts for major clampdowns. That is bound to yield real savings for him. Secondly, and in line with that, he should consider the establishment of some form of telephone hotline, particularly in tourist resorts. If he did that and reached out to the public, I think that he would find a genuine and grateful response that would provide much information and enable him to deal with the problem in tourist resorts.

That is part of a wider point about better publicity. We must convince people who are tempted to defraud the system—both tenants, when it comes to housing benefit, landlords and employers, who may connive at this sort of fraud—that they cannot get away with it and, more importantly, that they are likely to be caught. The Department of Social Security has a good record in clearing up fraud. It has a very good story to tell, particularly in constituencies such as mine where it is cracking down hard on fraud. We must make it clearer, perhaps at the point of requests for assistance with social security, that fraudulent claims will be dealt with and are likely to end up in some form of prosecution.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Is my hon. Friend aware of the fraud that asylum seekers coming into this country are committing and that, as from next month, all of them will be fingerprinted, a measure which was resisted strongly by Opposition Members?

Mr. Elletson: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. The scale of the problem and the amount of money that appears to be going out in fraudulent payments to those people is absolutely disgraceful and must clearly be regarded as another priority.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Elletson: Yes, I shall certainly give way to the hon. Gentleman. I think that we have all been looking forward to hearing from him.

Mr. Corbyn: Just so that the record can be put straight, Labour members on the Standing Committee that considered the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Bill opposed the fingerprinting of all potential refugees, including children—which Conservative Members supported—because there is already a perfectly adequate system for identifying asylum seekers by the issuing of a letter, stamped and embossed, which also includes a photograph. We believe that the use of fingerprinting is an attempt to criminalise people who seek asylum in this country. That is why we opposed that provision and that is why a large number of libertarian and legal sources also opposed it.

Mr. Elletson: I am sure that my hon. Friends and the whole House will take note of the hon. Gentleman's reminder that the Opposition opposed that provision, but I think that they will be suitably sceptical about the excuses which the hon. Gentleman gave.

Mr. Corbyn: What excuses?

Mr. Elletson: I suggest also that the Under-Secretary of State should toughen up on landlords and employers who are prepared to connive at social security fraud. There is a substantial amount of evidence that fraud is taking place. I do not think that landlords, in particular, should be allowed to get away with it. I know that there have been prosecutions, but stamping out fraud needs to be a major priority.

It is also important that we should work on the type of system that delivers results in combating social security fraud and ensure better co-ordination between local authorities, the DSS, the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service. It has been the key to success in a number of recent operations, particularly in Blackpool, Manchester and Westminster. The Government have introduced a programme of incentives for councils to clear up housing benefit and council tax fraud. They can attract a 100 per cent. subsidy for benefits that have been overpaid. Councils will also share in any increase in benefits that these savings achieve. That must be good news.

Mr. Bendall: Is my hon. Friend aware that in London, where one local authority can rehouse people in another borough, those people are supposed to register when that happens but that, more often than not, they do not, which is why councils often cannot catch up with people?

Mr. Elletson: Absolutely. That problem is to be found all over the country. I hope that the Minister will take note of that point, too, and will pass on the message to the Department of the Environment.

The introduction of new technology will be important in combating social security fraud. The new computer system that is to be put into operation in the 160 or so fraud areas will have a major impact.

The Under-Secretary should not hold back in dealing with the problem. I am sure that he will not. In a climate of rising public expenditure, we cannot afford to waste money. Nobody would expect us to waste £2 billion a year on fraud. The Under-Secretary was right to say that the people of this country are outraged by fraud and they expect him to become the hammer of the fraudsters. I hope that he will take the gloves off and deal with this matter with an iron fist.

11.16 am

Mr. A. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): We in Northern Ireland have many problems—of identity, security, lack of parliamentary democracy. There are also problems over the way in which Northern Ireland legislation is handled in this House. There is also the problem of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Irish Government sticking their nose in

our affairs. All these problems contribute to the unrest. That unrest and instability lead to the problems that we share with the rest of the United Kingdom: serious fraud and the abuse of the social security system.

One problem that concerns us very much centres on the legislation regarding homelessness and the fraud to which it has given rise. The Housing Executive was set up by the Government to look after and administer public sector housing, and its policy of housing homeless single people has led to great problems. Single homeless people use their houses only for the receipt of their social security cheques —well known as giro drops. They do not live in their houses. Many of them still live in the family home, but they use the social security system to get their cheques delivered to the houses that they have obtained through the Housing Executive.

The Housing Executive does not care too much about that, because it gets its housing benefit money through the Social Security Agency. It is one of the biggest problems we face, but it could be overcome if the Government would grasp the nettle and make the Housing Executive much more aware of its responsibilities. We have a large waiting list for houses. The people on that waiting list are legitimate family people who have been waiting for houses for years. While this system continues, they will never be rehoused.

Another serious problem concerns the building industry in Northern Ireland. I am sure that many hon. Members are aware of the serious scam perpetrated by the IRA a few years ago, when it defrauded the Government of literally millions of pounds through false tax exemption certificates.

The Government have recently produced a consultative document to regulate the building industry in Northern Ireland. I welcome it, but it does not get to the nub of the problem, because most fraud still involves social security and the 714 tax exemption system. Much could be done under existing legislation if the present law were applied with some force and vigour.

An example of the problems in the building industry is the way in which labour is brought on to building sites throughout the Province. Casual labour is bussed in to build houses and other buildings under Government programmes. The people involved are drawing the dole, but are prepared to work for cheap rates, which causes great problems for the wages system. In many cases, the labour even comes from the Irish Republic, and the people are allowed to go there one day a week to draw their dole.

One can imagine the problems caused for the building industry and for those who wish to get legitimate work in it, but are unfortunately unable to do so. When the Government try to investigate such problems, a paramilitary influence is unfortunately often brought to bear, and can stop investigations because of fear and intimidation.

There are also problems in the private sector, such as office cleaning businesses, where people are being employed "on the double" to clean offices and other public buildings. They, too, work for cheap rates. Even in the private security sector, some people work for as little as £60 a week, which causes great consternation and is certainly not helping our economy or people who wish to work legitimately. They are the great difficulties we experience in Northern Ireland, especially when some of the people involved are also drawing unemployment benefit, thus causing problems for the whole social security system.

As hon. Members will know, many chain stores are setting up in business in Northern Ireland, and some are doing well—some would say, much better than on the mainland. The reason is that we have a lucrative black market, which invariably distorts the unemployment figures and other statistics.

My purpose is to make the Government aware of our problems and to ask them to consult the various agencies more actively to combat this scourge in our community.

11.23 am

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I have been a Member of Parliament for 10 years. Before that, such are my curious tastes, I was an assiduous reader of *Hansard*. I was never aware of a major debate in which a major political party—or one which claims to be so—was content to field no spokesman.

I thought that my hon. Friend the Minister accepted the apology of the person who apparently speaks for social security matters on behalf of the Liberal Democratic party with his customary courtesy and friendliness. The Dispatch Box imposes that discipline on Ministers from time to time; luckily, those of us who are not charged with the responsibilities of office can take a more robust view.

It is extraordinary to hear the excuse that it is not possible for an hon. Member to speak to the House because the business was arranged only the week before. There have been times when I have been unable to speak in a regional debate affecting the west country for precisely that reason, but members of my party were here to speak on behalf of the people we all represent.

Clearly, one sometimes cannot tell what the business will be for the following Friday and cannot be sure that one will be here, but the idea that a political party cannot get anyone to turn up is extraordinary. Representatives of the Ulster Unionist party are here; I am sure that they find it extremely inconvenient to be here on Friday, but their party has arranged for representation.

We should remember that today the Liberal Democratic party is doubtless out on the streets of Christchurch telling the pensioners of Christchurch, whose pensions are paid from the social security budget, that they would like those pensions greatly enhanced. Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament will be telling them how outrageous it is that the Government have imposed value added tax on domestic energy, but they will not mention the fact that the idea was taken directly from the Liberal Democrats' manifesto. They will also not be telling the people of Christchurch that they were not present at a debate on social security fraud—the type of fraud which directly restricts the money avaialable to help pensioners and people who will be unduly affected by the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel.

Instead of posturing on the streets of Christchurch, the Liberal Democrats could have done something and made a contribution. They could have represented the causes and concerns of those they purport to represent, but they are conspicuous by their absence. It is quite contemptible.

Until recently, I was the Conservative majority leader on the Social Security Select Committee, an experience which I greatly valued. The Committee is chaired by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is an

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

extraordinary performer. He has a knowledge of social security matters which is, I think, without equal. He has a fearless way of putting over ideas which are sometimes controversial, even within his own party. He plays a major role, and anyone who has an interest in social security, or anyone who is dependent on social security, could look to the hon. Gentleman as a model of how things should be done.

What I found impressive during my time on the Select Committee was the fact that one would never hear the hon. Member for Birkenhead suggest that fraud was anything other than wrong, wicked and criminal, and should be pursued accordingly. That was always his position, and he stated it fearlessly. Sometimes, I felt that, in an attempt to achieve an intellectual consensus, other members of the Committee found not the concept but the language in which it can be expressed rather troubling. For all I know, we may in due course hear something that reflects that position. In any event, it is important that we remember that that was the tone of the Select Committee when I was a member from 1990.

It is interesting that we have today heard precisely the same attitude from Labour's spokesman. I do not say that in any carping sense. I thoroughly enjoyed the contribution speech of the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), and I hope that he will have gathered as much from the manner of my interventions.

Not only did I enjoy the content: I had to admire the style of delivery. The hon. Member's speech lasted 35 minutes, but I make no complaint about that. It was such a marvellous balancing act that I wondered how he would get to the end without being savaged by some of his colleagues. In the end, I detected that he was going to be savaged, but he managed to defer a mauling by what he said later in his speech. His speech was refreshing and, although it reflects the way in which these matters are dealth with in Select Committee, it is perhaps unusual to hear such a speech from the Labour Front Bench. It was welcome.

We began to see some internal tensions in the hon. Gentleman's presentation, but I realised that it would not have been appropriate to say quietly, as it were, from a sedentary position, "Cross the Floor, because I cannot tell the difference between us," because one or two things that he said finally made me feel that I could detect more of a difference between us than was readily apparent at first.

I have never understood—I say this with all the insincerity at my command—why the Labour party feels it necessary in debates on social security fraud to say at once, "What about crime in the big City?" I do not understand that—I say that with a straight face because I have been in the House for about 10 years—because it seems that crime is simply indivisible. Crime is wicked; wickedness should be punished, and criminals should be pursued and brought before the courts. That strikes me as so obvious that normally it should not need to be said.

If we were to have a debate on crime in the City—I would welcome such a debate and would take part—I cannot imagine making a contribution, either in a speech or from a sedentary position, let alone from the Dispatch Box, saying, "Yes, but what about social security fraud?" Although I do not understand it, I can speculate for a moment about what is going on.

We have the revisionist tendency at the Dispatch Box —trying to square circles and make some sense of why traditional supporters have not been representing them for about a decade. On the other hand, they have their natural consituencies represented by the serried ranks behind them which take a different view. That different view is much more primitive and goes a bit like this: crime in the City is committed by upper-class toffs who are absolutely dripping in money, whereas fraud in social security matters is committed by poor people who must defraud the system to live. That is the underlying animus which drives the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). The fact that that constituency must be dealt with by the Labour Front Bench means that we must pay lip service to that concept today.

One can have a bit of merriment at the difficulty of Labour Front-Bench spokesmen when they try to square the circle, but there is a much more serious point to be made. I accept at once that it is not intended, but we should consider for a moment how profoundly insulting it is to people who depend on social security benefits—we hope that it is for a relatively short period, but perhaps it is for their whole lives—to hear fraud talked about in these terms: "It is committed by people at the lower end of the market because they are so poor that they have no choice."

We will not find that from the sort of socialists represented by the Hampstead and Islington loveys. But what we will find among the working poor, or even sometimes the non-working poor, is that they are every bit as hard on crime and in favour of criminals being punished as those of us who earn vastly more. If we talked to those who represent not the flash showbiz end of support for the Labour party but the traditional bedrock working-class adherence, we would hear a line that is so stern that it makes me appear liberal and, frankly, that is remarkable. The idea that we must simply plant the idea that upper-class crime is reprehensible and lower-class crime is in some ways justifiable is not only wrong, daft and outdated but profoundly insulting to those for whose benefit that statement is apparently made.

When we talk about the effects of fraud and the money that is forgone by social security fraud, we are not talking about someone who made a mistake in filling out a form or who perhaps, because of the pressures he or she was under, made a false declaration on an isolated occasion; we are talking about large-scale sophisticated wickedness. That is what my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State was talking about when he referred to the latest fraud investigation.

We are talking about people of real talent who will divert their considerable energies to set up structures and complexities, which must require a lot of work. We are talking about systematically defrauding the system on a grand scale. We are not talking about an individual claimant who may be under a degree of pressure. We are talking about systematic, organised crime that needs to be stamped on—it can never be stamped out, but it certainly needs to be stamped on. Anyone who has any doubt that fraud is taking place on a grand scale is looking in an entirely different direction from that in which the rest of the world is looking.

If we look at the evidence produced by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and some of the press campaigns and investigative journalism that have taken place, to which I shall refer in a moment, or think about the anecdotes that we hear—what our friends and constituents tell us—two

things are clear: first, fraud happens on a grand scale and, secondly, it is unquantifiable and one cannot begin to tell what the savings might be. The hon. Member for Withington, who led with a skilful balancing act—of course, he expressed complete support for everything that the Government are doing—did not say "but"; there were "howevers", "furthermores" and swallowed phrases. I said "but", but the hon. Gentleman would not do it, which was rather unsporting. He said everything else but "but". To "put it in context"—a lovely phrase—he decided to slip in the statement that the amounts are relatively tiny. I do not know—a billion here and a billion there these days and we are beginning to talk about a week *or* two of the public sector deficit, so every little billion helps.

There is a slightly more serious point at stake. There must be something profoundly disillusioning for working people who are paying tax on a low income—although the rate has gone down greatly under the Government, it still represents a fair chunk of their income—and it goes against the grain when they know that in the house, the bedsit or the street next door there are people who do not get up in the morning who could and who are netting not that much less than they are. That is profoundly disillusioning and corrosive.

There is nothing worse socially than making people feel humiliated by working hard to earn a low wage when they know that there are more dishonest ways of earning about the same amount. Even if the amounts are small—even much smaller than I suspect they are—we owe it to the working people and, indeed, working poor people to ensure that, as far as we can in an imperfect world, every penny that is spent on social security is spent as intended.

Under the traditional demonology that usually characterises debates such as this—I accept that it has not done so today except in an undercurrent—the feeling has often been that we should face the fact that it is the rich who pay the taxes and they can afford to pay a bit. It is incredible that, in the past, such debates have taken place almost as though the way in which we judge a social security system is by measuring not the amount that reaches the people that it was meant to reach but the amount that was spent, squandered or raised. There are simply not sufficient rich people to provide in any abundance the money to fund something as vast as a social security system.

About 89 per cent. of the revenue raised in income tax is paid by basic rate taxpayers. There are simply not enough rich people, even if we confiscated all their money, to make more than a drop in the ocean compared with the total tax take. The fact is that social security payments are paid for by basic rate taxpayers.

In this debate, there has been a feeling among Labour Members that in some way the issue is all about the Government and how much money they give to people on social security. Perhaps it needs to be said, even in these revisionist times and subject to a speech that I am looking forward to hearing in a moment——

Mr. Sykes: My hon. Friend is staying only to hear the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

Mr. Nicholls: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for saying that I am staying only to hear the hon. Member for Islington, North. I take that personally—I am upset about it.

There is a serious point to be made. There simply is not sufficient money among the rich to be able to fund the social security budget, so we need to ensure that we target effectively.

There has not been much talk today about the sorts of benefits that can be subject to specific examples of fraud, but a point that constituents have raised in letters to me needs to be made: some people on invalidity benefit are worried that in some way the debate about invalidity benefit is directed at them. Obviously, it is not, but the figures tell a particular story. Apparently, the number of invalids has increased from 700,000 to almost 1·5 million over 10 years; that figure is incredible. If so many people are sick, that would be such an important matter that even the Labour party would not have missed the opportunity to exploit it. Those figures cannot be right.

Mr. Bendall: Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures are totally contrary to all the health reports which state that people's health is improving?

Mr. Nicholls: That is right.

Some other factor is involved, which we cannot measure without further information, because it is obvious that some of those in receipt of benefit are not those for whom it was designed.

My hon. Friend the Minister has already spoken about the planned reform of the benefit system, but I hope that when he replies to the debate he will emphasise that we are not talking about chasing those people who should, rightly, claim benefit; we are trying to ensure that only those who are entitled should claim. I have received several letters from constituents who are worried that we are talking about an arbitary cut in benefits. We are not. We are trying to direct payments towards those who should receive them.

I thought that we should have heard more today, and perhaps we will, about new age travellers. I applaud the steps that the Government have taken in recent years to deal with the menace of supporting alternative life styles on the social security system when the system was not designed for that purpose. If a person is claiming income support in normal circumstances, he should be available for work. That is, of course, a passive test and we now know that it is relatively easy to avoid it. That person should also be actively seeking work. Obviously, one should do both. Two years ago, many of my constituents were outraged at the idea of bus loads of social security clerks being sent out to camp sites to facilitate the payment of benefits to people who, by any stretch of the imagination, did not satisfy those two tests.

Such abuse no longer takes place, but many of my constituents wonder how it is possible that people who have no intention of doing anything approaching a day's work are able to support their life style. They believe that there is still too much laxity in some quarters in ensuring that social security payments are applied properly. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say something about that later.

The fundamental point is that the welfare state was not designed as a mechanism for supporting those who regard themselves as being entirely outside society. The welfare state is a mechanism for supporting people in society who have fallen on hard times. Society can be broad and encompass a huge range of political ideas. It encompasses comfortably the position that I adopt in the political

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firmament and that adopted by the hon. Member for Islington, North, to whose contribution we look forward. Some new age travellers whom I have met, however, are so far removed from the sense of community and from those who are entitled to rely on the welfare state that they are unable to tell the difference, politically, between the hon. Gentleman and me. That is distressing for both of us.

In no sense can the social security system and the welfare state be considered suitable mechanisms for supporting people whose life styles are so vastly removed from what society as a whole judges to be acceptable.

There is nothing wrong in adopting an alternative life style. There is nothing wrong in people saying that the apparatus of the civilised society, demoracy, the Westminster model and the rest is not for them. What is not acceptable, however, in any circumstances, is for people who have made that decision to expect that their activities should be funded by those whom they hold in complete contempt.

It has been said by Ministers and by Conservative Back Benchers that the key is to ensure that the funds get through to those who are entitled to them. The speech by the hon. Member for Withington was interesting and of a different tone from that adopted by many in the Labour party. I suspect, however, that there are still many in the Labour movement who would suggest that the aims and intentions of the social security review are not what they seem. It is worth while emphasising again what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in a recent debate:

"What we want is a better system which ensures that the most vulnerable people in society are protected and that all of us have the means to cope with the needs and variations of life. But to do that we must make sure that the benefits system is affordable. It cannot indefinitely outstrip the economic means that the country has to pay for it. If it did so, it would become unsustainable."

My right hon. Friend's conclusion sums up the whole debate, because he said:

"That would be the greatest betrayal of those in need and damage the economy."—[*Official Report*, 7 June 1993; Vol. 226, c. 6.]

There is no Government who can pay out the money to those on benefit, just the taxpayer. We must do our duty by the taxpayer and those who need to be maintained by the system. We must therefore take the social security review seriously.

We must ponder on the fact that the Liberals could not even be bothered to turn up for the debate. We must hope —I do not have a great deal of it—that what we have heard from the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Withington, in his new-model, revisionist speech, represents the views of the serried ranks on the Opposition Benches. But we shall see.

11.45 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I have heard many speeches from the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), but his performance today must rank as one of his greatest and most idiotic.

The hon. Gentleman set up a huge Aunt Sally and spent 20 minutes trying to knock it down. At the end of the speech, he let the cat out of the bag, however, when he revealed that the proposed reform is what we all know it to be about: it is a huge smokescreen to divert attention from the real intentions of the Conservative party to weaken, if not destroy, the social security system.

The hon. Gentleman tried to foster the idea that everyone on the Opposition Benches, and certainly Labour Members—the Liberals are not here, so we do not know their views—supports and condones fraud. He knows perfectly well that no Opposition Member does that. He also knows perfectly well that the major scandals of housing benefit fraud that have been uncovered in London in the past few weeks have been uncovered, yes, by Lambeth and Lewisham councils' internal investigations. The pressure from Lambeth, Lewisham, Croydon and Waltham Forest—not all Labour authorities—has led to the establishment of a London-wide investigation team headed by the treasurers of all the London boroughs, irrespective of party. They are determined to get to the bottom of the massive abuse of housing benefit fraud by landlords, claimants and all sorts of people.

The hon. Gentleman should remember that, in the early 1980s, many people expressed concern when his Government proposed the transfer of payment of housing benefit to local authorities. At that time, the Minister and I were members of the London borough of Haringey. I do not know what view the Minister took of that decision, but Haringey said that it was not a good idea for local authorities to take over the administration of that benefit. Haringey could envisage the precise problem that would arise without a unified system of benefit payment. As a result of the change, London had 32 different systems of administration of housing benefit. That was a perfect opening for the fraudulent abuse of the housing benefit system. That is precisely what happened.

The hon. Gentleman should at least recognise that London Labour authorities have attempted to get to the bottom of the abominable housing benefit fraud perpetrated by landlords. To pick up on what the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Mr. Bendall) said earlier, I also believe that that fraud has been encouraged by the deregulation of rents. That has meant that private sector rents have sky-rocketed and that, as a result, the amount paid out in housing benefit has increased.

I favour a return to a system of rent regulation. I do not see why millions should be paid into the pockets of private sector landlords, bed-and-breakfast millionaires, who have made a fortune out of the Government's refusal to invest in a housing building programme and an affordable rents programme. It is the Government who have lined the pockets of private sector landlords.

I am not in favour of fraud. The hon. Member for Teignbridge and I both sat on the Social Security Select Committee. He has tried to create illusions about what some Labour Members are supposed to have said, but he knows that his suggestions resemble nothing that we said.

En passant—as they say—I find it a bit rich that Conservative Members talk about fraud and dishonesty when all of them, except the Minister, has at least one paid job, if not 20, as well as being a Member of Parliament. That is immoral. People are elected to the House to be full-time Members of Parliament, not to take secondary incomes on behalf of private companies.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman look around him for a moment and speculate about where all his hon. Friends are?

Mr. Corbyn: I have honestly not the slightest idea where my hon. Friends are. I imagine that the majority are in their constituencies dealing with the problems occasioned partly by the poverty that many people suffer since the Conservative party came to office.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): The hon. Gentleman referred to rent controls. In New York, the middle class—the tax base—has been driven out, leaving only a limited number of rich people supporting a considerable number of people living in subsidised housing. That has resulted in the diminution of living standards for everyone concerned, distortion in the housing market and a housing policy that no one would sensibly wish to emulate.

Mr. Corbyn: It is a measure of how far the Conservative party has been driven to the right that Conservative Members now quote New York as a dangerous example of a step towards socialism because of its rent control system.

I favour rent controls because rents charged, particularly in London, are astronomical. Private sector tenants come to my advice surgery and tell me that they pay £150 a week for one or two-bedroomed flats, which are often in bad condition, and they cannot get them repaired. Many pay far higher rents. Is it right that landlords should make so much money from rent? The Government lifted rent controls and said that housing benefit levels should be set by the market. A system of rent controls would make more affordable accommodation available and people would not have to spend such a huge proportion of their income on rent.

The Conservative party is trying to increase council and housing association rents.

Mr. Bendall: If we bring back rent controls in the private sector, available properties will dry up. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it is a matter of supply and demand. As I said in my speech, if local authorities or Governments limited the amount that they paid on rents, it would bring rents down.

Mr. Corbyn: The cash limiting route, which the hon. Member for Ilford, North suggests, would be even worse. It would be as bad as the social fund, writ large. Under the social fund, people must be lucky enough to have their application accepted in the first 10 days of the month. They might then receive a loan, but will be unlikely to receive a grant. If they apply for a social fund payment towards the end of the month, they will have no chance and will go to the bottom of the queue for several months thereafter. Women who are victims of domestic violence must go into hostels and cannot be rehoused because the social fund cannot pay out for the basic necessities of life. That is injustice and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) said, that is a fraud against people who have paid tax and national insurance and are looking for just one job, unlike Conservative Members who hold dozens of jobs.

Mr. Bendall: I was arguing that for one-bedroomed properties in a certain geographical area, the rent that one can pay should be limited. That rent could be £80 or £90 a week. A two-bedroomed flat could cost £100 a week and a three-bedroomed house could cost £120 a week. You have limits and you control them in geographical areas. Rents in parts of the north are much cheaper than in London. Landlords will still have a fair return for their money but, as you rightly say, people will not have to pay £150 a week for one bedroom.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman inadvertently used the wrong expression. All remarks should be addressed to the Chair. Clearly, his remark was intended not for me but for the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

Mr. Corbyn: No one was suggesting for a moment, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you were trying to rent out a flat for £150 a week—*[Interruption.]* We are not allowed to discuss that possibility, but I am sure that you are not.

Conservative Members do not agree that we should restore rent controls. They have encouraged a free market economy and created bed-and-breakfast millionaires, who are making a great deal of money from the social security system. I should prefer more money to be put into capital investment programmes so that all the out-of-work building workers could be given something useful to do, such as building houses for the homeless. That would be a sensible way to approach the issue.

No one condones fraud and I was surprised that the hon. Member for Teignbridge did not mention the serious fraud in Westminster city council. First, it sold its cemeteries for 5p and then it used £15 million of public money to buy them back. An investigation is now being carried out into the council's housing department, resulting in the office of the council's Conservative leader being raided by the chief executive to provide papers for the Director of Public Prosecutions' investigation into the administration of Westminster city council.

I hope that Conservative Members will also condemn the sale of those cemeteries and the unfortunate circumstances that followed in which Westminster residents were expected to pay £15 million to get back something that belonged to them in the first place. By the way, no one was surcharged for that.

Mr. Nicholls: I see no need to distinguish between crime committed by one person or another, whatever his or her political view. Real opposition to crime should be indivisible. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for playing into my hands because he is an honest and honourable man. Every time he finds himself forced to condemn crime among people whom he regards as socially unacceptable bed-and-breakfast millionaires, he tries to justify it by introducing a political dimension. The trouble with the hon. Gentleman is that his mind is set somewhere in Russia in 1880.

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman's knowledge of Russian history is slightly awry. Peter Kropotkin had not even written "The Price of Bread" in 1880, which was long before the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Nevertheless, this is not a debate about Russian history or the fate of the Soviet Union.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman condemns what has happened in Westminster city council. I hope that he will condemn Conservative councillors obstructing that inquiry and the shredding of documents before the investigation officers arrived at the city hall to look at documents involving that council's housing policy.

Mr. Nicholls: I shall pass no comment on matters of which I have no knowledge but which sound as though they are sub judice. Will the hon. Gentleman consider

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what impression is made on people outside when they hear him talk about crime and justify it by referring to Conservative crime? That is a ludicrous position to adopt, although it is consistent with the hon. Gentleman's approach to such matters.

Crime and the need to condemn it should be indivisible. The hon. Gentleman does neither himself nor his constituents any favours by trying to justify crime in party political terms. As he knows, 1880 was when his ludicrous ideas were being formed.

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman's knowledge of history is even weaker than I had thought. Socialist ideas started long before 1880, indeed, before 1780—perhaps the hon. Gentleman will spend some time in the recess doing some reading, as it might help him——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Would the hon. Gentleman return to the subject of the main debate on social security fraud?

Mr. Corbyn: I do not for a moment condemn the hon. Member for Teignbridge for being politically motivated in his comments. I am sure that nothing could be further from his mind.

The housing benefit fraud, which has gone on in London and elsewhere, is absolutely appalling. It is being dealt with by the actions of local authority councillors and officers who have got together to do so. Nobody condones such fraud, but some credit should be given to those honest local authority officials who have attempted to get to the bottom of the fraud.

As I recall, the Government came to office on a programme designed to get rid of quangos and to ensure that things were better run and there was more accountability. Many jokes used to be made about the former Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, and his predilection for appointing people to the boards of quangos. We heard much about that in the 1979 election campaign, but there are now many more quangos and far less accountability in our society and far more money is paid directly by central Government to unaccountable organisations.

I am not suggesting that housing associations are intrinsically fraudulant or wrong, but there is much less accountability with respect to the money paid to housing associations to build than there is with respect to the money paid to local authorities to build and administer housing. The same applies to national health service trusts, which are not as accountable as direct health authorities. I could continue with more other examples.

If we are to achieve a more honest society, we must set good examples. The Conservative party and some of the gutter press must set a better example. They should pursue City fraud as assiduously as social security fraud—

Mr. Nicholls: Ah!

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman says, "Ah!", but what I am saying is relevant. We must investigate British companies that deliberately site their head offices in tax havens in order to avoid paying tax in this country. The hon. Gentleman knows what the Select Committee on Social Security, which was investigating the fraud involved in the Maxwell pension fund, has been discussing. There must be accountability in our society. One of the causes of the Maxwell pension fraud was the lack of accountability in the way in which the pension fund was run. The same is true of almost every pension fund in which there is a lack of democracy.

We live in a society in which, increasingly, many people are extremely poor and are in danger of losing their benefits. The Government—initially led by the then Prime Minister and the chair of the Conservative party in 1985—are increasingly targeting benefits. None of us condones fraud, but I believe that the Government and many Conservative Members promote such discussions when they know full well that the problem of housing benefit fraud is being addressed by local authorities. In doing so, they are motivated by the fact that such a discussion will divert attention away from their real agenda of cutting the social security bill, targeting benefits and reducing the level of payments to people in desperate need.

I spent yesterday evening visiting young people at the Centrepoint hostel for the homeless in London. Those young people are homeless for all sorts of reasons—some have run away from home, others have been thrown out of home, and many of them have been terribly abused and mistreated. They explained their problems when trying to obtain the benefits to which they are entitled. At my constituency surgery this evening in Finsbury Park, I am likely to be visited by many people who cannot obtain housing benefit, a social fund loan, income support or a pension. Those people live in desperate poverty and have to borrow off their friends and neighbours to survive until next week, which is an indictment of our society.

When the social security legislation was pushed through the House in 1986, one of the key issues was that the Department of Social Security would no longer be obliged to give advice and information to everyone about their right to claim and their eligibility for benefit. That is why many benefits are not taken up in some districts. The advice is simply not forthcoming and the voluntary agencies are so strapped for cash that they are unable to give advice; some of them have had to close down altogether. There is something deeply wrong in a society in which young people, pensioners and those living in desperate poverty who are entitled to benefit cannot obtain it. We must look at both sides of the coin. We must condemn fraud, but also condemn a system that is incapable of paying people who are desperately in need in order to alleviate their poverty.

12.4 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): We have covered a tremendous amount of ground this morning, but I am not sure that all the contributions have been meaningful, particularly those from the Opposition. I join my hon. Friends in saying that it is remarkable that, for a debate on a subject on which there is so much national concern, only two Labour Members are present and there is no one in the Chamber to represent other parties, including the Liberal party. That tells us something about the Opposition's commitment to social security fraud, about which every man and woman feels deeply offended.

I was even more depressed by the speech of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) who seemed to be selective in his condemnation. He seemed to spend more time worrying about tax evasion and other issues that are totally unconnected with the subject of today's debate. He

exploited political correctness and appeared to suggest that a good, honest, working-class man was incapable of committing fraud, whereas landlords were all villains.

Mr. Corbyn: When did I say that?

Lady Olga Maitland: That was the clear implication of the hon. Gentleman's speech. As is said so often by Conservative Members, crime is crime, and must be condemned on that basis.

When I listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), I found myself scratching around to find signs of his commitment to stamping out social security fraud. In his 40-minute speech, he made only scant mention of that subject. He mentioned other issues such as entitlements and tax evasion.

I take heart from the words of the words of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), who seems to have a genuine commitment. He made a statement to *The Guardian* which was published in January:

"It is the Labour party that is seen as in favour of mollycoddling people. We have to be tough with ourselves and ask why that has happened. We have to convince people that we are not a tax and spend party."

I congratulate him on making it clear that it is time to look at social security fraud and people who claim money which is not theirs by right.

I congratulate the Government on their genuine commitment to stamping out social security fraud, and on the many measures that they have taken to do so. The world seems to be divided into two categories: workers and shirkers. We appear to have become a nation of cheats who rob the needy. On average, every working person pays £13 every working day to support the jobless, the elderly, children, the sick and the disabled, but last year alone, a mind-boggling £500 million was creamed off—stolen by fraudsters. Some of them are petty criminals; some have a misplaced belief that one small lie does not matter. Others form themselves into well-organised gangs—as happened in the case of the counterfeit books in Brixton, described in the papers today. Those books had a face value of £35 million.

It is deeply disturbing to learn that there appears to have been an Irish nationalist connection with the case in Brixton. It is also disheartening to realise that, for every pound snatched from a needy person, someone who is desperate, frail or vulnerable loses—the money has gone to line the pockets of thieves and cheats who are greedy for easy money.

Cheating the welfare state has been considered fair game, the acceptable face of fraud. Nowadays, the friends and relatives of cheats do not seem as shocked as they used to be—until the day comes when they want to claim benefits themselves, only to discover that the money has already been stolen from them. The cost of social security theft is reckoned to be the equivalent of a penny on income tax.

The time has come to put an end to this so-called national sport. Stealing from benefits agencies is the same as stealing from one's neighbour: the money all comes from the same source. The only difference is that the seemingly anonymous state benefits agencies, funded by the taxpayer, have now had enough.

The public are fighting these shabby people now, which is why I offer my admiration for the Government's determination to stamp out this pernicious scam and for their decision to allocate an additional £10 million to allow the Benefits Agency to deploy more manpower and improved computers, with more cross-referencing. This will help the agency to target money better and to save next year about £1 billion—money which can then be given to the people who deserve it. It is important to remember the vulnerable, not to defend these cheats, a practice which the Labour party, at least by implication, seems to go in for.

It is time to make it abundantly clear that the law will be enforced. People who think that they have been getting away with fraud for years are going to find it infinitely more difficult to do so in future.

My constituency of Sutton and Cheam—agreeable, pleasant and leafy—attracted some fame the other day when I publicly drew attention to the problems of persistent juvenile crime—a problem which is reflected nationwide. In the same way, we are also vulnerable to cheats who put in fraudulent claims. I am often left speechless by the shirkers who come to my surgery and blatantly say that they cannot possibly work.

The other day, a barman told me that he was not working; he was claiming income support. When I asked why he did not find another job in a bar, he told me that he was very selective about the kind of bar in which he wanted to work, and that he was quite happy to wait and to live on a minimal amount of money. How dare he say that? He is a shirker. Perhaps we should follow the Italian example and put an end to giving such people support when they have no intention of seeking work.

I also find it irritating beyond belief when a youngster aged 21 or so tells me that he is not working. I ask him whether he has any plans to work. He says that he cannot find any. I now have an answer for such people. I produce magazines and lists of employment agencies. I offer them the *Evening Standard*, and I tell them not to come back to see me for at least two weeks and then to tell me how they have got on.

I know that these youngsters can find work. The trouble is that they are selective and lazy and will not do menial labour, plenty of which is available. When my son comes down from university, he picks up two jobs in one day because he is prepared to do dirty work. I do not see why the young should consider themselves above what I call, good honest toil. As far as I can see, it is theft if they claim income support.

As for those who claim sickness benefit, I find it astonishing that people who seem perfectly healthy and capable of working at least in an office, if not in a strenuous job, should tell me, as a man did recently, "My wife is going out to work and I am claiming income support." I should like to know why that man is not going to work. The time has come to be much more rigorous——

Mr. Bradley: Is the hon. Lady suggesting that GPs are falsely giving sick notes to sickness benefits claimants?

Lady Olga Maitland: I am suggesting that GPs are perhaps not careful enough when assessing people's health. Sometimes they become too sympathetic to a person's social circumstances and agree to give him a sick note. GPs need to be given clear guidelines on what is expected of them.

In my constituency, a tremendous amount of good work is being done to uncover fraudulent claims. North Surrey fraud office, covering an area from Croydon all the

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way to Mitcham and Morden, Wimbledon and Sutton, has saved £6·2 million that would otherwise have been stolen last year. A sub-office dealing with unemployment benefit saves about £6,000 a month by its vigilance. In Sutton, we have two full-time investigators who, last year, prevented the theft of £500,000. With a staff in north Surrey of 19, admittedly costing £500,000 a year, I reckon that the investment has been well worth it, given the size of the savings.

Sutton does not have quite the same problems as some other areas, So I should like to turn my attention to Haringey, whose fraud squad is hard at work. It caught up with nearly £1 million-worth of fraudulent claims last year.

I am reminded of the occasion two years ago when I spent a week in a hostel for the homeless. I was doing a test case for a radio programme about living on income support——

Mr. Bradley: How much were you paid for it?

Lady Olga Maitland: Nothing.

Apart from one other person in that bed-and-breakfast accommodation, the 29 residents were all immigrants—from Turkey, Bangladesh, west Africa and the West Indies. I am not saying that they were frauds; I do say that they came to this country because they knew that we would give them the most generous income support and a life style that they could not enjoy in their own countries. We should give that some attention, too.

I congratulate the Government on encouraging and giving incentives to local authorities to investigate fraudulent claims. The scheme is working well. Sutton has three full-time officers in the field, and the benefits of that are clear. Their experiences would be laughable if it were not for the tragedy of the mockery of the system. Moonlighting is rife and is almost seen as a game of touch and get away. The cheats are almost blatant in their efforts to claim money.

Last week, I was told about a young man who drew up outside our local unemployment office in his work van which was emblazoned with the company name. He shot in, signed up and tried to shoot out. Another man on his way to work turned up in a works van with a ladder on top. More extraordinarily, a taxi driver parked his cab outside the benefits office and went in to sign on while his paying passenger waited in the back seat. In another case, although not in Sutton, a man answered a call on his mobile phone from his office while trying to claim.

Our fraud investigators have a sharp instinct for cheats, and can sense when things are not right. Is a jobless man a little bit too tidy and smart? Could he have just walked in from his office? How energetic and interested is he in seeking work? Is he available for interviews, and how many telephone calls has he made? Has he written many letters? The officers tell me that the busy man suddenly signs himself off the dole when requested to come for an interview when the appointment might conflict with his job. As for the requirement to attend a mandatory week's course, the long-term unemployed person suddenly discovers that he has found work after all.

It is also important to visit employers who take on itinerant casual labour. Such employers engage staff at unsociable hours which suit night security workers and minicab drivers, people who can still clock into the unemployment office during the day. Minicabs should be licensed in the same way as black cabs, so that their operators are exposed to the same disciplines. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Mr. Bendall) on graphically demonstrating the way in which they have abused the system.

Some people who try to claim support from the Benefits Agency should not do so at all. They are well funded, with money in the bank or the building society, although sometimes there is a misunderstanding about what the money is for. I was told this week that it is not unusual for someone to say, "But that is my funeral money. Surely you cannot take that away from me." It should be carefully explained to people seeking income support that we are not trying to run them out of business or deprive them of their funeral money, but there is a difference between having money for one's funeral and claiming money to which one is not entitled.

We must crack down on scroungers, and especially on those who apply in several names. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), who is not in the Chamber at the moment, spoke about people who use fictitious names such as Count Dracula, Jack O'Nory, Donald Duck or Gary Lineker when claiming benefit.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the previous Secretary of State for Employment on her push to investigate alleged cheating. As a result, 50,000 people suddenly and mysteriously withdrew their claims. She uncovered a fraud in which people working abroad claimed unemployment benefit in Britain. Investigators discovered that groups of workers, mainly in construction, had been hired to work abroad and given time off every 13 weeks to return to Britain to sign on the dole and receieve unemployment benefit. I regret that that is possible if a claimant lives more than six miles from a benefit office.

It is disgraceful that employers have colluded in this way and turned a blind eye to employees who are on the dole. They have some responsibility, because they rely on the fact that people are claiming money in order to pay them lower wages. A London magazine distribution company had 1,000 false names on its books, ranging from William Shakespeare to William Caxton, Mickey Mouse and Nick Faldo. That went on for five years, but I am delighted to say that it ended with a conviction for false claims.

When I first entered Fleet street, some moons ago, there was a definite scam in the old-style printing industry. Printers clocked in using fictitious names, so that they could double-charge on social security. Fraud is rampant in the garment sweatshop industry. A series of visits recently resulted in 190 people withdrawing claims, with a saving to the Government of £330,000.

An investigation of part-time workers in the packaging, land work and perfume industries in the east midlands led to 303 people signing off the unemployment register. In the south-east, 733 people left the register, saving the state £670,000. In Scotland, more than £5 million was saved when investigations resulted in more than 7,000 people withdrawing claims.

It is appropriate that my hon. Friends, but not Opposition Members, should pay attention to new age travellers. It is offensive to see the way in which those people trample across our country and have the nerve to lay down the law according to their lights. The party is over for these hippies. From now on, they will not be able to get dole money in the free and easy way that they have

obtained it in the past. They never show any intention of looking for work. The war on those dole cheats reached new heights when investigators learned that £55 million in benefits should not have been handed out in 1991. It was discovered that one in five of the 230,000 claimants was a cheat.

The challenge in dealing with cunning cheats who use a variety of well-tried and up-to-date rewarding techniques is depressing. Many claimants know the complex rules by heart, and are well versed in how to get round them. One rule that is exploited to the full is that unemployed people are entitled to seek work in their own field first, even if it is known that work is unlikely to become available. That gives the more imaginative claimant unlimited scope to come up with occupations that are disappearing or in which there are few readily available jobs.

On a broader level, I have found when talking to people who are on income support for genuine reasons that I have had to point out to them that, if they are in a certain job and the work is finished, they should look for work in another sector. There tends to be a rather blinkered approach. People must understand that, in their lifespans, they may have to change their careers two or three times. Mobility and flexibility have to be encouraged.

Housing benefit abuse has been well documented by Conservative Members. It is a scandal. In Sutton, we are exposed to the same problems of collusion between landlords and their tenants, as elsewhere. We hear of the landlord raising the rent, the tenant claiming the increased rent and the two splitting the profit. Sometimes, tenants make claims on fictitious addresses, arranging for money to be sent to other addresses before being sent on to them. I welcome the suggestion of a national cross-referencing index on multiple housing benefit claims to ensure that it is impossible for those cheats to get away with it.

To multiple addresses can be added multiple names. In the most bizzare case that I have heard of, a man had 37 different identities. That particularly happens with immigrants. It may be politically incorrect to touch on this, but I will identify their origins. They are largely west Africans, with highly complicated names. The trend in that section of the community should not be left unnoted.

Our European friends are not much better. In the 1950s and 1960s, Italian immigrants flocked to this country, eager to work, to win a better life style and to contribute, and they succeeded. The country's presentation changed with the rise in the number of Italian restaurants, pizza bars and similar establishments, of which Sutton has an excellent supply. However, the situation has now changed.

The *Sunday Express* ran a front page headline saying:

"Crackdown on Euro Spongers—Lilley moves to stop Britain being a soft touch on handouts."

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on that, and I congratulate a campaigning newspaper on doing a worthwhile task. It certainly had a case to report, and that case has been taken up in other newspapers.

For instance, the *Daily Mail* ran a story saying:

"Rocco is Italian, idle and a heroin addict and you pay for him to live in comfort."

Rocco is aged 22, and his story is depressing. He came to this country. He knows that we are a soft touch. He picks up £67 a fortnight, and in addition, £90 a week for a shared room in a smartly decorated King's Cross bed-and-breakfast hotel—a useful sum. I can only describe him as a permanent loafer and a scrounger, but at least he gives the British welfare system high praise because it is easy to tap into. He says:

"In Italy, you would never get money if you haven't worked, and you would never get a flat that's paid for."

He simply cannot believe his luck. Furthermore, as a citizen from a fellow European Community member country, he is entitled to all the free medical treatment he needs, and he is a drug addict. He has access to the best possible NHS treatment, free housing, income support and the occasional crisis loans. Now, he teaches others how to milk the system.

Another Italian, Marco Redi, aged 26, has spent the past seven years sponging off our system claiming money from our social security system. He is a drug addict and has HIV and is getting the best possible treatment. He is blatant about his idleness and lack of willingness to seek work. He says:

"In Italy you get minimal help but here, it's very nice—I'm staying."

That is ironic, given that unemployed British nationals living in Germany, France and Spain get no financial help. Their insurance-based systems do not pay out unless the claimant has been in work. In Italy, a Briton down on his luck gets only 20 per cent. of his salary, for just six months—and that is only if he can prove that he has been in work. No proof, no dole.

In short, thousands of foreigners have been coming to Britain and claiming millions of pounds of benefits. Therefore, I welcome the Government's announcement this week that they intend to close that loophole in the income support rules and bring to an end the scam from which 10,000 have benefited, to the tune of £17 million.

Another area of abuse concerns single-parent families. People seem to be nervous of identifying that social grouping. However, whether or not it is politically correct, I do not hesitate to do so, because single-parent families, like everyone else, have responsibilities to society. They are not immune from and above the law. They must abide by the rules, and should not be given a free hand to cheat and to take money that is not theirs to claim.

One example of abuse is a single mother in her housing-benefit-subsidised council flat who allows her boy friend, who may be in work, to move in with her. Technically, she is no longer single, and she should not claim the advantageous benefits available to single parents.

Often, the cheat begins unwittingly. The boy friend spends the odd night in her flat, then weekends, then he is there more often than not, and then he becomes a permanent fixture and part of the household. It is right that we should rigorously ensure that those women who are backed up by a partner are brought to book if they continue to claim benefits to which they are not entitled.

Mr. Bradley: Can the hon. Lady tell the House the precise number of single parents in the position that she described? Precisely how many claimants is she talking about, and what is her source for that statistic?

Lady Olga Maitland: I am unable, at this moment, to give the precise figures, but I shall provide the hon. Gentleman with them at a later date. The background to what I am describing has come from my local Benefits Agency office.

Another abuse of the system is fictitious desertion. A woman with children pretends that her husband or lover

[Lady Olga Maitland]

has deserted her, and then claims housing benefit, income support, one-parent benefit and council tax benefit. All told, that can add up to more than £100 a week free of tax. It is little wonder that some couples go to considerable lengths to pretend that their relationship is over. We must breed a new habit of honesty. Such flexible households are not above the law, and should not consider themselves free to claim money that is clearly not theirs.

Another deeply serious point, which has already been raised, is the extensive theft of benefit books. Last week, a man in Sutton was arrested for stealing cheques sent to tenants in a multiple-occupation house. Officials say that that is just one small example of a large story. They estimate that the biggest losses come from stolen and counterfeit benefit books and girocheques. In north Surrey in the first quarter of 1991, more than 62,000 social security books were recorded as lost, stolen or destroyed. The head of the Benefit Agency's organised fraud unit said:

"It is easier to counterfeit a benefit book or girocheque than it is to go into a bank with a shotgun. There are fewer risks and the returns are as good."

In the past, a criminal having 100 stolen books could draw £8,000 a week, and might hand over only 5 per cent. of that to the accomplices who posed as claimants.

I congratulate the Government on acknowledging the seriousness of that problem, and my hon. Friend the Minister on demonstrating that much work has been done to make sure that such counterfeiting cannot occur in future. The message must go out to fraudsters and forgers that they can no longer get away with it. Benefit books will be like bank notes—forgeries will be easily detected in future, and those using them will be brought to book.

Clear guidance must be given to post offices and others who are confronted by a claimant who says, "My book has been stolen or mislaid. Can I have another?" Double encashment has been a great loophole in the system, but it is now being closed.

A rational approach must also be taken to invalidity benefit. Can it be true that the number entitled to claim it has more than doubled in the past decade, from 700,000 to 1·5 million? Have we suddenly become a deeply sickly society? I believe that doctors have unwittingly been over-generous to their patients, in helping them to claim more than that to which they were entitled—bearing in mind that invalidity benefit is higher than unemployment benefit.

More than two thirds of the general practitioners in a survey by "Monitor Weekly" admitted that they had signed benefit forms for patients whom they knew not to be sick, or whose sickness did not prevent them from working. Most newspapers argue that changes should be made. On 12 June, *The Times* commented:

"The number of claimants has more than doubled, although there is no evidence of a corresponding increase in ill health."

The *Daily Express* asked:

"why should the benefit not be re-examined . . . a stringent medical examination would seem only fair."

Although medical examinations are not as widespread as they might be, it is interesting to note that 50,000 claimants failed to report for a medical assessment last year, and consequently had their invalidity benefit stopped.

We must give GPs clear guidelines, and educate them in the fact that their job is to make a medical assessment and that they should not confuse their priorities. A GP may assess a crane driver with a history of heart attacks as unfit for work, but would that man be unfit for work behind a desk?

It is hard to understand how one GP managed to support the claims of a farmer who stole £36,000 by claiming invalidity benefit while doing three jobs. He was originally diagnosed as suffering from multiple sclerosis. I am glad that his condition was not too serious, but he managed to continue running his 30-acre farm, undertake sub-contracts and run a haulage business. His family—a wife, two sons and a daughter—and another farmer all colluded with him.

The examples are rife and rampant. One could go on for days describing cases of scamming, cheating and shirking. I congratulate the Government on their enormous determination to increase the search for more fraudulent claims. Their target of £60 million nationally on a £10 million investment in investigation resources is enormously worth while.

We must continue with our drive to encourage local authorities with incentives. There is no doubt that my Sutton council is encouraged, and that it has stretched its energies to seek our fraudulent claims, because it knows that it will get back a percentage to carry on with its work. The loopholes for abuse are still there. We must continue to modernise our information technology, and we must continue to update our cross-referencing to make it impossible for people to get away with fraud.

Above all, we must encourage a public spirit of coming forward with information about social security abuse. Information from the public already forms a major part of the basis on which investigations are made.

People should not feel guilty about giving information about their neighbours. They do not feel guilty if they report a bank robbery, and they do not feel guilty about reporting a major crime in another area. Why should they feel guilty about reporting that a neighbour is cheating? Who is more worthy of protection—the petty criminal neighbour or the needy victim who is prevented from getting the just help he needs? The money that is saved will help him even more.

The issue raises the question of identity cards. If we know who everyone is, we can immediately tap into the computer and thus make fraud far more difficulty. Some people say that identity cards are another form of Big Brother. In certain situations, such cards are worth while. We are all surrounded by Big Brothers anyway, because we are on various computers and we carry various cards.

Identity cards would give us just the means of getting information for the benefit of us all. Employers should follow the French system of logging with the Department of Social Security the names of all those whom they have laid off. That would not cover everyone, but it would make it more difficult for people to claim benefit to which they were not entitled.

I may have seemed rather hard, and to be pushing those who carry out scams and who are shirkers. They are indeed a very unpleasant part of our national life. However, I recognise that the vast majority of those who claim social security are entirely genuine, and that a far smaller number are fraudulent. People who are honest and in genuine need have nothing to fear about claiming benefits. Those who claim them fraudulently must know that we shall find them wherever they are. We will catch them. We will make them repay their debts. We will make

them go to court and, if necessary, they will be heavily fined, and may even pay the ultimate price of going to prison. It is morally wrong for people to steal, to lie, to cheat and to punish the very people whom society most wants to help.

12.48 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who made a great and comprehensive speech which was thoroughly well researched. All of us in the Chamber enjoyed listening to her.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) talked about a Jurassic tendency in the Conservative party. I have not yet seen the film, but I know that the Jurassic tendency applies to dinosaurs. Dinosaurs disappeared because of evolutionary improvement. Does evolutionary improvement account for the fact that the Labour Benches are so bereft of Members today? I can offer no other rational explanation.

Apart from Jurassic tendency, what is of great interest —I hope that the ladies and gentleman of the press will pick this up—is the marshmallow tendency: appealing on the outside but no substance in the middle. I am referring, of course, to the Members of the Liberal Democrat party who are so conspicuous by their absence today. On an issue of such importance, it is disgraceful that that party, which is always so sanctimonious about social security, should not be represented here today.

I imagine that the Liberal Democrats will be in Christchurch today talking about the need to increase pensions, benefits and so on, but the fact is that pensioners, like everybody else in receipt of benefits, suffer from fraud and abuse, and their investigation is part of the whole review of social security. Therefore, it is a great disappointment, which I hope will be noticed by everybody, that no Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament are here today. As I said earlier, it is the marshmallow tendency—looking good on the outside, but having no substance in the middle.

All hon. Members are in favour of a benefits system that protects the most vulnerable in our society—the sick, the disabled, the unemployed and the elderly—and an element of Conservative thinking is that there should be a safety net through which people cannot fall. We are spending £80 billion out of nearly £250 billion on social security. About £50 billion of the £250 billion is being borrowed and the amount of interest which has to be paid on that sum is increasing. If, therefore, there is any way of reducing public expenditure by cutting the fraudulent abuse of taxpayers' money, wherever it exists, we must do it.

Our duty in terms of social security is to help people in need. Every pound that is wasted or lost to fraud means less for those who are in real need. As the Under-Secretary of State pointed out, it is instructive and important to note that anti-fraud activity will save £1 billion in 1993-94—a substantial sum of money. I very much welcome the additional resources that are being made available to the Benefits Agency so that it can use modern technology to weed out false claims. The additional £10 million a year to be provided for this purpose is welcome. The fact that the anti-fraud yield was £341 million in 1990-91 and that it has risen to nearly £500 million in the last fiscal year is, again, to be welcomed.

I refer to the problem of bogus asylum seekers, to whom the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) referred. There are millions of potential economic migrants in the world. Outside Russia, 25 million Russians are having their civil liberties, including their language rights and political rights, removed. We see in eastern Europe the potential for economic migration on a substantial scale. Because of our generosity as a nation in always taking in people who are genuine refugees, something which we have done for hundreds of years, we act as a magnet to people who are in difficulty. While we have always welcomed genuine refugees, we now have the economic migrant. That is why all of us welcome the fact that the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Bill will clamp down on bogus asylum seekers and speed up the assessment process.

Two thirds of the asylum seekers arriving at our ports do so with no valid documents and might be suspect. The hon. Member for Islington, North said that fingerprinting was wrong, but it is at least a unique record of each individual. How else are we supposed to prevent abuse? Photographs and documents can be doctored and the solution advocated by the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues is in fact no solution at all. I hope that we shall continue to deal rigorously with a serious problem which can only grow worse as the years go by in view of the political turbulence all over the world. The traditional hospitality of the British people must not be abused. In a period of high unemployment all over Europe, we must protect British people, their jobs and their employment opportunities from bogus asylum seekers and others.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam graphically outlined the unparalleled generosity of the British taxpayer to other EC citizens. Newspapers and surveys by interested parties have uncovered enormous potential financial abuse. Britain is unique in that someone arriving by ferry can be given DSS leaflets in a number of European languages to tell him how to claim benefit. We are the only country to provide that service, which is almost an encouragement.

British nationals visiting Germany, Italy or France get no help at all. As my hon. Friend said, those countries have an insurance-based system under which one cannot claim benefit unless one has contributed to the insurance programme. The only two countries in which such benefit is automatic is Belgium and Ireland, and it lasts for three months. We must compare our social security set-up with that on the continent because many people involved in this area believe that our system leads to abuse as people come here with the intention of claiming benefit.

What always amuses my hon. Friends is that if the Labour party can attack this country or cite an aspect of life in another country which is better than ours it will unhesitatingly do so. I have heard the chandeliers in the Moscow underground being used as proof that Moscow had a better public transportation system, even under the old creaky communist system. Labour Members often cite France as an example of a country with a superior social security system. However, British nationals going to France receive no housing benefit. That is in contrast to newspaper reports which show clearly that in London housing benefits of up to £300 a week are being paid to EC nationals. That is an abuse of the system. British and other

[Mr. Richard Spring]

EC citizens going to France get absolutely nothing and information provided by the French equivalent of the DSS is provided only in French.

Germany is often supposed to have a pension system that is superior to ours, but only people who have worked and paid social security contributions for at least 12 months in the preceding three years can receive unemployment benefit. Needless to say, information is available only in German. By contrast, Denmark has a more rigorous system, and there are limits. It has a generous unemployment benefit system—people get 90 per cent. of their previous wage. Once again, EC nationals cannot qualify unless they have been living in Denmark for 12 months and have paid into the state unemployment fund. Needless to say, information about that is available only in Danish.

In Spain, there are no payments and information is available only in Spanish. In Portugal and Luxembourg, there are no benefits either. As I said, the only two countries in which there is something parallel to our system are Belgium and Ireland and payments continue for only three months.

There is substantial abuse because of the comprehensive social security benefits that are available to EC residents who come into the United Kingdom. However, I am glad that that has been tightened up and, undoubtedly, my hon. Friend the Minister will allude to that later. In the United Kingdom, proof of nationality must be provided. At the local DSS office, the interviewee must show that he or she has completed a national insurance record. That is helpful.

Another matter that must be examined is whether the rent is reasonable. If it is shown that rent is reasonable, 100 per cent. housing benefit is paid. What is the definition of "reasonable"? It is arbitrary. In central London, rent can be expensive and, therefore, costly to the taxpayer. Therefore, probably and potentially, an indeterminate amount of money is given to those individuals to the disadvantage of genuine British claimants. I am glad that that has been tightened up, but more could be done in that direction.

My hon. Friend the Minister talked about involving local authorities and sharing in the savings from fraud. I commend him on those remarks, because the new set-up announced in April gives local authorities an incentive to be involved. Local authorities keep 15 per cent. of the savings generated and, through anti-fraud efforts, that will rise above a threshold to 20 per cent. in 1993-94 and 17·5 per cent. in 1994-95. The reason for the rise is to give a boost and encouragement to effect those savings. Out of that will come a total saving of some £185 million, of which £45 million will usefully be retained by local authorities.

I turn my attention to the question of students. I have recently visited Japan and Taiwan and I was delighted with the number of students coming to the United Kingdom from those countries. Of course, they are areas of considerable economic growth. If we examine the history of Britain, students coming here have then returned to their home countries and played an important part in the lives of their nations. We should continue to welcome students for as long as we have excellent universities—and, of course, we shall continue to have them in the future.

In 1991, which is the last year for which full figures are known, 200,000 students from outside the EC came to Britain. While that is excellent news for the reason that I suggested—enhancing British prestige and increasing British influence in their home countries—it is clear from newspaper reports that there is abuse. Students working part time have certainly claimed income support in the past.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam referred to identity cards. I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to give an assurance on that, because, apparently, in student cities and towns—expecially in London—there is a roaring trade in bogus EC identify cards. It is difficult to determine the difference, for example, between a Colombian and a Spaniard, and other nationalities. That places considerable strains on the system and it is abused.

Another matter with regard to people arriving here is the increasing number of people who seem to appeal to the Home Office for a review of their conditions of entry to the United Kingdom to gain income support. While the Home Office is reviewing that, benefit is still paid. My understanding is that 10,000 people from abroad will not now receive income support, which involves savings of £17 million and is very welcome. However, asylum seekers will continue to receive benefit while the Home Office processes their cases under the urgent case rules. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will keep that process under constant review to ensure that it is not abused.

The scourge of the new age travellers, happily, has not afflicted the part of the world that I am privileged to represent, Suffolk and East Anglia. Under the actively seeking work test introduced in 1989, real attempts are now being made to address this problem. My constituents were very alarmed recently when a gipsy horse fair was held in my constituency. Happily, it passed off without major incident, but there was a considerable fear that a whole range of different individuals, including new age travellers, would arrive.

It is right that individuals who clearly have no intention of working—whom, in the past, DSS officials have bent over backwards to help—should now have to take on personal responsibilities and that their relationship to work should be more clearly defined.

The hon. Member for Islington, North made an interesting and curious speech. It is always comforting for my hon. Friends and myself to know that the Labour party has such individuals propagating a certain point of view. The whole thrust and ethos of his speech was less appropriate to a debate about social security fraud and abuse than to a national heritage debate. Such a speech, reflecting such attitudes, should be inscribed, illuminated, and put up next to a famous tomb in a cemetery not far from his constituency, where there are more specialist millionaires than the bed-and-breakfast millionaires to whom he constantly alluded.

It is clear that there is a feeling in this country that we have a comprehensive welfare system, which spreads far and wide and provides help to many people. It has been open to abuse, but there is a sentiment in my constituency and elsewhere that fraud and abuse must stop. Much of the evidence is clear and has been provided in the courts; much is anecdotal. The I-can-get-away-with-it mentality is deeply offensive to the British people, who are very fair-minded and have a liberal disposition to those who are disadvantaged for whatever reason.

We do not want to become a society of sneakers and snoopers, but I endorse the sentiments of my hon. Friends that it is up to us who observe the flagrant abuse of the system to make it known. That is in the interests of genuine recipients. All of us have a part to play in this.

There is an increasing mood of revulsion in the country about social security fraud. We are in a period of high unemployment, yet there are occasions when it is difficult to obtain seasonal labour in certain parts of my constituency because the black economy has become so entrenched. Part and parcel of the Government's intention in reducing taxation at many levels was to do away with the black economy.

We should give absolutely no quarter to cheats. That is very much the sentiment in my constituency and all decent people will welcome the moves announced by the Department of Social Security. Only genuine recipients with a genuine need should receive benefits. I am comforted by my hon. Friend the Minister's earlier remark that he will do everything possible to root out fraud and abuse—root and branch.

1.9 pm

Mr. Bradley: This has been an interesting, wide-ranging and informative debate. I intend to be brief in winding up because I want to hear the Minister comment on the many points that have been made. I hope that he will allow me to intervene in his speech, if appropriate, to clarify some of his answers.

Listening to the debate, I felt that I was in a no-win situation because I thought that I had made it absolutely clear that the Labour party was as committed as the Government to rooting out genuine fraud. I identified organised fraud as the major problem on which we need to concentrate. Many of the Government's initiatives have centred on organised fraud. Conservative Members who spoke earlier in the debate accused me of being a revisionist within the Labour party for taking that view. However, as the debate unfolded, it appeared that I had not made the position clear and that Conservative Members, especially the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), thought that I was soft on fraud. Clearly, my words were not worth the paper on which they were written.

May I therefore reiterate, on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition, that we are committed to rooting out genuine fraud wherever it occurs, whether it is perpetrated by individuals or organised gangs. Whether it is against the social security system—the Government have set a target of £1 billion—or involves tax evasion, totalling £4 billion, it is a loss to the public purse and the taxpayer and means that essential services such as social security are consequently underfunded. I hope that I have made that clear.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bradley: I shall happily give way to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam so that she can confirm that she hears what I say, has watched my lips, and will now accept the Labour party's position on the matter.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify the importance of chasing, with all the energy that it deserves, the multiple number of petty criminals? By their sheer numbers, their scale of fraud is every bit as important as the small number of major fraudulent claimants.

Mr. Bradley: I could not have been clearer in stating the Labour party's position on clamping down on fraud, wherever it may be, but—I was accused earlier of not saying "but" so I shall stress it now—the hon. Lady is wrong because most fraud is organised rather than perpetrated by individual claimants. If she can quote figures to the contrary, I shall accept a further intervention, but mere supposition is not good enough. Would she like me to give way to her on that point?

Lady Olga Maitland: No.

Mr. Bradley: Right.

Mr. Bendall: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bradley: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene on that specific point, I shall give way.

Mr. Bendall: I remind the hon. Gentleman that I gave him some specific figures.

Mr. Bradley: I do not wish to enter a dialogue across the Chamber, because I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would quickly intervene, but the hon. Gentleman's figures did not undermine my basic contention that the vast amount of fraud throughout the social security system—housing benefit, council tax and social security benefits—is organised. That is what the Government have been concentrating on recently.

I have made it clear that, wherever that abuse comes from, the Labour party is determined to tackle it in the same way as the Government, and I hope that the Government will accept that position.

I have listened to the debate with interest. I shall put aside the rather insulting comment by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam about our GP service, but she must justify many of the points that she raised. I welcome the fact that the hon. Lady has agreed to write to me about those matters. I was surprised when she said that the evidence for the abuse that she was claiming came from her local benefits agency. If that was the case, it may have clamped down on the abuse, which may no longer exist. I look forward to receiving information from the agency on the exact numbers and extent of the abuse in the context in which the hon. Lady mentioned it.

I do not want to concentrate too much on the hon. Lady's speech, but I was pleased that she was able to tell the House that her local authority is achieving its initiative targets. The success rate is patchy throughout the country and I look forward to the Minister making further comments on that. The patchiness is not due to lack of initiative or effort on the part of local authorities, many of which are finding it difficult to reach the lower end of the target scale, let alone the upper end. Therefore, they cannot benefit from the incentive of receiving 100 per cent. of the money retrieved. That creates difficulties when transferring resources into the fraud sections of local authority departments and ensuring that those authorities receive the money for the effort that they make. I am pleased that the Sutton and Cheam authority is achieving its targets.

We have had an interesting and wide-ranging debate. We have made the Labour party's position clear—we welcome many of the initiatives already undertaken and

[Mr. Bradley]

some of the new ones mentioned by the Minister today. I stress the support that the Labour party gives to the excellent work being undertaken throughout the country through a multi-agency approach with local authorities, benefits agencies, police and other agencies working together in rooting out fraud. They have made immense strides in the short time given to them to organise and establish internal organisations and to ensure that they work as effectively as possible. I hope that, in time, resources will be made available to ensure that staff are properly trained so that matters can be dealt with sensitively and efficiently.

I repeat my concern that when the Government attempt to root out fraud, they apply the same effort and commitment to ensure that those eligible for benefits, whatever they may be, receive their just entitlements. It is particularly important that, at a time when the poor are getting poorer, and the rich richer—there is no question but that that is true, as all the statistics show—we ensure that poor people receive the meagre benefit payments to which they are entitled. I hope that the Government, through their own publicity and by supporting the excellent work of welfare rights officers and local authority social services departments, will continue the take-up campaigns to ensure that individual claims are dealt with efficiently and claimants receive the money to which they are entitled.

A number of hon. Members mentioned the clampdown on new age travellers. It is an understandable move, but it has caused great anxiety among the public. We must not confuse that subject with the view that people are not actively seeking work. All the surveys carried out, whether by Government Departments, advisory committees that advise the Government or independent research, clearly show that the overwhelming majority of unemployment benefit claimants actively seek work. It is only a tiny minority who do not—I am pleased to see the Minister nodding in agreement and I know that the Secretary of State has made the same point. The overwhelming majority of claimants are genuine and are actively seeking work.

The latest report on the subject, issued this year by the Low Pay Unit, written by Alex Bryson and John Jacobs, and entitled "Policing the Workshy"—I commend it to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam—clearly showed that people are actively seeking work and are prepared to revise their initial hopes of finding a certain type of job, given the limited number of opportunities available in the climate of high unemployment. These people are sometimes not well advised by the unemployment officers with whom they deal, who should explain to them more clearly that it would be in their best interests to reduce their expectations.

Perhaps one of the greatest impediments to seeking work is the fact that people have to fill in so many forms and complete a great many interview references showing that they have been going out looking for work. That time might be better spent actually looking for work. Still, the results of the research are clear: the vast majority of the unemployed are actively seeking work and the only reason why they claim unemployment benefit is that they cannot find a job of any kind.

The Opposition are committed to ensuring that the social security system enables all who are entitled to them to receive the benefits that they so justly deserve. Although we need to look at fraud, we should bear in mind that there is also fraud that needs stamping out in the tax system and in public life generally, whereupon the money can be used in everyone's best interests.

In the pages of the *Financial Times*, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, writing about attempts to control public expenditure, implied that one reason for the massive hike in the social security budget was the success of the Government's take-up campaigns, urging people to apply for benefits. I seek an absolute assurance from the Minister that in the public expenditure review—we shall return to it in the autumn, when I am sure the Government will give us plenty of opportunities to debate their attempts to curb the social security budget—there will be no suggestion of the Government's undermining people's just entitlement to benefit. The Government must ensure that benefits that are still not the subject of 100 per cent. take-up are publicised by Government and local authorities. Only thus can we be certain that the people who deserve our support through the social security system will actually receive it.

1.23 pm

Mr. Burt: This has been a most interesting and enjoyable debate, as these Friday mornings often are. We have attempted to shoot one or two stereotypes. The Government have been at pains to confirm that we pay as much attention to ensuring that those entitled to money get it as we do to curbing fraud and abuse. The Opposition spokesman has been equally determined to show that the Labour party is as rigorous about fraud and abuse as it is about ensuring that everyone gets his just deserts. Back Benchers have united to condemn Her Majesty's absent Liberals. So we have all had an enjoyable morning.

We have done some serious work along the way. I shall reply to the speeches of my hon. Friends before dealing with matters raised by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley). I thank all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate.

I am thankful for the help that we have received from members of the London cab drivers club and the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association. I pay tribute to them for their assistance in dealing with the matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Mr. Bendall) of trying to uncover fraud in the taxi business. We welcome their co-operation. We work closely with them and will continue to do so. The members of those bodies work with some other Departments and the matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North about the operation at Heathrow is for the Department of Employment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North could have raised another issue, but, perhaps because of his position, he decided not to do so. I shall raise it for him. It is that those who drive taxis and register as unemployed, thus taking money to which they are not entitled, are helping to drive out of business those whom my hon. Friend seeks to help. They are taking their jobs. My hon. Friend was right to mention the efforts of the taxi drivers who, day in and day out, look after people in this place. Their honesty and integrity is impugned by those who break the rules and we welcome their efforts to assist us in trying to discover the culprits.

My hon. Friend spoke about housing benefit and payments to landlords. He has been kind enough to write to me on the subject. I shall make clear the rules relating to the direct payment of landlords. Local authorities are required to make direct payment of housing benefit to landlords when direct payments for service charges and rent arrears are already being made from income support. Secondly, it is paid in cases where tenants have arrears that are equivalent to eight times or more the weekly rent, unless it is in the overriding interest of the tenant that the benefit should not be paid directly to the landlord.

Local authorities may use their discretion to make direct payments of housing benefit to landlords when the tenant consents to it or requests it. They can also be made without the tenant's consent if that is considered to be in the interest of the tenant and his family. Such payments can also be made without the tenant's consent if he has left the accommodation to which the benefit relates and there are rent arrears at that address, but the amount paid directly must not exceed the arrears.

I share the worries of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North. The Department encourages closer liaison between local authorities and landlords. I was interested in his idea of a registration scheme to control fraud. It has attractions and I will bring my hon. Friend's suggestion to the attention of my colleagues in the Department of the Environment. The day-to-day administration of housing benefit is the responsibility of local authorities and we are cautious about imposing additional burdens on them. The issues that my hon. Friend raised are precisely those that the cross-London steering group will address. I shall say more about that group in my speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), who was supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes), spoke about the problems of those who live and work in tourist areas. Such problems arise because of the movement of people and the claiming of benefit, sometimes inappropriately. We must maintain a balance. Where people live is largely a matter of individual choice, and the free movement of people is an essential feature of an efficient labour market. The Government do not wish to restrict that.

It would be wrong to impose controls through the benefits system on the area or type of accommodation to which people wished to move. To go down such a restrictive route in a democratic society would be fraught with difficulty. It is better to ensure that the conditions of entitlement to benefit are rigorously satisfied and that those who abuse the system lose all claim to financial support from the taxpayer.

That is why I was pleased that my hon. Friend spoke of Operation Sea Breeze and that my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) spoke of the recent operation in Preston. Only by making it clear and public to people that those who abuse the social security system will be caught shall we be able to make progress.

We will continue to bear in mind the problems of tourist resorts when we are targeting our clampdowns, and I hope that my hon. Friends will be reassured by that. We will also look at the suggestion of improving the contact between the Benefits Agency and the public in disclosing fraud. We also now have the national service level agreement with local authority associations, designed to improve inter-agency liaison and co-operation, particularly in relation to housing benefit frauds in tourist areas, to which my hon. Friends referred. We will continue to develop those relationships further to improve our record in catching those who abuse the system. I hope that those measures will be of assistance to my many hon. Friends who represent tourist areas and associated places.

The speech of the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) reminded us of the problems over the water. I was pleased that he did so, and am grateful for his attendance this morning. I listened to him with care. Just the other week, I was fortunate enough to visit the Province, in connection with the launching of the Child Support Agency there. I enjoyed my visit—I always enjoy my visits there—and I look forward to making more. I will ensure that his remarks, which fall more appropriately in the remit of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Northern Ireland Office, are brought to their attention.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) made an interesting and powerful speech. He was kind enough to apologise to me because he is unable to stay for the winding-up speeches. He reminded us most importantly that the money that the social security system distributes is not its own money. It does not belong to the Department, to the Chancellor or, sadly, to me. It is money which we have taken from people, who have earned it, to ensure that public services and the needs of others are looked after. That reiterates the point that Ministers have made from the Dispatch Box many times. Those who abuse the system are not getting back at the Tory Government but robbing their friends and neighbours. My hon. Friend made that point extremely clearly.

My hon. Friend also made an effective point about the attitudes of working people towards fraud. He made a clear distinction between those attitudes and the attitudes that we sometimes hear from those who represent left of centre parties. The hon. Member for Withington made his party's view clear, and I respect and understand that. However, some Opposition Members have said things that have caused us worry, and may have caused the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) to make his comments, which have been quoted today, about molly-coddling and the Labour party's past associations. We should welcome a break with those associations, but they have been at least part of the reason why the Labour party has seen such a slide in its support in the past decade.

The hon. Member for Withington, like others, spoke about new age travellers. Without necessarily condemning the life styles of those who seek to be alternative, many of us feel strongly that they should not support that by claiming from the rest of society. The concern about new age travellers is not that they want to be different—many people want and are entitled to be different; the question is whether they are entitled to be different at other people's expense. Unfortunately, new age travellers symbolise those who want their alternative life styles to be supported by the very people whose attitudes they mock and deride. That is why it has been necessary to take action.

Nevertheless, the Department must always remember that any measures it takes cannot be directed at individual groups on the basis of, "We don't like your face, John." We must draw up rules that apply to all, which is what we have done in toughening the regulations on the requirement actively to seek work, about which my hon. Friends feel so strongly. The Employment Service ensures that all those who register for unemployment benefit are taking reasonable steps to find employment. Regulations

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were introduced in December 1992 to remove entitlement to income support from unemployed people and childless couples who do not actively seek work.

Measures have also been taken to ensure that benefit claims by new age travellers do not inconvenience ordinary members of the public. One or two of my hon. Friends referred to the trestle tables set up to pay benefits on one occasion last summer and said that that was awful. I understand their point, but, on behalf of the Benefits Agency, I must explain that it must bear in mind the care and consideration that it owes to other claimants. If a large group of new age travellers descends on a particular office, that can be intimidating for the staff and for other claimants. On past occasions, we have been requested by the civil authorities to find an alternative way to pay benefits to new age travellers and that has been the driving force, rather than any desire to give preferential treatment to new age travellers or others who descend en masse on a particular office.

We have tried to ensure that it is clearly understood that new age travellers must satisfy the same conditions for entitlement to benefit as everyone else by proving that they are both available for and actively seeking work. We maintain close co-operation with the police to minimise any disruption to other benefit claimants and to prevent new age travellers from making fraudulent benefit claims.

The Benefits Agency has established a central contact point to enable police intelligence units to share information so that district managers can be forewarned of approaching groups of travellers. That will help the agency to handle benefit claims in the most efficient way, with due regard to the needs of its other claimants. It is well aware of the need to clamp down on any fraudulent claims.

I hope that that explanation has put the matter in context. I recognise that, in total, new age travellers constitute a small proportion of those claiming income support or unemployment benefit. However, in the areas where they congregate they can cause considerable disruption to ordinary people who are going about their business and are frightened by the presence of people who are identifiably different. Of course, the fact that a person's appearance is different is not the issue, but it is wrong when such people use their numbers to be intimidatory. The Benefits Agency is entitled to feel uncomfortable about that, on other people's behalf. My hon. Friends have made their position clear and I am happy to assure them that the agency takes the matter seriously.

The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) reminded me of bygone days. A decade ago, I served with the hon. Gentleman on Haringey council. It was wonderful in the early days. If it had not existed, the *Sun* would have had to invent it—it did everything that was expected from a loony left Labour council. It was marvellous. There were three political parties on the council at that time—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for Withington will give me a little leeway. That council was comprised of the Labour party that ran the council, the Conservative opposition, and the Labour party that did not run the council. The degree and intensity of debate between the two Labour parties was of the greatest concern and interest to us all. I must leave it to the hon. Member for Islington, North to say which side of the counter he was on in respect of that debate. At least I learnt at first hand the difficulties of looking after a London borough and of providing the housing and other benefits that are now part of my brief.

The hon. Member for Islington, North referred to the cross-London boroughs team. We acknowledge the initiative involved in bringing that team together and its effect, and we shall strongly support it. The hon. Gentleman spoke of his recent visit to Centrepoint. Some months ago, I visited Centrepoint in Vauxhall. We have made, and continue to make, strenuous efforts to ensure that young people who are entitled to receive benefit do so. I was struck by the number of youngsters at Vauxhall who had come from disturbed backgrounds. They move about a lot and it is difficult for them to obtain information—and for benefit staff to keep track of them and to help. We have sought to improve our information procedures. The hon. Member for Islington, North did not acknowledge that or give credit where it was due.

As to hardship payments, we have improved the information available, to make it clear that more people are eligible than was originally thought. We have produced a booklet to help young people and their advisers. Each Benefits Agency office has a special officer with responsibility to liaise and deal with young people. We have made strenuous efforts to help. Sometimes, we have been hindered by comments by Opposition parties to the effect that no young people can claim benefits—period—and that income support cannot be paid to any 16 or 17-year-olds. That is not true. In particular circumstances, 16 and 17-year-olds can receive income support. However, we have often reiterated our general policy that that is not the best option for them. Sixteen and 17-year-olds should be in continuing education, training or jobs. We will not change that policy, because we believe it is right. Where people fall through the net and are vulnerable, the Department stands ready to support them. We are trying hard to get the balance right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) made a spirited and determined contribution to the debate and gave a variety of examples of fraud being tackled in different circumstances. She gave a catalogue of the savings that can be achieved by a determination to detect and to root out fraud.

The point that I most drew from my hon. Friend's speech relates to attitudes. She indicated how attitudes to fraud and to similar crimes have changed. Some people feel that if they are taking money from the Department of Social Security, they are taking money from the Government and are somehow being clever or getting their own back. That is not true. My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge spoke of our belief that all crime is indivisible. I condemn City fraud and sharp practice as determinedly as anyone, and as the hon. Member for Withington would expect. Just as crime is indivisible, so, too, are attitudes to dishonesty. If people think that obtaining something from the Government by subterfuge is all right, we shall be on a slippery slope. Perhaps we are many years down that slippery slope.

One reason why we face the high benefits fraud bill that we do is that attitudes have changed in the way suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam. The spirit of honesty for which she called must be rekindled, but that cannot be done solely by the Department—or by the House in the attitudes that it displays, although that can help. Neither can it be

rekindled solely by the Government. The spirit of honesty and fair dealing of one towards another is a matter which society must take strongly. The various opinion formers, whoever they may be, must support all those who profess adherence to values that are decent, honest and timeless. The comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam were timely today and I thank her for them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam also referred to the progress that we have sought to make on order books. I am pleased that she welcomes our efforts. We have made strides in ensuring that order book fraud will be more difficult. It costs a great deal of money, so I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments and for her support for those who have done so much work to take that process forward.

Both my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) referred to the difficulties caused by the thin borderline between legality and abuse. That has been marked by some newspaper articles about some who have come to this country from the European Community and who appear to be taking advantage of our benefits system. That is a genuinely difficult issue because we have treaty obligations to those in the European Community, and we are determined to stand by and to support those obligations.

However, I agree strongly with those who have expressed concern about the apparent ease with which people from other EC member states can claim benefit here. We have already tightened up the income support rules that apply to people who come from other member states to seek work here. My hon. Friends were right to raise points about that matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds was especially concerned about housing benefit. Overseas students are not treated more favourably than home students. Most are excluded on the ground of nationality. Only certain vulnerable students may claim housing benefit, and overseas students who have overstayed their period of leave, who are subject to a deportation order or who are judged by the immigration authorities to be illegal immigrants are excluded from housing benefit, even if they are in a vulnerable group.

As the House appreciates, there is a distinction between persons from abroad and persons from the EC, to whom different legislation applies. We have carefully tightened up this week on particular abuse that was prevalent among persons from abroad. Most of them come to this country on visas that provide that they will not be in receipt of public funds while in this country. It has become the practice for some 10,000 a year to apply, towards the end of their stay, for leave from the Home Office to vary that restriction. The law was that if people applied for such leave, benefits became available at that stage. Few who made a request to change the visa in the particular circumstances that they described would have their visas changed. Accordingly, this country found itself paying £17 million of benefits a year to people who had no hope of having the visa restriction changed. This week, therefore, we have moved to close that loophole and we believe that were right to do so.

I can confirm to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds that we keep the position on asylum seekers pretty well under review. However, I make it clear to the House generally that the restriction I have just mentioned does not apply to genuine asylum seekers. This country has a long and proud tradition of being able to receive those who, for various reasons, are unable to continue their activities abroad. That tradition goes back to the Huguenots and many others.

However, we must be careful in these modern days, especially because of the problems of economic migration which my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds made clear, to ensure that that hospitality is not abused. There is a difficult line to find, as debates in the House over the past two or three years have made clear. The Department of Social Security will faithfully back up the view of the Home Office in its distinctions on particular cases. I assure the House that we look carefully at the matter, but that we intend to ensure that those genuinely claiming to be refugees will get through under the new system far more quickly. They need not fear; they will continue to be covered. I hope that, by doing so, we strike the right balance between this country's proper hospitality and abuse.

Mr. Bradley: Although I agree with what the Minister has said, will he confirm, so that we do not again get matters out of context, that the numbers of people who apply for political asylum are small, so that the amount that we are talking about is equally small?

Mr. Burt: Yes, indeed. Applications for asylum in the United Kingdom totalled 22,000 in 1990. In 1991, they shot up to 44,000. The Home Office took certain action and, by 1992, the figure had come down to 24,000. That shows how volatile the numbers can be in particular circumstances, but they illustrate that we are talking about small numbers.

It is interesting, however, for those who look after purses to note that small numbers add up to a lot. The hon. Gentleman is constantly on at me and my colleagues about small amounts of money that we might be able to use to improve the benefits system in a particular way. We have to tell them that we are sorry, but we do not have the money. The £17 million that I have just referred to and false claims can add up to the sort of money that we might be able to use for just those things on which we want to spend money. That is why small amounts are important.

The hon. Member for Withington referred to take-up. I tried to make it clear in my speech that I had set my remarks about fraud in the context of this Government's determination to ensure that those who are entitled to benefits get them. The total amount unclaimed is estimated to be £1·7 billion, but that sum has to be set in the context of the amount actually claimed. We must remember that almost £9 out or every £10 is claimed and that four out of five who are eligible to make a claim do so. It also tends to be the smaller amounts that people do not claim, rather than the larger amounts. We want people to claim what they are entitled to, but we cannot force them to claim. Nevertheless, we have taken action, though various campaigns, to try to improve information about benefits. I mentioned earlier the £15 million that we spend annually on trying to make sure that people know what is available.

As for the Chancellor of the Exchequer's remarks, my right hon. and learned Friend was not suggesting in any way that the Department of Social Security should discourage the claiming of benefit. What he was seeking to do, and what the Government have sought to do in recent weeks, was to make it clear that the whole of the social

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security budget has to be looked at in terms of trends for growth. My right hon. and learned Friend was looking at the trends in the number of people making claims.

Reference has already been made to the impact that these trends have had on invalidity benefit. Concern has been expressed about who is truly eligible for invalidity benefit and who is not. It was in that context that the Chancellor made his remarks, but the Department and the Government are determined to ensure that those who are eligible to claim do so. There was no suggestion in my right hon. and learned Friend's remarks that that will not remain the case.

The hon. Member for Withington referred to the perceived threat to post offices. I was able to say a few things at that time. May I reiterate, however, that the anticipated growth of automated credit transfer is likely to be more than offset by an overall increase in the volume of DSS transactions with the Post Office over the next few years. We are committed to ensuring that our contractual arrangements with the Post Office continue to promote a viable and national network of post offices. We have already given that commitment. I am happy to reiterate it.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the National Audit Office report. We welcome that report in general. It reinforces a number of messages that we have been trying to get across about the need to bear down on fraud and abuse. It highlighted the extent of instrument of payment fraud—the order books. The report was complimentary about the results achieved. It highlighted a number of areas for improvement: more effective allocation of resources, improved intelligence gathering, greater security of order book delivery and the need to change the style, design and content of order books.

We have already taken action. Reference has been made to the work that we have done on order books, the result of which was introduced this week. We are also committed to investing in better intelligence sharing and in specific action with the Post Office to help to improve the delivery of order book transactions.

The hon. Member for Withington referred to the need for secrecy about the report. I hope that I can reassure him. We have two things principally on our minds in relation to the restriction of information. The first is the need to protect our investigative staff. It should be noticed that yesterday's raid, which involved the seizure of benefit books and the possible saving of many millions of pounds —one national newspaper today suggested £36 million— had to be carried out with armed police available. People who are involved in criminal operations that could net such large sums will go to great lengths to protect themselves and stop at very little to get away with their crimes. It is essential that we protect our staff, so we have to be cautious about information in some cases.

Secondly, and as the hon. Gentleman recognised, we also have to bear in mind the risk of copycat fraud, so we sometimes have to be a little careful about the information that we can relese to the public. Knowing him as I do, I am sure that, in our private conversations, we can come to proper arrangements about any information that he might legitimately need for his work. There is no problem about that.

We spent a little time talking about local authorities and their involvement in helping us with housing benefit fraud. I pay tribute to their work. We have found them enormously helpful in many ways. I regularly meet representatives of local authority associations to discuss their housing benefit work, and I have found it one of the best examples of co-operation between national and local government that I have come across in my time in the House.

The hon. Member for Withington raised an issue mentioned to him by organisations such as citizens advice bureaux. They wonder whether, in view of the speed of the changes, we provide enough training. We try to ensure that we do. We provide free fraud training for local authority fraud investigators, and we have been able within our own budget to secure additional funding for that purpose. More than 80 per cent. of the investigators who attended the training in 1992 felt confident that they could usefully apply what they have learnt. We monitor the training to ensure that it is adequate. We thus take full account of the concerns of people outside and inside the system.

I have already mentioned the cross-London fraud working group, which is a very helpful initiative. The Department has agreed to support actively this newly formed London-wide team of local authority specialists, which has been set up to tackle organised housing benefit fraud. I am happy to support that team and have already agreed that DSS officials should attend its meetings. That should ensure the contintuation of the good relationship between central and local government. In answer to a specific point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North, I am sure that he will find the team very helpful in dealing with the problems of hopping from borough to borough.

The hon. Member for Withington referred to the new system of subsidies and the changes that we have made. He expressed concern about the setting of targets. As I said, I have spent considerable time discussing such subjects with local authority representatives. The development of systems to encourage local authorities to uncover housing benefit abuse takes time, and we keep that development under review. We believe that the baseline targets that we have set have been appropriate. They are not too difficult to achieve, but we will keep them under review. We in no way intend to create disincentives for local authorities that have achieved a high level of performance. We shall review the baseline setting methodology in the light of the savings achieved in the coming year.

Mr. Bradley: How many local authorities have achieved their targets at the lower level and at the higher level?

Mr. Burt: I may have to write to the hon. Gentleman about that; it is an especially detailed point. The higher baseline represents less than 3 per cent. of expected housing benefit and council tax benefit expenditure. If local authorities provide sufficient additional resources to tackle fraud seriously, there is no reason why savings far in excess of the baselines should not be achieved.

Mr. Bradley: My question was asked in the light of the Minister's statement that the Government believe that the targets are appropriate. Clearly, we need to know how appropriate. We need to know what performance levels local authorities are achieving against the targets. I believe that an answer may now be winging its way to us.

Mr. Burt: The information provision system in this place is amazing. On this occasion, I must disappoint the hon. Gentleman because it is too early to say precisely what the achievements will be. I sought to show, by the answer that I gave—that the higher baseline represents less than 3 per cent. of expected housing benefit council tax benefit expenditure—that we have set realistic targets. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, but we know that from the local authorities.

The way in which we have worked with local authorities and changed the incentives—I know that the hon. Gentleman and local authorities welcome that as a response to what they have been saying to us—shows our good faith on this matter. It is to our mutual advantage that we work with local authorities and provide a system that saves the public money, but, at the same time, enables local authorities to do that little bit more. That has been the intention of finding a system that has given them an incentive to do work that then gets them extra money. That is not a bad thing for local authorities and they have appreciated our efforts there.

With that good faith in mind, we will look at the targets, because it is not our intention to penalise local authorities that are working effectively. I am not sure how I can help the hon. Gentleman further, but I am happy to listen.

Mr. Bradley: The Minister's comment slid off his lips, as we were expecting the answer from somewhere else. He said that he would write and tell me which local authorities had achieved their targets. Perhaps when he sees that information, he may be in a better position to review the targets.

Mr. Burt: I give the hon. Gentleman a commitment that when I am in a position to write to him with substantial information, I will do so. It might be a little precipitate to do that now, but I note the hon. Gentleman's point and I will write to him.

In conclusion, I shall clear up a few final points because we have covered so much. Market testing is a real issue in the Benefits Agency and the Government. The aims of market testing are clear. We are trying to ensure that good value for money is achieved. Sometimes, the best way to save money and change practices has been through the process of market testing. No firm decisions have been made on any market testing of the fraud operation.

We are carefully exploring the scope for ensuring the most efficient and cost-effective way of handling fraud investigations. A preliminary study has been carried out, which will be carefully considered by the Secretary of State. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that, whatever arrangements might be entered into in the future, questions of sensitivity and confidentiality will remain of paramount consideration.

I turn to the point of targeting our anti-fraud effort. I can reassure the hon. Member for Withington that, as far as I am concerned, cases are dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Having said that, we cannot ignore patterns of fraud when we see them. In recognising the context of fraud, and perhaps finding an area where fraud, or a specific sort of fraud, is prevalent, individuals are treated as individuals. Benefit investigators know that. If we get that balance right, we will be able to deal with the sensitivities raised by the hon. Gentleman, which are shared by many, and ensure that we direct our efforts to recover fraud savings from the areas that are most likely to produce them.

We have had a long and useful debate on the subject of fraud. With estimated savings of £1 billion this year, that amount is a substantial part of any Government's budget, even a Department of Social Security budget of £80 billion. I am grateful for the attention and attendance of my hon. Friends, who gave us the benefit of their thoughts on this subject. They can reassure their constituents that they have a Government who are determined to ensure not only that those who are entitled to benefits receive them, but that those who are not, do not.

The warning is clear for those who seek to cheat, not me, but their fellow citizens. They will be found out and forced to repay. They may find themselves with a criminal record or a spell in gaol. We know that there are serious fraudsters about. There is nothing wrong in letting people know that other folk are diddling them. I hope that the Government's message of determination will be noted from the debate.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That—

(1) this House do meet on Tuesday 27th July at half-past Nine o'clock;

(2) notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 17 (Time for taking questions), no Questions shall be taken, provided that at Eleven o'clock the Speaker may interrupt the proceedings in order to permit Questions to be asked which are in her opinion of an urgent character and relate either to matters of public importance or to the arrangement of business, statements to be made by Ministers, or personal explanations to be made by Members; and

(3) at Three o'clock the Speaker do adjourn the House without putting any Question, provided that this House shall not adjourn until the Speaker shall have reported the Royal Assent to any Acts agreed upon by both Houses.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Cedars Nursery, Nottingham

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

2.5 pm

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): First, I thank the Speaker's Office for giving me the opportunity to raise this issue today.

I became interested in child care because of something that happened locally. I do not profess to be an expert on it, but I have some knowledge of Cedars nursery in my constituency, which is due to be closed. I should therefore like to address the issue on a national level and a local one.

My knowledge about child care nationally stems from what has happened locally. It seems fairly strange that, at a time when many of our major employers are banding together to try to guarantee better child care facilities in the community, the national health service should cut its child care provision. Those major employers are members of the forum, Employers Childcare, and they include the BBC, British Telecom, British Gas, the Co-operative bank, Kingfisher plc, Rover Group and the TSB Group plc. They all want to improve child care provision in the community. They are not driven to do that because child care is an equal opportunities issue or a women's issue. They are not concerned about issues that are peripheral to their business. They are not in the business of charity.

The aims of that forum are clearly set out in its statement, which says:

"The provision of quality child care will help businesses to maximise their commercial potential and make the best use of the skills and labour available."

The members of that forum want to make their businesses more efficient and effective. They want to improve the provision of child care in order to retain their highly skilled and experienced staff and to reduce recruitment costs, absenteeism and poor records on punctuality—all caused because of the conflict between child care and work. They want to stop waste and increase their profits.

The House should remember that I am talking about hardheaded business men—sometimes they are hardhearted—whose interest in child care is not founded on charity. They want to invest in it because they realise that they spend tens of thousands of pounds on training staff and that those staff acquire years and years of experience. Employers recognise that their small investment in child care makes not only common sense but good economic sense. I am pleased to note that the Secretary of State for Employment seems to support that important initiative.

There is no doubt that our record on child care is not good. We do not offer the same level of provision as that offered by our European competitors and that puts us at a real disadvantage in the market. According to a survey conducted in 1992 by the organisation, Working for Childcare, which is devoted to promoting good child care in the United Kingdom, there are fewer than 450 workplace nurseries in the United Kingdom and 50 per cent. of them are in London or the south. That amounts to some 12,000 full-time day care nursery places, which represents just one place for every 300 children who require it.

Although I welcome the tax relief proposals that the Government made in 1990, they will have little effect because 60 per cent. of workplace nurseries are in the public sector and cannot benefit from tax relief. Only 16 per cent. of such nurseries are in the private sector. Joint schemes between the public and private sectors represent some 20 per cent. and may be the best way to improve child care. I do not wish to be dogmatic because I am happy whether workplace nurseries are run privately, by the public sector or by a partnership between the two. I simply want more child care places to be made available.

The national health service has more workplace nurseries than any other employer. I applaud many of the district authorities' imaginative child care initiatives and congratulate them on their vision in realising the benefits of child care. However, we must put the figures in perspective. The NHS has more workplace nurseries than any other employer because it is the biggest employer in Europe, employing more than 1 million people, three quarters of whom—750,000—are women. Because the NHS is so big, its child care provision is not as good as one first thinks.

I shall quote the figures produced by the British Medical Association because those produced by the Department of Health are abysmal. The BMA's figures show that, of the women who leave the NHS for maternity reasons, only 17 per cent. return to the NHS after the first year of pregnancy. By comparison, more than 50 per cent. of women who leave their employment in banks for the same reason return after the first year. What is the Government's response to that? Clearly, something is wrong if only 17 per cent. of nurses return to work in the NHS. What are the Government doing about it? The Department of Health's response seems to be that it is doing very little and plans to do even less in the future.

When seeking answers, I deliberately narrowed my inquiry down to nurses because I thought that if I asked about all staff I would get no answers. I discovered that the Department of Health had incomplete records for 1988 and 1989 because 11 regional and district health authorities had not responded to its inquiry. The Department's 1990-91 records for the number of people who left the NHS for maternity reasons were also incomplete because 27 units either did not reply or the data that they provided were inadequate and could not be used in the statistics.

However, it became clear that thousands of nurses were leaving the NHS every year for maternity reasons. When I tried to find out how many returned to the Department of Health after maternity leave, I discovered that there was no record of that. That is abysmal. The retention saving for just one D-grade nurse is some £28,000. That makes me wonder how much money is being lost to the NHS because people still maintain health care philosophies dating back to the last century. I hope that I shall receive a positive response from the Minister about the Department of Health's national strategy. The employers forum and many major employers say that the Government need a national strategy for health care—where is it?

Compared with the private sector, the NHS has a good record, but that is not to say that it has a good record per se. I am worried that, particularly with the introduction of trust status, if no direction is given by the Secretary of State, the Department of Health will not provide any sense of direction. If there is no direction from the Department of Health, there will be no direction from the regional or district health authorities. That will create a feeling among the trusts and units being set up, which do not share the long-term economic view of child care, that they have no incentive to push for a health care strategy.

I have two questions for the Minister on the national strategy. Will he consider two of the recommendations made by the British Medical Association in its report, "Childcare for Doctors in the National Health Service"? First, will he ensure that the national health service unit conducts a comprehensive survey of child care provision on behalf of the NHS management executive? Will that survey address the specific needs of health service employees who have to work shifts and at weekends?

Secondly, will the Minister ensure that NHS and trust hospitals have an incentive to provide child care facilities through some form of subsidy equal to the tax relief enjoyed by private employers? At present, private employers benefit from tax relief, but NHS or trust hospitals cannot, which leaves them without an incentive. Had those two recommendations been in force, the local incident which I am about to describe would not have occurred.

I refer to the closure of Cedars nursery. It is an excellent nursery which I have visited on several occasions, and I have talked to staff, parents and people involved in it. The Minister may ask why the nursery is to close. I think that he has some reasons for its closure, but I hope to persuade him otherwise. The nursery is not going to close because there is no need for it in the district; there is a definite need —the health authority has 15,000 employees and the nursery has 30 places. At best, it can provide places for 40 children from 40 different families. Therefore, it is obvious that there is a need for it.

The nursery is not going to close because staff and parents do not want it to remain; they do. It is not going to close because it is unsuccessful; it has been an enormous success. There are two reasons why the nursery is to close: first, the district health authority did not have the foresight to plan properly to ensure that the nursery survived, and, secondly, many of the senior management in the NHS are not committed to child care.

Cedars nursery was set up 20 years ago. A few Saturdays ago, I went to its anniversary celebrations. If I or anyone else had any doubts about how successful and prestigious the nursery was and how much support it enjoyed among people in the district, those doubts would have been wiped away by the anniversary celebrations. So many people responded to the invitations that there had to be two celebration cakes. As I walked about the 30-place nursery, all I heard from the hundreds of people who attended the anniversary celebration—including parents, children, past parents and past children—was praise for the nursery. I have heard praise for the nursery from everyone who has had any involvement with it. It is echoed by everyone I talk to in the NHS—every trust, unit and hospital. They all say that it is a marvellous nursery and a great success.

In correspondence on this issue with the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), the chairman of the health authority said:

> "Managers here at the Health Authority, in conjunction with the providers in Nottingham—whether it be directly managed units or NHS Trusts—will continue to explore all options which will allow us to maintain what I am pleased to note is acknowledged as an 'excellent nursery education' in a way that is equitable to all those parties involved."

That is hardly faint praise—the man means it. The problem is that he goes on to identify the reasons why the nursery is to close.

It is astounding that the nursery should be closed for the reasons given. Now that the units are going their separate ways because they want to achieve trust status —some have already achieved it—Nottingham health care unit, which itself is in the process of going for trust status, feels that it has been left holding the baby; indeed, it feels that it has been left holding a number of babies. It has been left with the funding and running of a nursery which predominantly caters for the children of staff who work in the other units, which have now become trusts. The staff at the unit therefore say that the nursery is not their responsibility, because they are not using its services.

The city hospital trust and the Nottingham community health trust, with staff whose children attend the nursery, say that they were never given funding for the nursery; it went to the other units—so it is not really their responsibility either. When I tell the district health authority that the nursery is going to close, it tells me that it is now a purchaser, not a provider of facilities—so the nursery is no longer its responsibility. I do not exactly agree with that. When I write to the Secretary of State, I receive a letter from the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), saying, in effect, that it is not his responsibility either.

The facts are that the nursery is closing down, and that it is not the responsibility of the units, the trusts, the DHA, the RHA, the Secretary of State or the Department of Health—so no one is to blame for the closure. I should be failing in my duty as a responsible Member of Parliament if I accepted these explanations for closing an excellent nursery which is highly regarded by everyone in the area.

The Minister, in his letter, did attach a certain amount of blame to someone. He said:

> "Officials have contacted Nottingham Health Authority and I understand that employees have asked for future child care initiatives for health service staff in Nottingham to concentrate on the development and strengthening of holiday play schemes, which will benefit more people than the current nursery is able to help."

If that is what the Minister understands—I do not know where he gets his information from—he is wrong. Surveys among NHS staff show, depending on how the questions have been asked, that child care features prominently among women's priorities, as do workplace nurseries.

A survey carried out in my region, but not my district, by the Central Nottinghamshire health authority states, in its final paragraph:

> "More flexible working patterns and a seven-day week all-year round Creche were commonly felt to be the most important provision of the future."

The questionnaire sent by the Central Nottinghamshire health authority to its staff asks ambiguous questions. This affects my patch because it is in the area of the district health authority. People were asked about their problems with child care and the greatest response was about cost. They said that expensive child care was the biggest worry. The second concern, which was well above worries about finding suitable carers, upset children and unsympathetic managers, was the lack of workplace child care facilities.

Workplace nurseries did not come top of the replies to the question about how matters could be improved. Child care vouchers and cheques were most mentioned. However, 67 to 80 per cent. of the parents were in favour of workplace nurseries for one to four-year-olds. The Minister has been sadly misinformed if he has been led to understand that the employees want to get rid of the nursery.

The final proof that the staff are not the reason for the closure is that the union has formally invoked the

[Mr. John Heppell]

grievance procedure on behalf of the staff because the nursery is closing. It lists matters such as recruitment, retention, lack of suitable alternatives and commitment to equal opportuntiies as reasons for doing that.

The nursery closure is a direct result of reorganisation for trust status. I shall not engage in an argument with the Minister to try to persuade him to stop his plans for creating hospital trusts, but I hope that he accepts that in urging hospitals to seek trust status the Government did not intend to close excellent nurseries. That is effectively what is happening because no one is prepared to take responsibility for what existed before. I hope the Minister agrees that the responsibility lies with the district health authority. Before trusts were proposed, the health authority should have made appropriate plans to ensure that the nursery was properly catered for and assured of survival.

Even at this late stage, I hope that the Minister will make representations to Nottingham district health authority about the absurdity of a Department campaigning vigorously to increase child care places and putting up about £45 million to do it, while at the same time denying such facilities to people in my area because those making the decisions about it follow the child care philosophy of three decades ago.

Those who understand the importance of child care are members of the Employers for Childcare which is campaigning for more child care. I wish that my district health authority had the same competence so that we could be assured of decent child care facilities.

2.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) on having the good fortune to secure this debate. I spent six weeks prior to my appointment seeking the same good fortune but without success. My consolation prize is to respond to the debate. I also congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing before the House the proposal by Nottingham health care unit, which is part of Nottingham district health authority, to close the Cedars day nursery.

The letter that I sent to the hon. Gentleman clearly states:

"It is a matter for each local authority to determine and fund the provision of child care facilities for staff in the light of local need."

There is no question of not knowing who is responsible. I did not use the word "blame", because I was not apportioning blame. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that I understand that those are matters wholly for the district health authority. The Secretary of State and I do not have jurisdiction. It is not like a case of hospital closure, where the community health council can appeal to the Secretary of State.

The debate gives us the opportunity to explore together the issues and decisions in the case and reflect on some of the wider points that the hon. Gentleman has made. I listened to him with interest. I welcome his acknowledgment of the initiatives in the NHS.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

Mr. Bowis: The initiatives are important. They are developing and I am sure that both the hon. Gentleman and I hope that they expand in many other parts of the NHS. I recognise the local knowledge and concern that underlie his remarks. I am sure that he is anxious to secure the best possible facilities for his constituents and shares with the management of Nottingham healthcare unit and the two Nottingham trusts—Nottingham city hospital and community health—a real concern to ensure that employees derive all possible assistance in combining a career with a balanced and harmonious family life.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about records, responsibi lity, employment and local decisions. As is the case with banks, those are not for national decisions, but for local decisions. It is not for the Department to second guess the local needs and priorities as assessed and decided upon by the local district health authority. That is its job—it knows how to do it best—and we support it as far as we can in the conclusions that it reaches.

The proposal at issue is that the Nottingham healthcare unit does not wish to run the Cedars day nursery at a financial loss, and the nursery will have to close not later than 31 March 1994. The nursery was established in 1973 as a child care facility for the children of staff employed by Nottingham health authority. It has been managed by the general hospital, which now forms part of the Nottingham healthcare unit. It is financed by fee income from parents and a joint subsidy from the Nottingham district health authority and the two trusts. The majority of registered users work at the city and community health NHS trusts. That is, 62 per cent., or 26 children, from the former and 21 per cent., or nine children, from the latter, with four children from the district health authority.

Let me stress, as the hon. Gentleman has rightly stressed, that the manager and nursery nurses at the Cedars are to be congratulated on the high standard of child care that they have provided over the past 20 years. The hon. Gentleman spoke of people echoing that fact, and I am happy to join them on behalf of my Department. That fact has not gone unnoticed and has been valued and praised by parents and hospital management alike. Despite that quality, it has not attracted the numbers to fill the nursery. Cedars offered a much-needed resource in previous years, particularly when there was little or no independent nursery provision in the area and when the child minder network was both in its infancy and very informal. Just over one third of its 30 places have been provided for children aged up to two years.

Between 1988 and 1992, the number of places in registered day nurseries throughout the country grew by 100 per cent., while the number of child minders rose by 40 per cent. There are now 90,000 places in registered day nurseries all over the country, and 106,000 registered child minders offering 240,000 places for the under-fives. Despite the tone of the hon. Gentleman's comments, I hope that he will recognise that there has been extraordinary progress to providing a multi-agency approach and giving choice of different types of provisions —the hon. Gentleman acknowledged the desirability of that—and there are the figures to show it.

Mr. Heppell: I do not dispute the fact that extra places have been made available through child minders and private nurseries. The difficulty in the recruitment of

children for the nursery arose only when the health authority let it be known that it intended to close the nursery.

Mr. Bowis: There are at least 130 nursery places within a two-mile radius of the Cedars. Therefore, managers in Nottingham have asked themselves whether it is justifiable to continue to subsidise a loss-making facility with money that could otherwise be spent on direct patient care.

As a small, 30-place nursery, which is not based on a major hospital site, the Cedars meets only a very small part of the child care requirements of the 14,000-plus people employed by the health service in Nottingham. Nor is it ideally located for the majority of Nottingham health care unit staff, who typically form less than 10 per cent. of the registered users of the facility.

I understand that the decision to close the facility has not been taken lightly. Over the past five years, the future of the Cedars has been carefully considered by local managers. Currently, the facility is subsidised by the district health authority and the two trusts. However, even with parents paying a rate of £65·25 per week, which compares with a commercial rate in the area of between £65 and £82·50, there remains a subsidy to find, amounting to £4 per full session per child.

The nursery carried a deficit of £38,000 in 1992-93 and expenditure is expected to outstrip income by more than £28,000 again in 1993-94. That does not take into account the considerable capital expenditure for upgrading the fabric of the Cedars that would be required if the facility were to remain open—for instance, repairs to roofing, guttering and the ventilation system. It is believed that that money could be better spent in the health service on patient care.

A business plan for recovery of the capital costs of the upgrading, together with recovery of the existing subsidy over the next three years, would require an immediate increase of almost 30 per cent. in the weekly charge at the Cedars for current users. That would bring the charge up to almost £85 per week, which is well above the cost of places available in the commercial sector. Indeed, I understand that those 130 private nursery places nearest to the Cedars cost less than £75 per week.

Alternatively, the Nottingham health care unit estimates that it would be necessary to double the number of children using the nursery in order to make a commercial case for continuing to run it. I am told that the average occupancy at the Cedars over the past year has been 65 per cent., and I understand that the capital cost alone of expanding the nursery to accommodate twice that number would be in excess of £170,000.

I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that there is another, expanding facility close to the Cedars —the Queen's medical centre at the University hospital NHS trust. It is within 10 minutes travelling time of the Cedars and is a 50-place, privately run day nursery. It is expanding its capacity to 78 places and has already agreed with the Nottingham health care unit that children from the Cedars can be accommodated there if the parents so wish. The charge for a full place, including meals, is about £77 a week, which is £8 less than the charge that would be required for the Cedars were it to become commercially viable.

The hon. Member will join me, I am sure, in applauding the decision of managers at both Nottingham trusts to consult with staff about future staff benefits. The city hospital NHS trust has surveyed one in four of its employees and, in the light of the results, has decided to focus its child care efforts on strengthening the holiday play scheme and finding other ways of assisting with child care responsibilities. It has appointed someone who delights in the title of human resources planning and rewards manager—I hope that he speaks in simpler terms than that title implies—specifically to examine the issues of staff benefits and appropriate child care provision. The trust has therefore decided not to continue to subsidise the Cedars after March 1994.

Nottingham community health NHS trust has discovered that a centralised day nursery facility does not meet the needs of staff working across Nottingham. Efforts will therefore be directed at developing holiday play schemes. I understand that the trust will also discontinue its subsidy of the Cedars after March 1994.

The hon. Member will be aware that nursery places in the commercial sector are available in Nottingham. There are 37 nurseries listed in the city, Broxtowe and Rushcliffe areas, and the Vernon Park day nursery, which is due to open later this year, has advertised 50 places with rates of £70 per week, only a little above the current rate at the Cedars and considerably below the figure required for the nursery to become viable commercially. Nottingham also has an inner-city task force, which has been supporting a number of nursery and child care projects.

I understand that the Nottingham health care unit has always been prepared to consider any proposal put forward by parents or staff, or both, for the future of the Cedars. However, lengthy deliberation has shown that no viable business case has yet been found for keeping the nursery open. Nottingham health care unit and Nottingham health authority agreed to a proposal by parents and staff to form a co-operative to run the nursery, but that option has not been taken up by the parents.

Mr. Heppell: The option to form a co-operative was suggested by the parents. The only problem was that staff were worried that they would have to resign from the NHS to take up posts with the co-operative. The parents asked the unit's management whether they would second the staff to the co-operative, which would have paid them— there would be no cost to the NHS. It was simply a matter of protecting the employees' rights. The unit said that it was not prepared to do that, and in effect gave an ultimatum that unless the staff resigned by 31 May, the co-operative option was off.

Mr. Bowis: I entirely understand that. I imagine that parents and staff would have had to decide on certain issues. Nevertheless, the possibility was explored, even if—as the hon. Gentleman suggests—it was not possible to pursue it for the reasons that he gave, and perhaps for other reasons.

Managers at Nottingham health care and Nottingham health authority are to be commended for recognising the great duty that they owe to the seven staff currently working at the Cedars. The managers would like to put an end to months of uncertainty and to explore re-employment opportunities within and outside the health authority. Their intention is to redeploy staff into suitable alternative posts where possible, or to assist with finding alternative employment.

I emphasise that there is no doubt about the national health service's commitment to child care provision. The

[Mr. Bowis]

Department of Health fully recognises that good child care facilities can be of considerable help—and here I echo the hon. Gentleman's remarks—in reducing staff turnover, recruiting and retaining the services of NHS staff with young children, and competing for skilled staff in the labour market.

In particular, the provision of suitable child care facilities is a key factor in increasing women's participation in the work force, if they choose that following the birth of a child. As the hon. Gentleman lists equal opportunities as one of his special interests, I am sure that he will welcome progress in that respect.

In May 1991, the General Whitley Council reached agreement on new provisions for child care, which commended to health authorities the establishment of an appropriate range of facilities, including workplace nurseries, holiday play schemes and child care voucher arrangements. That is an enabling agreement, which gives each employer discretion to determine the type of assistance appropriate to local circumstances.

In 1991, the Department of Health also launched its "Women in the NHS Initiative" and subsequently joined the Opportunity 2000 campaign, to put women's issues on the NHS managerial agenda. As a result, there has been much interest generated throughout the NHS, and many authorities and trusts are looking at how they can improve their employment practices.

In reality, that has meant that local management has had to examine all aspects of employment practice, including flexible working, term-time hours, job share and, of course, child care. A survey by the NHS management executive at the end of 1991 showed that more than half the health authorities in England provided some form of help with child care. That is progress, and should meet some of the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

The NHS management executive recently produced a booklet, "School's out—initiatives for out of school child care", which focuses on the approaches that trusts and authorities have taken to improve the quality and quantity of child care available outside school hours and during holidays.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising those issues and for the chance to respond. I, for one, am firmly committed to the provision and development of appropriate forms of child care in the national health service in the light of local recruitment and retention needs, and in the light of the needs and wishes of local people—as assessed and responded to by local health authorities and local NHS trusts.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 5 July 1993

HEALTH

Folic Acid

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in educating the public and health professionals about the importance of folic acid in the diets of women of child-bearing age to reduce the risk of their children being born with spina bifida.

Mr. Sackville: Guidance has been issued to all doctors, senior nursing staff, midwives and health visitors and pharmacists as well as key professional organisations. Copies of the guidance will be placed in the Library. Manufacturers have been asked to increase the range of supplements and fortified foods available. The Health Education Authority has already begun to update its publications to include the new advice. Plans are under way to issue further public education materials this summer to raise women's awareness of the importance of taking folic acid when pregnant or planning a pregnancy.

Specialties

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* specialty beds and *(b)* specialists there were at the latest available date in each London region for (i) neurosciences, (ii) cardiac, (iii) renal, (iv) cancer, (v) plastics and burns and (vi) children; and what are the forecast numbers in each of those categories for each of the next five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 24 June at columns *248-49*. The whole-time equivalent number of consultants employed by each of the Thames regional health authorities and the special health authorities, by specialty, as at 30 September 1991, is shown in the table.

	NW Thames	*NE Thames*	*SE Thames*	*SW Thames*	*SHAs*
Neurosciences	18·2	36·3	20·9	19·0	28·8
Cardiac	11·1	16·1	27·1	14·4	35·4
Renal	17·2	31·5	28·8	16·1	8·4
Cancer	21·4	24·0	20·7	7·9	12·9
Plastics and Burns	8·9	7·4	7·8	2·8	0·9
Children	78·1	87·3	91·5	69·3	44·5

The future number of consultants will depend upon the pattern of provision of these services in the Thames regions which will be determined by a number of factors, including the strategic intentions of purchasers, the findings of the specialty reviews and those of the research reviews of the special health authorities.

Waterborne Diseases

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 8 June, *Official Report*, column *238*, if she will list the infectious diseases associated with poor water supply and sewage disposal and the incidence of those diseases in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: There are many diseases which can be associated with poor water supply and sewerage disposal, few of which are commonly found in this country.

GP Fund Holding

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the total cost of general practitioner fund holding in 1991-92 to all parts of the national health service.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 26 March at column *751*.

Specialty Reviews, London

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what assumptions she is proceeding in her review of London hospitals about the number of beds and specialists needed per head of population in each specialty.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is for local providers working with purchasers to maximise bed usage and to determine the number of consultants and the specialities they represent in order to meet their contractual commitments.

Eye Tests

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many national health service eye examinations have been undertaken since 1985 in each regional health authority and in England.

Dr. Mawhinney: The number of national health service sight tests paid for by family health services authorities in each financial year is shown in the table.

Number of NHS sight tests paid for, analysed by regional health authority

Thousands

Regional health authority	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*[1]	*1990-91*[1]	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Northern	592·1	600·0	627·6	698·0	740·4	336·8	275·6	314·7	—
Yorkshire	722·7	730·4	752·3	843·2	906·1	403·5	311·6	368·2	—
Trent	912·6	950·0	980·9	1,095·3	1,166·7	515·0	406·8	483·6	—
East Anglia	380·6	408·8	422·0	468·7	493·1	191·5	159·9	194·3	—
North West Thames	828·7	853·4	862·3	943·7	1,016·6	384·4	290·2	354·3	—

Regional health authority	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90[1]	1990-91[1]	1991-92	1992-93
North East Thames	894·5	914·4	943·4	1,028·0	1,055·0	468·2	361·4	440·3	—
South East Thames	734·6	761·8	803·6	875·1	927·8	385·6	296·9	359·9	—
South West Thames	625·8	648·7	652·9	710·6	735·3	283·0	220·4	267·8	—
Wessex	619·2	645·9	697·7	739·4	806·3	343·2	258·0	312·0	—
Oxford	489·6	515·6	546·1	607·9	657·3	221·5	205·7	247·5	—
South Western	761·6	785·9	826·6	917·2	1,017·5	418·1	324·5	402·9	—
West Midlands	1,096·6	1,154·8	1,188·8	1,314·2	1,438·4	634·0	488·2	574·0	—
Mersey	449·8	465·7	473·6	531·6	562·1	259·8	204·9	246·3	—
North Western	773·8	810·6	837·5	922·0	970·3	435·3	349·7	413·6	—
England[2]	9,882·2	10,245·8	10,615·4	11,694·8	12,492·8	5,279·8	4,153·7	4,979·4	[3]5,527·6

[1] From 1 April 1989, NHS sight tests were restricted to certain eligible groups in the population. The figures for 1989-90 included 1·63 million sight tests paid for in 1989-90 but conducted in 1988-89 under the previous scheme.

The remaining 3·65 million were conducted and paid for in 1989-90 but do not constitute a full twelve months of the scheme. The figures for 1990-91 which do represent 12 months under the new scheme, are not therefore directly comparable with those for 1989-90.

[2] Due to rounding, the sum of the components may not equal the total.

[3] Provisional figure. An analysis by regional health authority is not yet available.

Mr. Jonathan Zito

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will order a public inquiry into the circumstances which led to the death of Jonathan Zito and its implications for community care policies.

Mr. Bowis: The two regional health authorities concerned, South and North East Thames, are jointly holding an inquiry into the events which led to the death of Jonathan Zito. Any further action is dependent upon the report of the inquiry.

Dentistry

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the future of the rules governing free dental treatment.

Dr. Mawhinney: Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's review of the remuneration of general dental practitioners set out a number of options for changing the way in which we deliver general dental services. We have consulted widely on his report and shall announce our proposals in due course.

Abortions

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abortions have now been performed in total under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967 in the whole of the United Kingdom; and how many and what percentage of those abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother.

Mr. Sackville: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave her on 5 May at column *44* for the total number of legal abortions and the number and percentage of those performed in emergency "to save the life of the pregnant woman", notified to the Chief Medical Officers of England and Wales under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967.

Information relating to Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. Northern Ireland is not covered by the Abortion Act 1967.

Nurses and Midwives

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish details of the numbers of whole-time equivalent NHS nursing and midwifery staff employed on each grade and pay point of the clinical grades, educational grades and senior nursing and midwifery pay spine in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 23 June 1993]:* Figures for 1992 are not yet available. The information for 1990 and 1991 will be placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Tax

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how long it is expected it will take to settle outstanding disputes over council tax banding valuations in the Chelmsford parliamentary constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Circencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Planning on 29 June 1993 at column *416*.

Construction Industry

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his proposals for a review of procurement and contracting arrangements in the construction industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I have today chaired a meeting of representatives of the construction industry at which it was unanimously agreed to appoint Sir Machael Latham to undertake a review of procurement and contracting arrangements in the construction industry. We want less litigation and conflict and more productivity in the construction industry.

Sir Michael will begin work later this month and complete the review within 12 months. An interim report will be produced by the end of the year. Sir Michael will be assisted by a number of specialist assessors who will channel the views of their respective organisations. Where appropriate, groups of client and contracting organisations will stand behind the assessors and provide representative opinion on key issues.

The review will be jointly funded by the Department of the Environment, the Construction Industry Council, the Construction Industry Employers Council, the National Specialist Contractors Council and the Specialist

Engineering Contractors Group. It will be closely supported by a number of other bodies, in particular the British Property Federation and the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply.

The terms of reference of the review, which have been placed in the Library, require Sir Michael to consider the current procurement and contractual arrangements, and the roles and responsibilities of all participants in a contract. Sir Michael's objective will be to present recommendations to Government and other bodies about practical reforms to reduce conflict and litigation and to encourage productivity and competitiveness.

TRANSPORT

Market Testing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much the market-testing programme has cost his Department since November 1992.

Mr. Norris: The approximate cost of market testing since November 1992 is £430,000 including consultancies.

Woolwich Tunnel

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which railway organisations have responsibility for considering the benefits and costs of a rail tunnel under the Thames at Woolwich.

Mr. Norris: London Transport, with the London Dockland development corporation, and consulting British Rail, are conducting further studies of the costs and benefits of a rail tunnel at Woolwich. In addition Union Railways has invited comments on its proposals for a "Union Metro", which would incorporate a rail tunnel at Woolwich.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider a rail tunnel at Woolwich.

Mr. Norris: I shall certainly consider any well-founded investment proposal for a rail tunnel at Woolwich, and I look forward to seeing comments on the Union Metro proposal.

InterCity Trains

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures British Rail will be introducing to improve the locking mechanisms on InterCity trains; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail is implementing the main recommendations of the "Slam Door" report issued by the Health and Safety Executive, which included the redesign and replacement of primary door locks.

In addition InterCity has recently awarded a £17 million contract to ABB Transportation Ltd. to fit secondary door locks to the InterCity fleet of slam-door coaches.

Jubilee Line Extension

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent consideration he has given to the Jubilee line extension.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend keeps in close touch with the negotiations on the private sector contribution to the funding of the extension.

Passenger Service Franchises

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which part of European Community law governs the submission of bids to run passenger service franchises by the boards of nationalised railways and their subsidiaries.

Mr. Freeman: There is no Community legislation which directly deals with the role of nationalised industries in bidding for passenger rail franchises.

British Rail Maintenance Ltd.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the report by McKinsey on the future of British Rail Maintenance Ltd.

Mr. Freeman: This is an internal BR report that was prepared in confidence for the British Railways Board. I will be making an announcement on the future of British Rail Maintenance Ltd. as soon as possible.

Passenger Rail Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new passenger rail vehicles including locomotives, rolling stock and multiple units are scheduled for delivery to the British Railways Board during the financial years *(a)* 1993-94, *(b)* 1994-95 and *(c)* 1995-96.

Mr. Freeman: In addition to the answer I gave the right hon. Member in the *Official Report* on 12 March at column *768*, delivery of new leased rolling stock is planned for 1995 and 1996 using the £150 million facility announced in the autumn statement. The number of leased vehicles will depend on which of the supplier's bids currently being assessed by BR is successful. In addition BR may undertake fuller operating leases for rail vehicles subject to recent guidance issued by HM Treasury.

BR Staff (Working Hours)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the average hours worked per week by British Railways Board train drivers during the latest period for which figures are available.

Mr. Freeman: During the week ending 26 June 1993, BRB train drivers, excluding those absent through sickness or other reason for all or part of the week, worked an average of 47·8 hours.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the average hours worked per week by British Railways Board signalmen during the latest period for which figures are available.

Mr. Freeman: During the week ending 26 June 1993, BRB staff operating signals, excluding those absent through sickness or other reason for all or part of the week, worked an average of 50·8 hours.

BR Staff (Maintenance)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many British Railways personnel are employed on the maintenance of locomotives and rolling stock.

Mr. Freeman: On 26 June 1993, BRB had in its employment 17,146 personnel on the maintenance of locomotives and rolling stock.

Shipping Companies (State Aid)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral answer of 28 June, *Official Report*, column 643, if he will set a target date for the diminution of state aid to shipping companies in all European Community member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: It is not in our power to set a target date. This is primarily in the hands of the Commission. But we shall continue to take every opportunity within the Community to press for the early removal of state aids which distort competition among shipowners.

Search and Rescue

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made with the establishment of local coastal search and rescue committees since his announcement of 9 March 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The chief coastguard has now reached agreement with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, on the guidelines for the establishment of what will be called local search and rescue (SAR) committees. It is hoped that a similar agreement will soon be reached with the association for Scotland.

The committees, jointly chaired by HM coastguard and police, will provide a consultative body to consider co-ordination problems on the shoreline, improved liaison between interested authorities, and to assess the availability, readiness, and effectiveness of rescue resources. Such requirements are already embodied within a memorandum of understanding between HM coastguard and the police.

As far as practicable the jurisdiction of the committees will align with police force boundaries. Membership will comprise representatives of the emergency services, Royal National Lifeboat Institution—RNLI—Ministry of Defence helicopter bases, county and district council officials, harbour and port authorities, and recognised voluntary rescue services such as the Royal Life Saving Society—RLSS—and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents—RoSPA. Additional members may be co-opted from time to time as necessary.

Local search and rescue committees will be independent of my Department's district marine safety committees but will liaise as necessary with them on matters of mutual interest and concern.

A copy of the joint coastguard and police document, "Guidelines for the Establishment of Local Search and Rescue Committees" will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Railways (Disabled Passengers)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to make provisions for disabled passengers in the code of practice to be issued to the new railway operators; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We have introduced an amendment to the Railways Bill, currently before the House of Lords, which will place a duty on the regulator to prepare and promote a code of practice for protecting the interests of disabled passengers, and to consult the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee—DPTAC—in preparing or revising the code. This will be a published code of practice available to all new railway operators.

Pilots

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the maximum age at which a pilot is permitted to fly an aircraft for a commercial flight in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norris: Under schedule 8 of the Air Navigation Order 1989, the holder of an airline transport pilot's licence shall not at any time after he attains the age of 60 years, act as pilot in command or co-pilot of any aeroplane for the purpose of public transport, if the aeroplane's maximum total weight authorised exceeds 20,000 kg.

For aeroplanes below that weight, the licence holder may continue to fly an aircraft after he attains the age of 60 years, up to a maximum of 65 years, if the aeroplane is fitted with dual controls and carries a second pilot who holds an appropriate licence entitling him to act as pilot in command or co-pilot of that aeroplane.

M27 Aircraft Crash

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the age of the pilot who flew the aircraft which crashed on the M27 motorway on Wednesday 26 May.

Mr. Norris: I understand that the pilot is 63 years of age.

Sheehy Committee

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent he envisages that the recommendations of the Sheehy committee will apply to the British Transport police.

Mr. Freeman: As my hon. Friend is aware the terms of reference of the Sheehy inquiry did not extend to non-Home Department forces, but we nevertheless await the Home Secretary's response with interest. In the meantime we will study the report carefully and consider its recommendations in the context of the British transport police. I look forward to a further meeting in due course with my hon. Friend and representatives of the British Transport Police Federation to discuss this matter.

Rail Privatisation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to invite British Rail to bid for all franchises.

Mr. Freeman: Under clause 22 of the Railways Bill, British Rail could not be a franchisee; under clause 23(3) the franchising director could not therefore invite it to tender.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Palace of Westminster (Fire Safety)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *259*, if he will make available the report of Her Majesty's fire service inspectorate following its visits to the Palace of Westminster to monitor progress on the agreed programme of work over the past 10 years; and if he will list the specific points which have required the other visits to which he refers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The record of visits to monitor progress on the programme of works leading to fire certification is not kept in the form of a report. The other visits have been numerous, usually to provide advice on a variety of fire safety matters such as the enclosure of stairways, fire doors, signs, and the appointment of in-house fire safety specialists. In both cases the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Police Complaints Authority

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were disciplined by the Police Complaints Authority in 1992.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None. Responsibility for discipline lies with chief officers. The Police Complaints Authority may recommend that disciplinary charges are brought and did so in relation to 56 charges in 1992.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases were dealt with by the Police Complaints Authority in 1992.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on the different categories of cases dealt with by the Police Complaints Authority in 1992 is contained in chapter 10 of its annual report for 1992, available in the Library.

Prisoner Transfers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what criteria are followed by his Department in approving the transfer of a prison inmate from a closed prison establishment to an open prison establishment; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many prison inmates in prisons in England and Wales requested a transfer to a prison nearer their home during the last six months for which figures are available; and how many such requests were granted.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 4 July 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the criteria for the transfer of prisoners from closed to open prisons, and the number of prisoners who requested transfers to a prison nearer their home during the last six months.

The principles which apply to the decision whether to downgrade an inmate's security categorisation are set out in Circular Instruction 7/1988, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library. Account is taken of a number of factors including time left to serve, attitude, positions of trust held and behaviour in any periods of temporary release. Any prisoner who has successfully completed a period of home leave is considered for transfer to an open establishment.

Requests made by prisoners seeking transfers to establishments nearer their homes are dealt with locally and information is not collected centrally.

Police Batons

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether officers of the North Wales police force will be equipped with side-handled extendable batons for the purpose of testing their effectiveness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 21 June at column *2*.

Housing Estates (Crime)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the delays in enforcing the law concerning criminal behaviour on housing estates.

Mr. Charles Wardle: As far as I can ascertain, no representations on this subject have been received recently. The deployment of resources to investigate crime is an operational matter and is therefore the responsibility of chief officers of police.

Police

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many copies of the Sheehy inquiry report will be distributed to branches of *(a)* the Police Federation and *(b)* the Police Superintendents Association.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Sheehy inquiry secretariat supplied two copies of the report to the Police Federation and Police Superintendents Associations headquarters. In addition, the Home Office distributed 60 copies to the Police Superintendents Association.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had since 28 April with bodies representing London borough councils concerning his proposals for policing in London as contained in Cm 2281.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend met with the Association of Metropolitan Authorities on 17 June and again on 28 June. Copies of my right hon. and learned Friend's statement of 28 June and that of his predecessor, announcing the Government's intentions, and copies of the White Paper were sent to the local authority associations, including the Association of London Authorities, the London Boroughs Association and the Outer London Districts Metropolitan Police Consultative Association.

Asylum

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been denied access to the United Kingdom's asylum procedures on third country grounds in the past 12 months and been

subsequently removed from this country; and how many of these were subsequently returned by the third country to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In 1992, 441 port asylum applicants—excluding dependants—were removed from the United Kingdom following refusal of their application on the ground that they had arrived from a safe third country. Information on cases subsequently returned by the third country is not recorded.

Pepper Sprays

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to evaluate the use of pepper sprays for police purposes.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We are assessing the information which is available about these products, in relation to their possible use by the police against dogs.

Central European Time

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has reached a decision with regard to moving the United Kingdom to central European time; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I would refer the hon. Member to my reply on 24 June to a question from the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright), columns *255-56*).

PRIME MINISTER

No. 10 Downing Street

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what charges are made for the use of 10 Downing street for charitable or other fund-raising events; and what use is made of the catering and other facilities of 10 Downing street at such events.

The Prime Minister: Where charitable or other non-official events are held at No. 10 Downing street, the organisers are responsible for all catering and staff costs, as well as other miscellaneous direct costs. Organisers may use the kitchens or other facilities at No. 10 Downing street.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what are the rules governing the use of No. 10 Downing street for non-official purposes;

(2) if he will give details of the rules governing the use of 10 Downing street for the purposes of fund raising for political parties.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 June 1993]:* Ministers under this and previous administrations have been allowed—at their own or party expense—to host non-official or party receptions or functions in Downing street. All catering, staff and other direct expenses must be met by the organisers of the event. Appropriate arrangements are required for security clearance.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister how many functions to raise money for political parties have been held at No. 10 Downing street since 1980.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 June 1993]:* Under this and previous Administrations, a variety of functions have been held at No. 10 Downing street where the costs have been met by political parties. The purpose of such functions is not a matter for the Government, but I can confirm that since November 1990, there have been no functions at 10 Downing street at which funds have been raised for political parties, or for which tickets have been sold for the benefit of political parties.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what charities benefited from functions organised in No. 10 Downing street in each year since 1984.

The Prime Minister *[holding answers 22 and 23 June 1993]:* Since November 1990, there have been a total of 25 receptions, dinners or other functions at No. 10 Downing street for charities or voluntary bodies. The organisations concerned have been:

NSPCC
Surrey County Cricket Club Youth Trust
Lords Taverners
MENCAP
Age Concern
EUREKA
Wordsworth Trust
Huntington's Disease Association
Action Research
Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust
National Council of Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care
Crossroads Care[1]
Animal Health Trust
ORT
Youth Clubs (UK)
ChildLine
Silver Trust
Marie Curie Cancer Care
Excalibur Scheme
Motability
Westminster Foundation for Democracy
London Community Cricket Association
International Spinal Research Trust
Cambridge Arts Theatre Trust

[1] two functions

Mr. Asil Nadir

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give details of the functions attended by Mr. Asil Nadir in No. 10 Downing street since 1984.

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Prime Minister how many times in the last 10 years Mr. Asil Nadir has attended functions in No. 10 Downing street.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 June 1993]:* I understand that Mr. Nadir attended six functions in No. 10 Downing street between 1984 and 1989. These were a dinner and a reception for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children; a reception for the Harold MacMillan Trust; a lunch for the President of Turkey; and two lunches for industrialists.

Vietnam

Mr. Alton: To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise the issues of the extent of religious freedom in Vietnam, and the continued imprisonment of persons in that country for their faith, with the Prime Minister of Vietnam during his forthcoming visit.

The Prime Minister: I intend to raise our concerns about human rights in Vietnam with the Vietnamese Prime Minister, Mr. Vo Van Kiet, during his forthcoming visit to the United Kingdom.

Plaques

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister if inscriptions on plaques which are unveiled in the course of visits by foreign Heads of State are viewed in advance by representatives of Her Majesty's Government.

The Prime Minister: We would agree in advance any inscriptions on plaques unveiled at official engagements. We would not expect to be consulted about private engagements.

Republic of Ireland President

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister if proposals by the person holding the position of President of the Irish Republic to visit the United Kingdom are communicated to Her Majesty's Government by the office of the President of the Irish Republic.

The Prime Minister: Proposals for visits to the United Kingdom by the President of the Irish Republic are communicated to Her Majesty's Government by the Government of the Irish Republic.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister what information he receives from the office of the President of the Irish Republic on thanks received in respect of visits by the person holding the position of President of the Irish Republic.

The Prime Minister: None.

Heads of State

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the private visits to Northern Ireland by foreign Heads of State in each of the last three years.

The Prime Minister: The information is as follows:
16 December 1990—President Robinson
4 February 1992—President Robinson
22 May 1992—President Robinson
6-7 September 1992—President Robinson
18-19 June 1993—President Robinson

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister what criteria are used to distinguish between private and official visits to the United Kingdom by foreign Heads of State.

The Prime Minister: Official visits are those undertaken at the invitation of the British Government.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the public engagements which have been fulfilled by Heads of State during private visits to Northern Ireland in each of the last three years.

The Prime Minister: The information is as follows:

16 December 1990
President Robinson attended the Installation of Archbishop Daly at Armagh and visited the Armagh Observatory.

4 February 1992
President Robinson met women's groups at the EOC Offices in Belfast; had lunch with the Law Society; met voluntary groups and cultural traditions groups in the Linenhall library; and attended a reception in Stormont castle.

22 May 1992
President Robinson, as part of "Impact 92" in Londonderry, lunched with Church leaders, visited Foyle day care centre, opened "The Craft Village", visited community groups, and attended a civic reception and pageant.

6-7 September 1992
President Robinson attended the "Beyond Hate Conference" in Londonderry; opened Belcoo enterprise unit; lunched with Enniskillen Rotary; and met community groups in Enniskillen library.

18-19 June 1993
President Robinson visited the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust, Down museum, and West Belfast community groups; attended the Solicitors' Association annual dinner; and visited Coalisland enterprise centre and Ballance house, Glenavy.

All the above visits were private. President Robinson attended each engagement at the invitation of the organisers.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Prime Minister which of the undertakings given by the Federal Yugoslav Government at the London conference on 26 and 27 August 1992 have been fulfilled; what assessment he has made of changes in their policy and actions towards the crisis in the former Yugoslavia; what changes he considers to be still required; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The London conference established principles and a negotiating structure as the basis for a settlement of the problems of the former Yugoslavia and set out specific steps to secure an effective and durable cessation of hostilities. The Yugoslav authorities have failed to co-operate satisfactorily with the efforts of the international community to achieve peace in Bosnia and to resolve the problems of minorities in Croatia and Serbia. The international community is committed to the rigorous enforcement of United Nations sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro until the conditions for their lifting have been met.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Prime Minister when the question of sanctions against the Republic of Croatia was last considered by Her Majesty's Government; and what plans he has to raise this matter again with the international community in the future.

The Prime Minister: Policy towards Croatia is regularly reviewed in the light of Croatian Government co-operation with the efforts of the international community both to ensure a peaceful resolution of the problems in the Krajinas and to achieve a lasting and equitable peace in Bosnia. Croatia was put on notice by the 8 June meeting of EC Foreign Ministers that restrictive measures would be initiated against Croatia if the situation so requires.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Prime Minister to what extent the Croatian Government have complied with its obligations, as outlined in the London conference; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The London conference established principles and a negotiating structure as the basis for a settlement of the problems of the former Yugoslavia and set out specific steps to secure an effective and durable cessation of hostilities. The Croatian Government are expected to do more to co-operate with efforts to achieve

peace in Bosnia. Croatia was put on notice by the 8 June meeting of EC Foreign Ministers that restrictive measures would be initiated against Croatia if the situation so requires.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Prime Minister which of the undertakings made by the Serbian Government at the London conference on 26 and 27 August 1992 have been fulfilled; to what extent there have been changes in their policy and actions towards the crisis in the former Yugoslavia; if he will list the changes still required; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The London conference established principles and a negotiating structure as the basis for a settlement of the problems of the former Yugoslavia and set out specific steps to secure an effective and durable cessation of hostilities. The Belgrade leadership has failed to co-operate satisfactorily with the efforts of the international community to achieve peace in Bosnia and to resolve the problems of minorities in Croatia and Serbia. The international community is committed to the rigorous enforcement of United Nations sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro until the conditions for their lifting have been met.

Unemployment, Liverpool

Mr. Parry: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside and the deputation representing the unemployed in Liverpool.

The Prime Minister: I met the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside with a number of other people from the area on 16 June. I will be writing to him shortly about points raised at the meeting.

Mr. Shabir Shan and Mr. Yasin Malik

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 27 May, *Official Report*, column *663*, what further information he has received about the detention in India of Mr. Shabir Shah and Mr. Yasin Malik; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Our high commission in New Delhi is in regular touch with the Indian Ministries concerned, but have received no further information on the cases of Shabir Shah and Yasin Malik since receiving the aide memoire from the Indian Home Ministry which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs forwarded to the hon. Gentleman under cover of his letter of 30 June.

Mr. Gazanfer Ali

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 8 June, *Official Report*, column *226*, what further information he has received about court proceedings in Pakistan relating to Mr. Gazanfer Ali; and if he make a statement.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs wrote to the hon. Member for Bradford, West on 24 June with information on the two cases involving murder charges against Mr. Gazanfer Ali. Both cases have been further adjourned.

EDUCATION

Class Sizes

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the class sizes in January in Lancashire in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Robin Squire: The average sizes of single teacher classes in maintained primary and secondary schools in Lancashire local education authority for the years 1983 to 1992 are given in the table.

Average sizes of classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary and secondary schools in Lancashire Local Education Authority[1] 1983-92 (Position as at January each year)

	Primary Schools	*Secondary Schools*
1983	26·4	20·9
1984	25·9	20·8
1985	26·5	21·1
1986	26·9	20·8
1987	27·0	20·3
1988	26·7	20·2
1989	27·2	20·0
1990	27·5	20·2
1991	27·7	20·7
1992	27·6	20·7

[1] Figures for 1990, 1991 and 1992 include self-governing schools.

Delegated Funding

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will show, for each local education authority and for each year since 1989 for which information is available, the proportion of the potential schools budget delegated to schools, listing local education authorities by rank order of the proportion delegated in the most recent year for which information is available and showing the rank order in each year.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is as follows:

Table showing the proportion of the potential schools budget (PSB) delegated to schools: 1990-94

(1) Local education authority (LEA)	*(2) Proportion of potential schools budget included in schools' budget shares*						
	1993-94	*1992-93*		*1991-92*		*1990-91*	
	Percentage	*Percentage*	*Rank order number*	*Percentage*	*Rank order number*	*Percentage*	*Rank order number*
All LEAs where LMS in operation before April 1992							
1. Hertfordshire	91·1	87·1	16	86·2	18	n/a	—
2. Dudley	90·5	85·1	59	84·5	54	84·0	35
3. Solihull	90·1	85·8	34	85·6	28	85·3	18
4. Leicestershire	90·0	85·4	48	84·3	58	n/a	—
5. Wolverhampton	89·9	80·9	97	81·6	93	81·8	69
6. Brent	89·8	86·9	20	83·5	72	83·6	38

(1) Local education authority (LEA)	(2) Proportion of potential schools budget included in schools' budget shares						
	1993-94	1992-93		1991-92		1990-91	
	Percentage	Percentage	Rank order number	Percentage	Rank order number	Percentage	Rank order number
7. Manchester	89·1	87·2	14	88·0	6	n/a	—
8. Leeds	88·8	86·8	22	86·3	17	86·1	10
9. Rochdale	88·7	88·3	6	88·5	2	85·7	13
10. Cheshire	88·7	88·3	8	87·4	12	84·3	31
11. Sefton	88·4	88·8	2	87·9	7	87·4	4
12. Cumbria	88·4	86·7	23	85·4	34	82·5	60
13. Westminster	88·4	85·6	38	84·9	44	78·0	87
14. Berkshire	88·3	89·1	1	87·7	8	87·7	2
15. Barking and Dagenham	88·3	87·8	9	85·2	37	87·0	5
16. Walsall	88·1	85·7	37	85·5	29	85·7	14
17. Oxfordshire	88·1	85·9	32	84·7	48	81·4	76
18. Northumberland	87·9	87·2	15	88·2	5	86·5	8
19. Lincolnshire	87·8	86·3	26	85·5	32	85·1	20
20. Bexley	87·8	88·3	7	81·3	94	81·3	77
21. Hounslow	87·8	84·8	64	83·3	77	81·6	73
22. Sunderland	87·7	88·3	5	88·4	3	86·9	6
23. Suffolk	87·6	87·0	19	97·6	10	85·7	15
24. Northamptonshire	87·6	87·6	10	86·0	22	84·7	24
25. Croydon	87·5	86·8	21	81·0	95	n/a	—
26. Stockport	87·5	88·3	4	88·7	1	n/a	—
27. Birmingham	87·4	84·3	83	83·4	73	83·0	52
28. Hereford and Worcester	87·4	85·5	44	84·0	61	n/a	—
29. Bury	87·3	87·1	17	85·3	36	81·9	65
30. Devon	87·3	87·3	12	87·1	13	83·1	51
31. Wiltshire	87·2	84·4	77	83·3	76	82·4	62
32. Bedfordshire	87·2	85·2	52	83·3	75	84·0	34
33. Essex	87·1	85·1	57	85·1	41	84·0	33
34. Enfield	87·0	86·4	25	84·7	47	81·5	75
35. Bolton	86·9	88·5	3	88·3	4	89·1	1
36. West Sussex	86·8	87·4	11	87·7	9	87·5	3
37. Ealing	86·7	86·1	29	82·9	83	81·7	71
38. Wirral	86·7	85·7	35	85·7	27	n/a	—
39. Merton	86·7	84·3	81	84·9	45	79·8	82
40. Staffordshire	86·7	85·4	45	84·8	46	84·6	25
41. Harrow	86·6	82·8	94	82·5	90	81·5	74
42. Knowsley	86·6	84·4	78	83·2	78	81·9	66
43. Dorset	86·5	84·2	85	85·2	38	81·9	68
44. Trafford	86·5	84·7	71	83·9	65	84·4	28
45. Cleveland	86·4	84·4	76	83·4	74	83·6	39
46. Havering	86·4	86·1	30	85·1	40	83·9	36
47. Nottinghamshire	86·3	85·1	58	84·0	63	82·7	55
48. Redbridge	86·2	85·0	61	83·9	81	82·7	56
49. Shropshire	86·2	86·3	27	86·1	20	84·6	26
50. Sandwell	86·1	85·6	42	82·7	87	83·2	49
51. Bradford	86·1	84·7	68	86·7	15	86·0	11
52. Newcastle	86·1	84·9	63	82·4	91	79·8	83
53. Warwickshire	86·1	87·0	18	86·7	14	85·2	19
54. Coventry	86·1	83·0	93	82·8	86	80·9	78
55. South Tyneside	86·1	86·0	31	85·9	23	83·8	37
56. Calderdale	86·1	85·6	40	85·5	31	81·9	67
57. Salford	86·0	84·7	66	86·0	21	84·4	29
58. Barnet	86·0	85·2	54	83·7	71	84·4	30
59. Haringey	86·0	83·8	90	83·8	69	79·4	85
60. Cumbridgeshire	86·0	87·2	13	87·5	11	80·8	79
61. Hampshire	85·9	86·6	24	86·1	19	85·8	12
62. Durham	85·8	85·3	49	82·2	92	83·1	50
63. Avon	85·8	83·6	91	82·8	85	82·3	64
64. Doncaster	85·8	84·2	84	84·0	60	85·5	17
65. Waltham Forest	85·8	82·1	95	80·2	96	79·7	84
66. East Sussex	85·7	85·2	53	85·4	35	84·1	32
67. Sutton	85·6	84·7	70	85·2	39	83·4	42
68. Wigan	85·6	84·1	86	83·0	82	83·3	47
69. Bromley	85·6	84·7	72	84·9	43	80·7	80
70. Richmond	85·6	85·0	60	82·6	89	80·0	81
71. Isles of Scilly	85·5	85·1	56	83·2	79	n/a	—
72. Surrey	85·5	85·7	36	84·6	49	85·6	16
73. Kent	85·5	84·5	73	85·8	26	84·9	23
74. Barnsley	85·4	85·3	51	85·9	25	83·4	43
75. Somerset	85·4	85·6	39	85·5	30	82·9	53
76. Gateshead	85·4	83·9	89	83·9	66	83·3	46
77. Derbyshire	85·4	84·5	75	84·0	62	83·4	45
78. Sheffield	85·3	84·1	87	85·9	24	82·6	59
79. Oldham	85·3	84·3	82	83·1	80	81·6	72
80. Buckinghamshire	85·3	85·3	50	86·6	16	84·9	22

(1) Local education authority (LEA)	(2) Proportion of potential schools budget included in schools' budget shares						
	1993-94	1992-93		1991-92		1990-91	
	Percentage	Percentage	Rank order number	Percentage	Rank order number	Percentage	Rank order number
81. Cornwall	85·3	85·0	62	84·0	64	83·6	41
82. Norfolk	85·2	86·2	28	84·4	55	83·6	40
83. Tameside	85·2	84·7	67	83·8	68	84·4	27
84. Rotherham	85·2	84·7	69	85·4	33	86·1	9
85. St. Helens	85·2	85·4	47	84·5	52	83·3	48
86. Kirklees	85·2	85·5	43	85·0	42	83·4	44
87. Humberside	85·1	85·2	55	84·6	50	81·7	70
88. Hillingdon	85·1	84·4	79	83·9	67	n/a	—
89. Wakefield	85·1	84·0	88	84·3	57	82·9	54
90. Newham	85·1	82·1	96	79·5	97	n/a	—
91. North Tyneside	85·1	84·8	65	84·6	51	82·3	63
92. Kingston upon Thames	85·0	85·6	41	84·4	56	78·5	86
93. Isle of Wight	85·0	85·8	33	83·8	70	82·5	61
94. Liverpool	85·0	84·5	74	82·9	84	84·9	21
95. Gloucestershire	85·0	83·2	92	84·5	53	86·8	7
96. Lancashire	85·0	84·3	80	82·7	88	82·7	57
97. North Yorkshire	n/a	85·4	46	84·2	59	82·6	58
Averages	86·7	85·6		84·9		83·8	
Inner London LEAs where LMS in operation from April 1992							
1. Islington	92·6	85·2	2				
2. Corporation of London	86·5	87·0	1				
3. Greenwich	86·3	79·6	9				
4. Tower Hamlets	85·9	77·2	11				
5. Camden	85·0	83·2	4				
6. Hammersmith and Fulham	84·6	81·7	5				
7. Lewisham	83·8	81·1	6				
8. Lambeth	83·6	79·7	8				
9. Southwark	83·3	79·1	10				
10. Kensington and Chelsea	81·7	76·1	12				
11. Wandsworth	80·8	84·2	3				
12. Hackney	n/a	79·8	7				
Averages	85·0	80·6					
National averages	86·6	85·3		84·9		83·8	

Notes:

1. All 109 local education authorities (LEAs) in England have local management schemes in operation and are required to publish budget statements showing planned expenditure, under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988. The figures above are derived from those statements. The LEAs are ranked according to the percentage of funds included in schools' budget shares in 1993-94, with those including most at the top of the list. All percentages are rounded to one decimal place; where more than one LEA is shown as having the same percentage, the rank order takes account of the unrounded percentage. In the case of the inner London LEAs (other than Westminster), the introduction of statutory local management schemes was deferred until April 1992; the 12 LEAs concerned are listed separately.
2. The potential schools budget (PSB) in each LEA consists of the general schools budget (GSB)—ie all planned spending on schools—less planned spending on certain excepted or centrally held items: capital expenditure; expenditure supported by central government and EC grants; and expenditure on home to school transport, school meals, cleaning and grounds maintenance, and other transitional exceptions. With effect from April 1993 (April 1995 in the case of the 12 inner London LEAs shown separately), the total of schools' budget shares must account for at least 85 per cent. of each LEA's PSB. Where figures for 1993-94 are said to be not available (n/a), the LEA's budget statement had not been received in the Department by the end of June 1993; in relation to 1990-91, n/a indicates that no statutory local management scheme was yet in operation for the LEA concerned. Percentages and ranking order numbers are given for previous years.

NB The percentages shown above may differ from those calculated by individual LEAs because of the effects of rounding.

Education Assets Board

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many recommendations from the Education Assets Board are awaiting a decision by his Department; and if he will list them and the time they have been with his Department.

Mr. Robin Squire: There are 14 cases awaiting final determination by my right hon. Friend. These are:

Institution	Date received
Grant Maintained Schools	
Dartford Grammar School for Girls, Kent	December 1992
Epsom and Ewell High School, Surrey	March 1993
Great Barr School, Birmingham	August 1992
Kingsley Park School, Northamptonshire	September 1992
Pate's Grammar School, Gloucestershire	November 1991
Reading School, Berkshire	April 1993
Stratford School, London	May 1992
Thamesview School, Kent	March 1993
Wilson's School, Sutton	June 1993
Wymondham College, Norfolk	December 1992
Higher Education Institutions	
Falmouth College of Art and Design	September 1991
University of Greenwich	September 1991
University of West of England; Bath College of HE	November 1991
Further Education Institutions	
Somerset College of Arts and Technology	June 1993

Disabled Students

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the number of disabled people, in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: There were 11,000 full-time and 32,000 part-time students with learning difficulties and disabilities in further education colleges in England in 1991-92. Approximately 165,000 children had statements of special education needs maintained by local education authorities in England in 1991-92. Numbers of people with disabilities and learning difficulties in other sectors of education are not collected centrally.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to allow part-time disabled students to claim disabled students' allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Disabled students' allowances are payable as part of a mandatory award. The Education Act 1962 restricts mandatory awards to designated full-time courses, and to certain part-time initial teacher training courses. Local education authorities can make discretionary awards for other part-time courses, including such allowances as they think fit.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will update the table given in his answer of 6 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *513*, giving the number of copies distributed and the cost in each case of the booklets *(a)* "School Governors, How to Become a Grant-maintained School", *(b)* "Grant-maintained Schools—Questions Parents Ask", *(c)* "Grant-maintained Schools—What it Means for Staff", *(d)* "Grant-maintained Schools—Questions Staff Ask", *(e)* "Grant-maintained Schools—Experiences During the First Year" and *(f)* "Education into the Next Century".

Mr. Robin Squire: The total numbers of booklets which have been printed to fulfil expected demand and the current costs of producing each booklet are as follows:

Total printed	*Current cost per booklet*
	£
(a) 300,000 since April 1992	0·23
(b) 1,635,005 since March 1990	0·08
(c) 193,000 November 1990—September 1992	[2]0·09
(d) 225,000 since September 1992	0·07
(e) 470,000 since June 1991	0·09
(f) 2,750,000 since August 1992	[1]0·0592

[1] Estimate
[2] Booklet is no longer produced; it has been superseded by *(d)*. This was the cost when it was last produced.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list, for each local education authority, the date when his Department received a local management of schools budget statement made under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988 for the purpose of calculating grant-maintained schools' budgets for the financial year 1993-94, the date when an acknowledgement was sent, if that budget statement formed a satisfactory basis for the calculation of annual maintenance grant for the grant-maintained schools in the authority's area, and the date by which he expects that his Department will have informed *(a)* 30 per cent., *(b)* 40 per cent., *(c)* 50 per cent., *(d)* 60 per cent., *(e)* 70 per cent., *(f)* 80 per cent., *(g)* 90 per cent. and *(h)* 100 per cent. of grant-maintained schools of their final annual maintenance grant budget figure.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows the date the section 42 statement was received from LEAs with grant-maintained schools within their area and the date receipt was acknowledged by the LMS unit of the Department. LEAs were advised in February that provided they submitted complete and final budget details by 31 March such data would be used to calculate annual maintenance grant. Information from the following LEAs did not meet the required standard:

Bromley
Hounslow
Humberside
Liverpool
Newham
Oxfordshire
Somerset
Tameside
Warwickshire

Certain points on Leicestershire's budget statement remain to be clarified before a decision can be taken on whether it provides a satisfactory basis on which to determine annual maintenance grant.

By 30 June 61 per cent. of grants had been finalised. I expect 70 per cent. to have been finalised by 23 July; 80 per cent. by 31 July; 95 per cent. by the end of August; and the remainder in September, although it is possible that one or two exceptional cases might take a little longer.

Local Education Authority	*Date Section 42 Budget Statement Received*	*Date Receipt Acknowledged*
Avon	31 March 1993	7 April 1993
Barnet	29 March 1993	31 March 1993
Bedfordshire	31 March 1993	31 March 1993
Berkshire	*31 March 1993	31 March 1993
Bexley	30 March 1993	7 May 1993
Birmingham	25 March 1993	7 May 1993
Bolton	12 March 1993	29 March 1993
Bradford	31 March 1993	14 April 1993
Brent	10 March 1993	29 March 1993
Bromley	*31 March 1993	31 March 1993
Buckinghamshire	26 March 1993	19 April 1993
Calderdale	29 March 1993	7 May 1993
Cambridgeshire	1 March 1993	29 March 1993
Cheshire	29 March 1993	7 May 1993
Croydon	*31 March 1993	7 May 1993
Cumbria	30 March 1993	7 May 1993
Derbyshire	26 March 1993	31 March 1993
Devon	31 March 1993	19 April 1993
Dorset	29 March 1993	7 May 1993
Dudley	*24 March 1993	29 March 1993
Ealing	25 March 1993	31 March 1993
Essex	31 March 1993	7 May 1993
Gloucestershire	31 March 1993	31 March 1993
Hammersmith and Fulham	31 March 1993	31 March 1993
Hampshire	31 March 1993	31 March 1993
Havering	*29 March 1993	18 May 1993
Hereford and Worcestershire	30 March 1993	7 May 1993
Hertfordshire	*31 March 1993	5 April 1993
Hillingdon	31 March 1993	7 May 1993
Hounslow	1 April 1993	7 May 1993
Humberside	*30 April 1993	11 May 1993
Kensington and Chelsea	*30 March 1993	7 May 1993
Kent	*31 March 1993	31 March 1993

Local Education Authority	Date Section 42 Budget Statement Received	Date Receipt Acknowledged
Kingston-upon-Thames	*29 March 1993	7 May 1993
Kirklees	31 March 1993	7 May 1993
Lambeth	*31 March 1993	31 March 1993
Lancashire	26 March 1993	31 March 1993
Leicestershire	*29 March 1993	7 May 1993
Lewisham	31 March 1993	7 May 1993
Lincolnshire	26 March 1993	7 May 1993
Liverpool	27 May 1993	28 May 1993
Newham	5 April 1993	7 May 1993
Norfolk	31 March 1993	7 May 1993
Northamptonshire	31 March 1993	7 May 1993
Nottinghamshire	25 March 1993	7 May 1993
Oxfordshire	5 April 1993	14 April 1993
Rochdale	30 March 1993	31 March 1993
Sandwell	29 March 1993	7 May 1993
Sheffield	29 March 1993	31 March 1993
Shropshire	24 March 1993	7 May 1993
Solihull	30 March 1993	7 May 1993
Somerset	*13 April 1993	30 April 1993
Southwark	31 March 1993	7 May 1993
Staffordshire	29 March 1993	31 March 1993
Surrey	31 March 1993	7 May 1993
Sutton	30 March 1993	7 May 1993
Tameside	14 May 1993	17 May 1993
Tower Hamlets	31 March 1993	7 May 1993
Trafford	29 March 1993	30 March 1993
Walsall	29 March 1993	31 March 1993
Waltham Forest	29 March 1993	7 May 1993
Wandsworth	*31 March 1993	7 May 1993
Warwickshire	7 April 1993	15 April 1993
Wiltshire	29 March 1993	7 May 1993
Wirral	*31 March 1993	14 May 1993
Wolverhampton	29 March 1993	31 March 1993

*The date of receipt given in each case is the date when a budget statement was first received. Where these dates are marked with an asterisk, revised statements or parts of statements have been received subsequently.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Know-how Funds

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the most recent analysis of the Government's know-how funds.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A review of the know-how fund covering activities in 1992-3 is being prepared and will be published later in the year. A copy will be placed in the Library in due course.

PHARE Funds

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries are currently eligible for PHARE funds.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Countries currently eligible are Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia also receives assistance from the PHARE programme.

Technical Assistance Funds

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been the priority areas of technical assistance under the PHARE and TACIS funds; and what proposals there are to change these.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: PHARE priorities and programmes are described in an EC publication summarising PHARE activities in 1992 already placed in the Library. Member states agreed revised guidelines in December 1992 for the period 1993-97; a copy has been placed in the Library of the House. A revised TACIS regulation for 1993 and beyond was agreed in March, subject to the views of the European Parliament which are still awaited. The full texts are available in the Library, but in summary they cover:

PHARE:
- Restructuring and privatisation of state enterprise in industry and agriculture
- Support for the private sector
- Modernisation of the financial system
- Development of a social safety net
- Nuclear safety
- Regional co-operation

TACIS
- Human Resources Development
- Enterprise restructuring and development
- Infrastructure
- Energy, including nuclear safety
- Food production, processing and distribution

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the EC about improvements in the administration of the PHARE and TACIS funds.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for Overseas Development have discussed the question of improvements with Sir Leon Brittan. We welcome the programme of improvements which Sir Leon announced on 9 June, and I have placed a copy of his speech in the Library.

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer on aid and trade provision to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) of 17 June, *Official Report*, column *679*, which creditworthy low-income countries will now qualify and which countries which have benefited during the last five years will be disqualified.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Creditworthy low-income countries which are currently eligible for aid and trade provision support are China, Indonesia, India, Ghana, Lesotho, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

Countries which have benefited over the last five years from the ATP but which are not included in those listed above are Botswana, Colombia, Egypt, Kenya, Malaysia, Morocco, Swaziland, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what authorisation has been given to the Commonwealth Development Corporation to operate in additional countries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Following a request from the corporation, approval has been given for the CDC to operate in Vietnam. It expects to give priority to promoting private sector development.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Colombia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what human rights issues he plans to raise with President Gaviria of Colombia when he visits Britain in July.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will raise with him the concern felt in this country about human rights in Colombia and the overall level of violence there.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department gives to the Colombian security services.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Since Colombia's appeal in 1989 for help in combatting drugs, the Department has provided assistance worth £9·1 million, with a further £0·3 million planned for this financial year. This has covered non-lethal equipment technical expertise and training to the Colombian law enforcement authorities. Areas of assistance have included bomb search and disposal, protection of VIPs, communications and riverine patrolling.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect of legislation introduced to deal with drugs and terrorism in Colombia on human rights and freedom of expression.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Such legislation is necessary to defend the democratic rights and freedoms of Colombian citizens and should be impartially implemented and enforced.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to deny entry visas to Colombian military officers suspected of serious human rights violations.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Colombian citizens do not need visas to enter the United Kingdom.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect of activities by the Colombian security servies on human rights.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We remain concerned by reports of human rights abuses in Colombia. We have urged the Colombian Government to bring to justice those responsible. We support the Colombian Government's efforts to promote greater understanding of, and respect for human rights, within the security forces, whose efforts to combat drug trafficking and terrorism make a major contribution to the protection of the human rights of the majority of Colombians.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures the British Government will be taking to ensure that British investment in Colombia does not contribute to environmental damage and social unrest in Colombia.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: British investors are required to observe the relevant Colombian legislation relating to environmental protection. Investment in Colombia should encourage economic and social development.

Conventional Arms Transfer Register

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about returns, in addition to that by the United Kingdom, to the United Nations conventional arms transfer register; if he will place a copy of such information in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: To date, we understand that 62 countries have submitted data to the United Nations register of conventional arms. The United Nations Secretary General will report to the United Nations General Assembly in the autumn on the returns received. A copy of this report will be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

Bosnia

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates of interception of the violations of the United Nations no-fly zones in Bosnia since October 1992.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: NATO enforcement of the no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina began on 12 April. Between then and 23 June—the latest date for which United Nations reports are available—NATO fighters intercepted 28 violators in total, on the following dates —one violator on each date unless otherwise indicated:

13 April
30 April (2)
13 May (2)
18 May
25 May (2)
26 May (2)
30 May
7 June (2)
8 June (2)
13 June (2)
14 June
15 June (2)
16 June
17 June
21 June
22 June (3)
23 June

Diplomatic Service (School Fees)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the cost to public funds of school fees for children of persons working in the diplomatic service in each year for the last 10 years.

Mr. Goodlad: The cost to public funds of boarding school fees in the United Kingdom, and day school fees at posts overseas, for children of diplomatic service officers in each year since 1983-84 has been:

	£ million
1983-84	6·94
1984-85	7·46
1985-86	7·63

	£ million
1986-87	8·11
1987-88	8·53
1988-89	8·61
1989-90	8·69
1990-91	9·19
1991-92	9·45
1992-93	9·82

Nigeria

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent election in Nigeria.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 1 July at column *589*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter).

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the information held by his Department *(a)* on the results in each state of the Nigerian presidential election on 12 June 1992 and *(b)* on the turnout figures.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The results and turnout figures for each state of the Nigerian presidential election held on 12 June 1993 have been published in Nigeria and are as follows:

Presidential election: 12 June 1993

State number	*State name*	*NRC votes cast*	*Per cent.*	*SDP votes cast*	*Per cent.*	*Voter turn-out Per cent.*
1	Abia[1]	151,227	59	105,273	41	26
2	Adamawa	178,865	53	155,625	47	35
3	Akwa-Ibom[1]	199,342	48	214,787	52	40
4	Anambra[1]	159,258	43	212,024	57	29
5	Bauchi	513,077	61	334,197	39	40
6	Benue	186,302	43	216,830	57	33
7	Borno[1]	128,684	46	153,496	54	23
8	Cross River	153,452	48	189,303	52	39
9	Delta	145,001	31	327,277	69	41
10	Edo[1]	103,572	33·5	205,470	66·5	34
11	Enugu	233,281	55	193,969	45	33
12	Imo	193,202	55	156,700	45	31
13	Jigawa	89,836	39	138,552	61	19
14	Kaduna[1]	336,860	46	389,713	54	45
15	Kano[1]	154,809	48	169,619	52	12·5
16	Katsina	271,000	61	171,169	39	26
17	Kebbi	209,872	73	77,102	27	35
18	Kogi[1]	256,732	54	222,760	46	49
19	Kwara[1]	80,209	23	272,270	77	53
20	Lagos[1]	149,432	14·5	883,965	85·5	43
21	Niger[1]	221,437	62	136,350	38	36
22	Ogun[1]	59,246	12	425,725	88	52
23	Ondo	160,994	17	802,024	83	55
24	Osun	72,068	16·5	365,266	83·5	41
25	Oyo[1]	105,788	16·5	536,011	83·5	40
26	Plateau[1]	259,394	38	417,565	62	45
27	Rivers	646,952	63	379,872	37	54
28	Sokoto	372,260	79	97,726	21	29
29[2]	Taraba	89,836	39	138,557	60	—
30	Yobe	65,133	37	110,921	63	26
31	Abuja, Fct[1]	18,313	48	19,968	52	25

[1] Published by the Nigerian National Electoral Commission.
[2] Provisional.

Other results were collated and agreed by the National Electoral Commission and political parties but not officially released before the elections were annulled by military decree on 23 June.

South Africa

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the South African Government following the recent outbreaks of right-wing extremism; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On 26 June the European Community and its member states issued a statement condemning the attack on 25 June on the world trade centre in Johannesburg.

The South African Government are well aware of our total support for the negotiation process, and of our view that it represents the only possibility of achieving a peaceful transition to democracy. We have frequently expressed our total condemnation of violence, and our conviction that those who use violence in an attempt to derail the negotiation process must not be allowed to succeed.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Market Testing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much the market-testing programme has cost his Department since November 1992.

Mr. Waldegrave: The cost of market testing the Office of Public Service and Science, including its agencies, HMSO and COI, since November 1992 has been around £589,000. As a result of market-testing activities during this period, savings of £1,769,000 have been made.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Market Testing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritae how much the market-testing programme has cost his Department since November 1992.

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage has spent £80,690 on its own market-testing programme since 1 November 1992. The Historic Royal Palaces agency and the Royal Parks have spent £9,000 and £37,200 respectively on their market-testing programmes since November 1992.

BBC

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what replies he has received to the Government's consultation document about the future of the BBC.

Mr. Brooke: By 31 May, we received more than 6,200 replies from members of the public and 300 responses from organisations. I have placed in the Library a copy of a report by Research International Advertising Media, analysing the replies from the public, and a list of the organisations which responded.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in respect of how many estates notified for probate, valued at *(a)* over £1 million and *(b)* over £2 million, no tax was paid in each year since 1988.

Mr. Dorrell: Estimates for the numbers of estates applying for grants of representation and estates paying no inheritance tax where death occurred in the financial years 1988-89 and 1989-90 are given in the table. Figures for more recent years are not yet available.

Year of death	*(a) Net estate over £1 million*		*(b) Net estate over £2 million*	
	Number of estates applying for grants of representation	*Number of estates not taxed*	*Number of estates applying for grants of representation*	*Number of estates not taxed*
1988-89	573	156	153	46
1989-90	859	245	231	63

Scotch Whisky

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the yield to the Treasury from excise duty on Scotch whisky for 1992-93 in cash terms, and as a percentage of total excise duty revenue; and what is the estimate of the corresponding figures for 1993-94.

Sir John Cope: Estimated figures are as follows:

Year	*Percentage of total excise duty*	*Excise duty on home-produced whisky £ million*
1992-93	2·7	690
1993-94	2·5	700

Business Exapansion Scheme

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total cost to the Exchequer of the business expansion scheme tax relief on *(a)* all loan-linked investments where shares were issued before 16 March 1993 and *(b)* those loan-linked investments where shares were issued after 31 December 1992 and before 16 March 1993.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 25 June 1993]:* It is not yet possible to provide a reliable estimate of the amount of money raised through loan-linked business expansion scheme investments. A tentative estimate is that approximately £650 million was raised, almost all of which was invested in newly built and second-hand residential property. Tax relief on this sum is estimated to amount to £250 million. Over £500 million was raised between 31 December 1992 and 16 March 1993; tax relief on that sum would be approximately £200 million.

Scrip Dividends

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide an estimate of the revenue which would have been raised by the Exchequer in 1992-93 if scrip dividends had been liable to advanced corporation tax at the same rate as dividends paid in cash.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 1 July 1993]:* The Exchequer effects are very difficult to estimate. They would depend on the decisions taken by companies about what sort of dividends to pay. The main effect would have probably been a small cash flow benefit to the Exchequer from higher advance corporation tax largely offset by a reduction in subsequent mainstream tax payments.

WALES

Market Testing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much the market-testing programme has cost his Department since November 1992.

Mr. Redwood: The estimated cost of the Welsh Office market-testing programme, since November 1992, is

£335,000. It has, of course, produced savings and improvements, which are expected to be substantial when the programme is complete.

Radiography

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time radiographers there are currently practising in Wales; how many there were in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information available centrally relates to staff directly employed by the national health service and is not reliable for years prior to 1984.

Full-time radiographers (numbers) in post as at 30 September

	Number
1984	469
1985	486
1986	490
1987	523
1988	520
1989	543
1990	545
1991	567
1992	570

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to make available a national health service bursary for training in radiography in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Bursaries are available for pre-registration radiography training. Post-registration and post-graduate training is a matter for the employers.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to increase the funding for graduate and post-diploma training in radiography; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply of 29 June to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) at column *479*.

IACS Forms

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many complaints he has received from Welsh farmers about the integrated administration and control systems forms; what structure has been set up to deal with these complaints; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have received several complaints which have been answered at an appropriate level within the normal departmental structure. I shall be keeping future requirements for form filling under close review.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

THORP

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which nuclear power stations were designed to use reprocessed fuel; and in which power stations the reprocessed fuel from the thermal oxide reprocessing plant is to be used.

Mr. Eggar: No special design features are required in most water-moderated nuclear reactors to enable them to use reprocessed nuclear materials in their fuel. The use of reprocessing products arising in the thermal oxide reprocessing plant is a matter for the customers of British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what radioactive materials or radio-isotopes are already on site, or have been delivered for use at the thermal oxide reprocessing plant for commissioning or other purposes, excluding consignments or irradiated fuel, within the last three months, or are expected to be delivered before 31 July;

(2) if any of the completed or outstanding commissioning work to be undertaken at the thermal oxide reprocessing plant has resulted in any radioactive contamination of the plant;

(3) what has been the cost of all commissioning of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant undertaken and completed to date; and if he will specify those areas and items of plant completed so far.

(4) what is the approximate cost and timescale for each element of outstanding commissioning work on the thermal oxide reprocessing plant; and what areas or items of plant have yet to be completed.

Mr. Eggar: This is an operational matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consignments of radioactive materials or radio-isotopes have been or are to be transferred within the Sellafield site for the thermal oxide reprocessing plant centre.

Mr. Eggar: The majority of the irradiated fuel to be reprocessed during the first 10 years' operation of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant has already been delivered to storage ponds on the Sellafield site, including the receipt and storage facility attached to the THORP plant.

Mr. Alton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the initial estimates for the cost of constructing and maintaining the THORP at Sellafield and the actual cost of construction and maintenance.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 22 June 1993]:* For the costs of constructing the thermal oxide reprocessing plant, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 17 December 1992 at columns *468-69*. The plant's maintenance costs are an operational matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Post Office (Pension Payments)

Mr. Morley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the public sector occupational pensions that formerly had facilities for payment through Post Office Counters Ltd. which have been withdrawn in the last 18 months.

Mr. McLoughlin: Those public sector occupational pensions administered by the Paymaster General's Office —that is, the national health service, England and Wales; national health service, Scotland and the principal civil service pension scheme—had this facility withdrawn on 1 April 1993. Fifty-nine thousand pensioners were affected.

However, special arrangements were made to open a Girobank account for those pensioners who wished to continued to draw their pension at a post office.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mrs. Lait: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications for loans under the loan guarantee scheme have been made since the Budget; how many have been successful; and what were the figures in the same period in 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of applications made under the loan guarantee scheme between the Budget and 25 June 1993, the number of successful applications and the corresponding figures for the same period in 1992 are as follows:

	1992	*1993*
Applications Received	738	644
Loans Guaranteed	738	637
Applications under consideration	0	6

The changes in the Chancellor's Budget statement which came into effect on 1 July include a measure that allow small firms which have been established for two years or more to obtain loans up to a maximum of £250,000 with a guarantee of 85 per cent.

Cable Television

Mr. Luff: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to be able to award a licence for cable television services in the Worcester area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I was pleased to be able to grant a Telecommunications Act licence on 28 June 1993 to Comment Cablevision Worcester Ltd. to install and run a broadband cable service in the Worcester, Redditch and Droitwich area. I look forward to the licensee offering the residents of Worcester and surrounding areas a wide range of TV and other telecommunications services.

Steel

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy concerning the dumping of steel in the United Kingdom by east European producers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Action against dumping is a matter for the European Commission, which is ready to investigate any evidence which the steel industry may put to it. As regards other trade measures, the Community has already agreed for 1993 some import restrictions in the form of quotas or tariff quotas on certain steel products from the Commonwealth of Independent States, Georgia, Bulgaria and the Czech and Slovak Republics.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has as to overcapacity among east European steel producers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: According to figures produced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, East European production of crude steel in 1992 amounted to 29·4 million tonnes, compared to capacity of 48·9 million tonnes, equivalent to an excess in capacity of almost 70 per cent. over production.

Postal Services

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the quality of the postal services.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department regularly receives representations about a range of postal issues, including quality of service. Royal Mail continues to make significant improvements in this area. Nationally, in 1992-93, 91·9 per cent. of first-class mail was delivered the next working day and 98·4 per cent. of second-class mail was delivered within three days.

Video Copyright

Lady Olga Maitland To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures the Government are taking to stop the infringement of copyright by illegal video duplication.

Mr. McLoughlin: Copyright owners have considerable powers under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988 to take appropriate legal action themselves against those infringing their intellectual property rights. In addition, this legislation provides for significant criminal penalties for those who make or trade in unauthorised copies of audiovisual works, demonstrating the importance that the Government attach to combatting this illegal activity. The Patent Office's promotional literature and associated audiovisual aids continue to play a major role in increasing the general awareness of the rights existing in these works.

Research and Development

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what details he has of investment in research and development and innovation by industry in the west midlands region based in north Staffordshire.

Mr. Sainsbury: The details requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set targets for Government investment in research and development for industry in the west midlands region based in Stoke on Trent.

Mr. Sainsbury: It would not be appropriate for the Government to set such targets: it is industry's responsibility to innovate. Moreover, since DTI schemes usually involve matching funding, targets would require assumptions to be made about the proportionate contribution local industry would be willing to provide.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library a full copy of the Energy Minister's speech on nuclear power to a London conference on 29 June.

Mr. Eggar: I have placed in the Library of the House copies of the press notice issued following my speech to the British nuclear industry forum on 29 June.

Public Houses

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the European Commission last reviewed the block exemption of tied public houses.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: In June 1990 the European Commission announced the results of a review it had undertaken of competition in the European Community beer market. This concluded, inter alia, that no change should be made to the block exemption which expires in 1997.

Beer

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his oral answer of 23 June, *Official Report*, column 294, what percentage of beer was sold through *(a)* tied public houses and *(b)* untied public houses in each year since 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The available information is as follows:

Beer sales since the Beer Orders (per cent. by channel)

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	[1] *November 1992*
On-trade:				
—tied	44	42	36	29
—free	37	38	43	49
Off-trade	19	20	21	22
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Source: MMC report on Allied-Lyons plc and Carlsberg A/S, July 1992.
[1] Estimated.

Brewery Industry

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what part the Office of Fair Trading has played in his investigations into issues raised with him about Inntrepreneur leases in the brewery industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: In considering whether any competition issues have been raised in the representations made to my Department about Inntrepreneur leases and related matters, my officials have worked closely with the Office of Fair Trading.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many representations he has received from lessees of Inntrepreneur Estates complaining of the conditions of its tenancies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Since the beginning of the calendar year, my Department has received over 100 letters from, or on behalf of, Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd. lessees.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with Sir Alan Sheppard, chairman of Grand Metropolitan plc, about Inntrepreneur leases in the brewery industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has had no discussions with Sir Allen Sheppard, chairman of Grand Metropolitan plc, about Inntrepreneur leases. Officials have met recently with Mr. R. G. Williams, chairman and managing director of Grand Metropolitan Estates Ltd., which administers the property portfolio of Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd., to discuss a number of specific issues relating to Inntrepreneur leases.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his oral answer of 23 June, *Official Report*, columns 293-94, what significant improvement has been achieved for the tenants of Inntrepreneur Estates as a result of his intervention; and what course of action he has urged upon such brewery companies.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: As I made clear in my answer to the hon. Member on 7 June at columns *161-62*, the negotiation of individual leases is a commercial matter for determination between landlords and tenants. Nevertheless, in 1991 Ministers did secure certain assurances from the national brewers about treatment of tenants when introducing changes to leasing arrangements. I believe that these assurances have had some effect in helping to smooth what has been a difficult period of transition for brewers and tenants. I am, for instance, aware that a number of tenants nearing retirement have been offered more flexible lease arrangements. It would be wrong, however, to have expected these assurances to resolve all commercial differences between a brewer and its tenant.

British Nuclear Fuels

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what criteria are used by his Department to assess the corporate plans produced by BNFL.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 22 June 1993]:* When assessing the corporate plans of BNFL, my Department applies commercial criteria in line with current Government policy.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when his Department last received a copy of the forward corporate plan produced by BNFL.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 22 June 1993]:* DTI receives copies of all British Nuclear Fuels plc corporate plans following their approval by the board of the company.

Furniture (Safety)

Mr. Michael: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress was made at the European Council on 14 June concerning the conclusion of the draft directive on the fire behaviour of upholstered furniture.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 30 June 1993]:* On 14 June 1993 the Commission stated that the proposed directive on the fire behaviour of upholstered furniture had not been included in the 1993 legislative programme because of the difficulty in preparing adequate standards, particularly with regard to the safety of fire retardent treatments. Subsequent to this, at the Copenhagen European Council the Commission produced a list of items, in the context of discussions of subsidiarity, for which no legislation is now planned. The safety—flammability—of foam-filled furniture is included in this list.

Textile and Clothing

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will make a statement outlining progress which has been made in his negotiations with the United States of America on tariff peaks in the textile and clothing sector;

(2) what recent representations he has received from *(a)* the Apparel, Knitting and Textiles Alliance, and *(b)* others, about the need for an agreement to reduce United States tariff peaks on textiles and clothing as a prelude to wider multilateral negotiations with all other GATT signatories on wider tariff harmonisation, consolidation and removal;

(3) if he will state his policy on the level of the United States of America's tariff peaks on textiles and clothing.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 2 July 1993]:* I have recently received correspondence from the Apparel, Knitting and Textiles Alliance about the need to reduce United States tariff peaks on textiles and clothing as a prelude to wider multilateral negotiations with all other GATT signatories on wider tariff harmonisation, consolidation and removal. It is the European Commission which negotiates on behalf of the European Community on tariffs. It remains United Kingdom and EC policy to obtain substantial reductions in peak United States textile and clothing tariffs in the course of the GATT Uruguay round market access negotiations. The EC is currently negotiating with the United States on the elements of a market access agreement which would include a substantial reduction in US textile and clothing tariff rates.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mental Health Act 1983

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in Northern Ireland have been detained under section 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983 in each year since 1985.

Mr. Ancram: The Mental Health Act 1983 does not apply in Northern Ireland. The equivalent legislation is the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 of which article 4 applies to admissions to hospital for assessment. The number of admissions from 1986 are as follows:

Year	*Number of admissions*
1986	691
1987	539
1988-89	788
1989-90	771
1990-91	566
1991-92	642
1992-93	635

The numbers are of admissions, not persons, as a person could be admitted more than once during the year. Data for 1988-89 onwards are on a financial year basis.

Leadhill Primary School

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new admissions of pupils there have been to Leadhill primary school in each of the past five years; how many new admissions are expected in September; how many classrooms were lost in June 1982 as a result of vandalism; when it is planned to replace those classrooms; and at which primary schools in the borough of Castlereagh there will be capital expenditure for the provision of new classrooms during the next three years.

Mr. Ancram: Admissions to Leadhill primary school in each of the last five years and expected admissions in September 1993 are as follows:

Year	*Number*
1988	23
1989	25
1990	26
1991	25
1992	33
1993	32

Four classrooms at Leadhill primary school were demolished following an arson attack in June 1983. They were replaced by three temporary classrooms.

There are no plans at present for major capital expenditure for the provision of new classrooms at primary schools in the borough of Castlereagh, but the South Eastern education and library board regularly reviews the need for capital development at controlled schools in its area.

Abortion

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the terms of the inquiry currently being undertaken by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights on abortion law in Northern Ireland; and what steps were taken by the commission to alert right hon. and hon. Members representing constituencies in Northern Ireland prior to announcing the inquiry.

Mr. Ancram: The Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights is not undertaking an inquiry. It has published a paper on abortion law in Northern Ireland, inviting a wide range of bodies and individuals to respond on ways in which the law could be clarified. Northern Ireland Members of Parliament have been invited to contribute their views.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received from right hon. and hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies on whether the Abortion Act 1967 should be extended to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: None.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement providing details of representations which he has received on the proportion of *(a)* people of Northern Ireland, or *(b)* the medical profession in the Province would support the extension of the Abortion Act 1967 to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: In the past 12 months, five representations have been received indicating that a majority of people in the Province would support the extension of the Abortion Act 1967 to Northern Ireland. Twenty-one representations have been received indicating that a majority of people would be opposed to such an extension and one that a majority of the medical profession would likewise be opposed.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those churches or religious organisations from Northern Ireland which have expressed to him a view that the Abortion Act 1967 should be extended to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: No churches or religious organisations have expressed such a view.

Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what authority the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights is established; who are its current members; who is its chairman; upon what basis and for what terms he appoints individuals to the commission; what is the annual cost of the commission; and if he will make it his policy to bring forward proposals for its abolition.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The commission is constituted in accordance with section 20 of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973. Members are selected on the basis of their legal or other relevant experience. They are appointed for a period of two years and their appointments may be renewed. The commission's membership on 1 July 1993 is as follows:

Chairman:
Mr. Charles Hill, QC

Members:
Mrs. J. Harbison, CBE
Mrs. M. Clark-Glass, CBE
Mr. R. T. Mullan
Mr. F. A. Mackle, OBE
Mr. A. L. Sherrard
Mr. D. Nesbitt
Mrs. J. Corr
Professor S. F. Lee
Mrs. J. Smyth
Ms G. Keegan

Ex-Officio Members[1]*:*
Mr. R. G. Cooper, CBE
Mrs. J. McIvor, QSM

[1] The 1973 Act stipulates that the commission's membership must include ex-officio the chairman of the Fair Employment Agency, and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints and the Northern Ireland Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. Mr. Cooper is chairman of the FEA and Mrs. McIvor holds both commissioner posts.

The annual cost of the commission for the period April 1992 to March 1993 was £240,200 (provisional figure).

I greatly value the independent advice of the Standing Advisory Commission of Human Rights and the Government have no plans to bring forward proposals for its abolition.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits Uprating

9. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was spent on uprating benefits in April.

Mr. Lilley: The uprating of all the main benefits in April this year by 3·6 per cent. cost an additional £2·5 billion.

Invalidity and Sickness Benefits

12. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of the adult male population receives *(a)* invalidity benefit and *(b)* sickness benefit.

Mr. Scott: In March 1991, the latest date for which these figures are available, about 4·5 per cent. of the adult male population received invalidity benefit, and about 0·4 per cent. received sickness benefit.

Available information is in the table.

	Males in receipt of benefit on 30 March 1991[1]	*As a percentage of the adult male population*[2] *per cent.*
Sickness benefit	85,000	0·4
Invalidity benefit	976,000	4·5

[1] Based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants, rounded to the nearest thousand.

[2] Provisional estimate for mid-1991 of 21,542,000 males in Great Britain aged 16 and over; based on early 1991 census results.

16. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any proposals for changing entitlement to sickness and invalidity benefits.

Mr. Scott: I refer to the reply to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) earlier today.

Medical Appeal Tribunal

14. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many domiciliary medical appeal tribunals there were in England and Wales in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1982.

Mr. Burt: The president of the independent tribunal service advises that in 1992, 242 domiciliary medical appeal tribunals were held in England and Wales. The Department no longer has the figures for 1982.

Pensioner Owner-occupiers

15. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the proportion of pensioners who are owner-occupiers and have paid off their mortgages.

Mr. Hague: Over half of all pensioners now own their own home—of these, 94 per cent. own their homes outright with no mortgage commitments.

Back to Work Initiative

17. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many inquiries there have been to the family credit helpline since he announced the back to work initiative in April.

Mr. Burt: Since I launched the helpline, which fulfilled our manifesto commitment, well over a quarter of a million inquiries have been answered.

Disability Working Allowance

18. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the number of people receiving the disability working allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Some organisations of and for disabled people have commented on the take-up of this benefit. Disability working allowance has been widely welcomed in

principle and we are working with organisations to ensure that more of the people who could take advantage of it are aware of the new opportunity which it presents.

Social Security Review

19. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will announce the completion of his review of social security.

Mr. Burt: The timetable for the expenditure review is long term. We will shortly publish background analytical material to the review with the intention of stimulating public debate about the future of the social security system. At this early stage, I cannot say what the long-term timetable will be.

Social Fund

20. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total value of payments made by the social fund since its introduction.

Mr. Scott: Since the social fund was introduced in 1988, over 16·3 million social fund awards have been made worth more than £1·5 billion, including maternity, funeral and cold weather payments as well as awards from the discretionary scheme.

Family Credit

23. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families in the north-west were in receipt of family credit at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Burt: At 31 October 1992, the latest date for which information is available, there were 63,000 families in the north-west region of England receiving family credit.

Housing Benefit

24. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what further consideration he has given to the introduction of a universal housing benefit scheme covering both rent and mortgage payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to her on 18 January, at column *101*.

Pensioners (Income Support)

25. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many low-income pensioners have gained from the extra increases in income support that have taken effect since the start of 1991.

Mr. Hague: More than 1·5 million pensioners and their partners have gained from these increases since 1991. In addition, a large number of other pensioners have gained from consequential rises in the other income-related benefits.

Sick and Disabled People

26. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the most recent figure for the average increase in spending on long-term sick and disabled people since 1979; and what were the comparable figures for the period 1974 to 1979.

Mr. Scott: During 1992-93 we spent almost £15 billion on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people. This represents an annual increase of £700 million per year since 1979 at 1992-93 prices, double the annual increase between 1974 and 1979.

Pensions

27. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much total pension incomes have increased between 1979 and 1992; and what was the equivalent figure between 1974 and 1979.

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) on 7 June at columns *139-40*.

Personal Pensions

28. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the results of his Department's policies to encourage personal pensions.

Mr. Hague: The Government's policy in encouraging personal pensions has proved to be highly successful with over 5 million people currently being personal pension holders.

Invalidity Benefit

29. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were in receipt of invalidity benefit in January 1990; and what are the latest available figures.

Mr. Scott: On 31 January 1990 there were, 1,196,000 people receiving invalidity benefit[1]. The estimated average number receiving invalidity benefit at any one time during 1992-93 was 1,490,000.[2]

Notes:

[1]Source—1 per cent. sample of claimants, rounded to the nearest thousand.

[2]Source—Departmental Report.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of people in receipt of invalidity benefit have additional income from *(a)* an occupational pension, *(b)* a spouse earning less than £44·65 and *(c)* a spouse earning more than £44·65 a week, giving figures separately for men and women.

Mr. Scott: Information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available follows.

Using information from the 1989, 1990 and 1991 family expenditure surveys, we estimate that around 45 per cent. of men and 25 per cent. of women in receipt of invalidity benefit received an occupational pension.

Information is not kept on the number of invalidity benefit recipients whose spouse earns above the earnings limit. However, at 30 March 1991, there were some 4,000 reduced rate adult dependency increases in payment arising from claims made before 16 September 1985. At that time, such increases were reduced because of earnings rather than not paid about a given level as is the present rule.

Information about invalidity benefit recipients at 30 March 1991 who received an adult dependency increase is in the table.

	Number of beneficiaries	Adult dependency increase in payment	Per cent.
Total	1,306,000	415,000	31·8
Men	976,000	412,000	42·2
Women	330,000	2,000	0·7

Note:
1. 30 March 1991 is the latest date for which information is available, figures based on a 1 per cent. sample of incapacity benefit claimants, and rounded to the nearest thousand.

Students (Income Support)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will restore income support to students who fall ill during the long vacation.

Mr. Burt: Since September 1990, financial support for most students has come from the education maintenance system, not the social security system. We have no plans to restore income support to students.

Family Support

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual spending from family credit; and what was the spending on family income supplement in 1979.

Mr. Burt: Family credit expenditure for 1992-93 was £864 million. This is 36 times more than the £24 million spent on family income supplement in 1978-79 in cash terms and 13 times more in real terms.

Claimants (Co-located Facilities)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had about co-locating facilities for claimants and the unemployed.

Mr. Burt: Officials from the Departments of Social Security and of Employment have examined ways of improving the interaction of employment service and Benefits Agency functions in order to improve the service provided to unemployed people. Recommendations which have been taken forward include better liaison between offices in the same area and moves towards standard opening hours. In addition, a number of measures are being piloted; for example, family credit advice and calculations for newly unemployed people, and locating BA staff in ES offices to give immediate advice about income support claims. The results of the latter pilot are now being evaluated.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Murder Cases

41. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will ensure that, in murder cases where hon. Members have raised the conviction with members of the Government, transcripts or notes of the trial are retained longer than the five-year norm.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Five years is the rule but if there is an appeal then the transcripts and statements made available for the appeal are retained indefinitely by arrangement with the Public Record Office.

Conciliation Services

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement about conciliation services.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government greatly value the work undertaken by local mediation and conciliation services in many areas of the country.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Women Priests

33. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what estimate has been made of the reduction in the number of stipends payable to clergy as a result of clergy retiring or leaving the Church on the grounds of the ordination of women.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners have made no such estimates because they have no means of knowing how many clergy may actually resign. They are, of course, discussing the possible financial implications with dioceses using a benchmark of cost per 100 men.

Redundant Church Buildings

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what proportion of redundant church buildings have been transferred to housing associations and local authorities for social housing provision.

Mr. Alison: Since 1969 more than 100 or about one third of the sites of demolished redundant churches have been transferred to housing associations or local authorities, mainly for social housing purposes. Conversion of standing redundant church buildings present more difficulties, but, over the same period, 11 have been transferred to housing associations or local authorities for social housing purposes while terms have been agreed in a twelfth case.

Women Priests (Pensions)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what are the proposed rules relating to the payment of a widow's pension for the husband of an ordained female cleric who dies in an incumbency.

Mr. Alison: Pensions for the widowers of female members of the scheme for those in the ministry—currently deacons, deaconesses and licensed layworkers—were introduced under the Church of England Pensions Measure in 1988. These pensions are calculated in exactly the same way as pensions for widows of male members of the scheme.

SCOTLAND

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what money is currently spent from the urban aid programme in Scotland on work specifically with refugees and/or asylum seekers.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: No projects specifically for refugees and/or asylum seekers are currently being funded. Such individuals may, however, benefit from other projects being funded in the areas in which they live.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assistance, in cash, his Department has given, or plans to give, to assist the resettlement of Bosnian refugees or asylum seekers in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is responsible for the funding of reception and resettlement arrangements for former detainees and their dependants from concentration camps in Bosnia whom the Government have agreed to accept in the United Kingdom at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The Scottish Office provides financial assistance to support the Scottish Refugee Council in its overall work with refugee communities in Scotland including asylum seekers from Bosnia. In 1993-94 grants totalling approximately £91,000 have been awarded.

Homelessness

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons aged between 16 and 21 years were turned away from temporary accommodation in the latest year for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on those turned away from temporary accommodation is not collected centrally.

Care of the Elderly

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many trained and untrained nurses, physiotherapists, speech therapists, and occupational therapists work in care of the elderly within each health board area.

Mr. Stewart: The whole-time equivalent figures for qualified and unqualified nursing staff as at September 1992 are detailed in the table. Data on the number of qualified and unqualified physiotherapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy staff working in the care of the elderly are not held centrally.

Scotland: nursing staff in care of the elderly: by qualification status and health board: as at 30 September 1992

Whole-time equivalent

	Care of the elderly	*Qualified*	*Registered*	*Enrolled*	*Unqualified*	*Auxiliary/ Assistant*
Scotland	9,276·4	4,728·8	2,777·4	1,951·4	4,547·6	4,547·6
Argyll and Clyde	861·1	381·3	219·5	161·8	479·7	479·7
Ayrshire and Arran	542·0	310·4	222·0	88·4	231·6	231·6
Borders	127·5	69·2	47·3	21·9	58·3	58·3
Dumfries and Galloway	385·5	213·3	145·0	68·3	172·2	172·2
Fife	610·9	358·5	193·7	164·8	252·4	252·4
Forth Valley	559·0	267·5	203·0	64·5	291·5	291·5
Grampian	842·7	399·0	205·4	193·6	443·7	443·7
Greater Glasgow	1,898·2	814·9	436·2	378·7	1,083·3	1,083·3
Highland	317·7	176·6	136·0	40·6	141·2	141·2
Lanarkshire	780·0	430·9	206·4	224·5	349·1	349·1
Lothian	1,296·7	702·8	418·6	284·2	593·9	593·9
Orkney	87·2	54·1	17·2	36·8	33·1	33·1
Shetland	77·7	54·4	29·0	25·4	23·3	23·3
Tayside	779·3	429·1	248·4	180·7	350·2	350·2
Western Isles	109·1	66·9	49·7	17·2	42·2	42·2
State hospital	2·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	2·0	2·0

Damp Housing

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when, at current and planned levels of capital allocation, he expects to eradicate dampness from public sector housing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: All local housing authorities have been asked in their next housing capital programmes due to be submitted to the Scottish Office by 31 August, to set out a strategy for tackling damp housing in their areas, including quantified targets which can be used as a basis for assessing progress.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if there has been any change in Government policy about the use of urban aid funds for work with the ethnic minorities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. The urban programme remains a source of grant assistance for ethnic minority projects in eligible areas. Applications for all types of projects throughout Scotland compete on their merits for the available resources. Funds are not earmarked for particular client groups. There is in addition a separate ethnic minority grants scheme, introduced last year, which is not confined to particular areas.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the guidelines about the use of urban aid are interpreted flexibly in the case of projects involving the ethnic minorities; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The urban programme is targeted on eligible areas of deprivation. The Scottish Office recognises, however, that the spread of ethnic minority populations can make it difficult for local authorities and voluntary organisations to devise projects which fully comply with the programme's geographical targeting requirements. Accordingly discretion is exercised in this respect when ethnic minority projects are considered.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what projects for work with ethnic minorities have been approved under the urban aid budget in the past five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

Name of project and sponsoring local authority	*Type*	*Capital costs £*	*Revenue costs £*
1989			
Volunteer community interpreting project, Central regional council	New	15,500	25,044
Multicultural advice and information service, Stirling district council	New	48,500	55,580
Gryffe womens aid, Strathclyde regional council	Supplementary	4,521	32,236
English as second language project, Tayside regional council	Extension	—	13,875
Garnethill community hall, Glasgow district council	Extension	—	25,680
Dundee translators and interpreters project, Dundee district council	Supplementary	—	3,978
Shakti womens aid, Lothian regional council	New	15,729	51,189
1990			
Gryffe womens aid, Strathclyde regional council	Supplementary	7,738	3,192
Ethnic legal services project, Strathclyde regional council	New	18,527	64,098
Central Garudwara community halls, Strathclyde regional council	New	213,068	20,622
Creche for ethnic minority project, Strathclyde regional council	Supplementary	—	21,852
1991			
Interpretation and translation service, Grampian regional council	New	—	33,155
Asian cultural and educational project, Central regional council	New	—	9,920
1992			
The Dixon Community—Black elderly initiative, Strathclyde regional council	New	24,110	64,334
Ethnic minority enterprise centre, Strathclyde regional council	New	45,315	162,460
Chinese cultural community project, Central regional council	Extension	—	13,750
Dundee translators and interpreters project, Dundee district council	Supplementary	10,000	—
Multicultural advice and information service, Stirling district council	Supplementary	2,000	11,690
Glasgow translation and interpretation service, Glasgow district council	New	16,580	83,909
1993			
Dundee translators and interpreters project, Dundee district council	Extension	—	68,169
Multicultural advice and information service, Stirling district council	Extension	—	55,580
Ethnic minorities womens centre, Strathclyde regional council	New	42,179	193,314

Name of project and sponsoring local authority	Type	Capital costs £	Revenue costs £
Chinese elderly care project, Strathclyde regional council	New	11,961	119,095
Multicultural elderly care centre, Strathclyde regional council	New	145,457	180,654
Volunteer community interpreting project, Central regional council	Extension	5,460	56,354
Asian cultural and educational project, Central regional council	Supplementary	—	3,460
Ethnic minority sports development project, Glasgow district council	New	—	42,285

Notes:
New projects are approved on the basis of capital costs and four years' running costs. 25 per cent. of the costs shown are met by the sponsoring local authority, the remainder by the Scottish Office.
Supplementary applications seek additional funding until the end of the previously approved period.
Extension applications are approved for a further three years after the initial four years' funding has expired. This applies only to projects run by voluntary and community groups.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what arrangements he intends to put in place to secure the emergency carriage by air ambulances in Scotland of blood and other emergency medical products; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what were the medical qualifications of the Scottish ambulance service staff who dealt with the request for the transport of emergency blood products by air ambulance to Shetland on 17 June;

(3) what arrangements were in place on 17 June for persons to contact the medical director of the Scottish ambulance services by telephone out of office hours, and what changes are proposed in these arrangements.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 24 June 1993]:* It is for the Scottish blood transfusion service to supply blood or blood products requested by hospitals and to decide on the appropriate transport arrangements for delivery of these both for routine situations and in emergencies.

Air ambulances are primarily tasked to collect or carry patients to hospital at the request of clinicians and are equipped accordingly. In a life saving situation and where it would be sensible and cost effective to do so, there is no reason why an air ambulance should not be used to carry blood or blood products for emergency medical treatment. This is a matter for arrangement between the Scottish blood transfusion service and the Scottish ambulance service which are divisions of the Common Services Agency.

A protocol has now been agreed to the effect that the Scottish ambulance service will transport blood or blood products by air ambulance when in the opinon of any clinician in the Scottish national blood transfusion service there is a serious risk to life and there is no other sensible or reasonable option available. The ambulance service will give such requests priority subject only to the emergency evacuation of patients.

Ambulance control staff do not have any medical qualifications but are able to seek medical advice when required from the medical director of the Scottish ambulance service who is an accident and emergency consultant and is on call 24 hours a day by radiopager.

In the event that he is unavailable, there is an arrangement with the accident and emergency department at the Aberdeen Royal infirmary to provide medical advice to the air desk controller. The arrangements on 17 June were in accordance with these procedures. No further changes are currently proposed but the position is kept under review.

Forestry

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what contribution to the United Kingdom economy is made by the timber trade.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 1 July 1993]:* The total value added by the timber trade, including the forestry and wood processing industries, is about £8,000 million annually; this represents about 1½ per cent. of the gross domestic product. The wood processing industry accounts for about 6½ per cent. of manufacturing industry.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce a country certification scheme to prove to potential purchasers of British-grown timber United Kingdom forests are sustainably managed.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 1 July 1993]:* The Forestry Commission has already laid the basis for a certification scheme. Permission to fell trees is given by the commission's forestry authority arm only if the felling proposals are

"in accordance with the Government policy to promote the sound management of woodlands as a renewable natural resource".

A statement to this effect is included in plans of operation approved under the commission's woodland grant scheme and will soon be included in felling licences.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on allowing the independent inspection and certification of the United Kingdom's forest management policies implemented by the Forestry Commission.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 1 July 1993]:* The forestry authority arm of the Forestry Commission

implements the Government's forestry policy in Great Britain, regulates the forestry industry, and monitors forestry standards. There is therefore no need for any other organisation to carry out inspections or certification.

Coastal Planning

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to revise the 1974 "Coastal Planning Guidelines for Oil and Gas Development".

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 July 1993]:* In line with the undertaking given in "This Common Inheritance" (Cmd 1200), all our planning guidelines are subject to review. The 1974 coastal planning guidelines for oil and gas development have already been supplemented by the 1977 national planning guidelines for petrochemical developments and by the 1981 national planning guidelines on priorities for development planning. Further refinements will also be included in a new national planning policy guideline on business and industry, which I hope to issue shortly.

Uranium-tipped Shells

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions uranium-tipped armour piercing shells have been fired into the water from the Kirkcudbright ranges during tests.

Mr. Aitken: I have been asked to reply.

Firing of DU shells from Kirkcudbright started on 29 March 1982. Since that date about 4,000 shells have been fired into the Solway firth from the range.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many IACS forms have been submitted late in total and in each category of lateness specified in the IACS rules.

Mr. Jack: A total of 331 IACS forms have been received in England after the 15 May deadline. Of these 305 were received by 4 June and will attract a late claim penalty, and the remaining 26 have been received after 4 June will not qualify for any payment. The late claims represent a very small proportion of the 87,300 forms received.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of IACS forms were returned by the closing date in each EC member state.

Mr. Jack: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) on 30 June, *Official Report*, column *564*.

Set-aside

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will set out the mechanisms for resolving set-aside disputes.

Mr. Jack: If an applicant is unhappy about any aspect of the way in which their claim for arable area and set-aside payments has been handled, they will always be offered an opportunity to discuss their concerns with a senior officer in the regional organisation of MAFF.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has had to introduce an appeals procedure for set-aside disputes along similar lines to the milk quota tribunals.

Mr. Jack: None.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has received regarding the hormone bovine somatotropin; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: We continue to receive a number of representations from both individuals and organisations about the possible availability of bovine somatotropin (BST).

No licences for BST products may be issued in member states under the moratorium agreed by the Council of Agriculture Ministers in 1990. This was extended to 31 December 1993 to allow the EC Commission time to prepare and present its report on the implications of licensing BST by the end of June 1993. The report is now expected to be available later this month. We will be considering the contents and recommendations of the report very carefully, taking into account the many divergent views we have received on the subject, in coming to a view on the future of the moratorium.

Days-at-Sea Limitations

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the boats registered at Lowestoft now subject to days-at-sea limitations, together with the comparative track record in each case upon which the limits have been determined; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Provisional days-at-sea allocations were issued in respect of 240 fishing vessels administered by the Lowestoft district fisheries office. The vessels' recorded half-days in 1991 and their provisional allocation are as follows—in order to protect commercial confidentiality the name and PLN number of the vessels are not included:

Provisional Days at Sea Allocations: Lowestoft District

Recorded Half Days in 1991	*Provisional Allocation*
404	404
0	160
118	160
0	160
180	180
12	160
294	294
216	216
273	273
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
218	218
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160

Recorded Half Days in 1991	Provisional Allocation
0	160
0	160
252	252
2	160
0	160
219	219
164	164
79	160
188	188
182	182
110	160
166	166
227	227
0	160
227	227
278	278
228	228
106	160
0	160
0	160
162	162
0	160
187	187
228	228
373	373
204	204
171	171
0	160
100	160
0	160
250	250
0	160
184	184
40	160
152	160
308	308
147	160
44	160
0	160
246	246
0	160
0	160
209	209
184	184
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
50	160
0	160
0	160
46	160
0	160
137	160
71	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
95	160
13	160
0	160
42	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160

Recorded Half Days in 1991	Provisional Allocation
280	280
0	160
130	160
282	282
0	160
264	264
27	160
0	160
20	160
0	160
227	227
0	160
140	160
0	160
121	160
280	280
105	160
127	160
146	160
122	160
91	160
12	160
0	160
555	555
195	195
432	432
435	435
518	518
506	506
481	481
35	160
28	160
489	489
507	507
430	430
0	160
0	160
326	326
397	397
465	465
402	402
102	160
0	160
362	362
430	430
399	399
386	386
190	190
379	379
461	461
525	525
233	233
55	160
174	174
269	269
136	160
20	160
67	160
30	160
200	200
0	160
0	160
0	160
244	244
4	160
250	250
95	160
6	160
32	160
200	200
50	160
156	160
189	189
56	160
0	160
83	160

Recorded Half Days in 1991	Provisional Allocation
0	160
80	160
83	160
0	160
0	160
74	160
179	179
80	160
264	264
350	350
220	220
231	231
153	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
58	160
475	475
200	200
176	176
0	160
0	160
0	160
138	160
0	160
193	193
0	160
0	160
54	160
44	160
196	196
0	160
209	209
234	234
290	290
13	160
0	160
94	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
127	160
0	160
243	243
99	160
229	229
58	160
0	160
0	160
170	170
0	160
0	160
0	160
384	384
284	284
270	270
64	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
0	160
135	160
0	160
12	160

PA Management Consultants

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the projects undertaken by PA Management Consultants for her Department in the last three years.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 15 June 1993]:* PA Management Consultants were used on the following projects, during the last three financial years up to March 1993:

Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (prior to becoming an Executive Agency):
- Project Costing and Management
- Computerised Management Information System
- Computerised Accounting System

Development of computer system sub-strategies for the Food Science, Economics and Statistics, Animal Health Group and Horticulture areas of the department.

Animal Tracking Computer System.

Design of Food Related Computer Data Base.

EMPLOYMENT

Passive Smoking

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposal he has to amend health and safety legislation to provide a remedy for employees whose health is threatened by passive smoking at work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 1 July 1993]:* Adequate legal protection for employees against risks to health from passive smoking at work is already provided by section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. No amendment is therefore necessary.

Smoking

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how progress towards the "The Health of the Nation" goal of a large majority of employers implementing a no-smoking policy by 1995 is being monitored; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 1 July 1993]:* Achievement of "The Health of the Nation" aim

"that the large majority of employees are covered by a no-smoking policy by 1995"

is being promoted by voluntary means, through encouraging employers to introduce sensible policies on smoking in discussion with their workforce. Early results from recent surveys indicate continuing progress towards realising this aim.

Holidays

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he intends to introduce the proposed legislation to give employees a statutory right to four weeks' paid annual holiday; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holiday answer 1 July 1993]:* The Government have no plans to introduce legislation providing for four weeks' paid annual holiday. The Government's policy is that annual holiday entitlements, like other terms and conditions of employment, are a matter for employers and employees to decide.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Fraud Prosecutions

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Attorney-General what steps he is taking to speed up the process of prosecution in fraud cases.

The Attorney-General: Prosecution of the most serious fraud cases, handled by the Serious Fraud Office, is already very much faster than before that office came into being. Currently the average period between the SFO taking on a case for investigation and the transfer of the case to the Crown court, is 15 months.

Long criminal trials are the subject of an inter-departmental working group, which issued a consultation paper at the end of the last year, and of examination by the Royal Commission on criminal justice, whose report is expected very shortly.

In assessing what steps should now be taken to expedite the trial process in serious fraud cases I, together with the Lord Chancellor and the Home Secretary, will consider the responses to the consultation paper and the views of the working group together with the report of the royal commission.

DEFENCE

Pathfinder Initiative

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to implement the Pathfinder initiative.,

Mr. Aitken: This is a matter delegated to the Defence Research Agency under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 5 July 1993:

In today's written answer, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying to your question about the Pathfinder Initiative.

The Pathfinder initiative which I launched last year is aimed at establishing closer alignment between the DRA and industry in order to bring about an earlier and more effective transfer of technology from ourselves to those who can carry it forward into development and production.

There are 3 elements to Pathfinder—strategic alignment briefings at senior level, an annual conference, and a formal bidding process in which industry can put forward proposals for inclusion in our own research programme. All 3 elements are now very much under way. A first round of briefings took place last year, as indeed did the first conference, and we are about to announce the outcome of the initial tranche of industry bids. The process will be continuing this year with further briefings, a second conference planned for November 1993, and a second round of bidding by industry.

So far both industry and academia have shown considerable interest and I am confident that the Pathfinder Scheme will yield the benefits that I envisaged when it was first devised.

European Future Large Aircraft Project

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what resources Her Majesty's Government will commit to the European future large aircraft project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The Government do not consider it necessary to commit defence resources towards the development of the European future large aircraft, since existing technology is adequate to meet short-term requirements for military transport aircraft. The future large aircraft will be considered as a candidate to meet future Royal Air Force requirements, if it is available at the appropriate time.

Underground Nuclear Tests

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of whether further underground nuclear tests are required to ensure the *(a)* credibility, *(b)* reliability or *(c)* safety of (i) the Trident system and (ii) the WE177 free-fall nuclear bomb; and what criteria are employed by his Department for assessing each of these factors in each case.

Mr. Aitken: We are confident in the safety and reliability of the WE177 free-fall bomb and that subject to completion of the necessary assessments—which do not require further underground testing—Trident will enter service as a safe and reliable system. We are similarly confident in the credibility of our nuclear deterrent, current and planned. We need, however, to ensure that we are able to maintain the highest levels of safety assurance over time. Testing has played a central role in this in the past; the development of alternative techniques is now a high priority.

Nuclear Test Sites

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost since 1963 of the clean-up and restoration, in historic and present prices, of the radioactive and toxic contamination at the nuclear test sites at *(a)* Christmas island, *(b)* Malden islands, *(c)* Monte Bello islands, *(d)* Emu Field and *(e)* Maralinga.

Mr. Hanley: This information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Britannia

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contributions were received in the latest available year from the Governments of other countries to the running of the Royal Yacht Britannia.

Mr. Hanley: HMY Britannia's operating costs are funded entirely from the defence budget and no contributions are made by Governments of other countries.

RMAS Golden Eye

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who acquired RMAS Golden Eye when it was disposed of by the Royal Navy.

Mr. Aitken: At the request of the purchaser this matter is regarded as commercially confidential.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Royal Navy disposed of RMAS Golden Eye.

Mr. Aitken: RMAS Golden Eye was handed over by the Royal Navy to the successful tenderer during the week commencing 16 December 1991.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what payments have been received from the United Nations as danger money for the United Kingdom troops with UNPROFOR in Bosnia; if this money has been paid to the men and women concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The United Nations does not pay danger money for any United Kingdom personnel serving in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his counterparts in France and Canada regarding payment of a United Nations supplement to the UNPROFOR force in Bosnia; what was the outcome of such discussions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: There have been no such discussions.

Depleted Uranium Ammunition

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what precautionary measures were taken to minimise the dangers of inhalation of radioactive particles from depleted uranium ammunition by British troops during the Gulf war.

Mr. Hanley: Special instructions were issued to personnel undertaking explosive ordnance disposal whose work involved a direct risk of exposure to particles of depleted uranium. Advice was also issued to those involved in the transportation and storage of the ammunition.

Submarines

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral response to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) of 24 June, *Official Report*, column 507, what are his plans for the four submarines, Churchill, Dreadnought, Swiftsure and Revenge, in light of his decision to allocate the Trident refitting and decommissioning work to Devonport.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) on 29 June 1993 at columns *492-93*.

Radiation Compensation Scheme

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department will join the radiation compensation scheme operated by the civil nuclear industry.

Mr. Aitken: We intend to do so, subject to negotiations with British Nuclear Fuels plc and the Atomic Energy Authority and with the departmental trades unions.

MOD Police

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions are issued to MOD police concerning their powers towards trespassers on MOD establishments; and if he will place copies of such instructions in the Library.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 29 June 1993]:* Ministry of Defence police deal with trespassers on Ministry of Defence property on behalf of the Secretary of State on the direction of the commanding officer or head of establishment. The police officer will first ask the trespasser to leave MOD property. If the person refuses to do so he or she will be ejected using the minimum force necessary to effect the removal.

If an incursion on MOD property is in contravention of byelaws, offenders may be arrested by MDP officers, who have constabulary powers, and prosecuted for breach of byelaws.

As is the case in respect of other civil matters and criminal offences, all MDP officers, during their initial and refresher courses are trained in the use of their powers to deal with all aspects of trespass. The use of any of these powers is a matter on which the individual police officer must exercise his judgment at the time and according to the circumstances. His actions are subject to scrutiny by his supervising officers and the courts.

The chief constable MDP believes that it would be impractical to issue force-wide written instructions to cover the police response to all aspects of the operation of the law of trespass. From time to time written guidance is included in local operation orders to provide an appropriate response arising from special events or in special circumstances.

Vexatious Litigation

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times in the past five years his Department's police have been declared vexatious litigants and charges not proceeded with; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 June 1993]:* I am not aware of any of my Department's police ever having been declared a vexatious litigant.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 6 July 1993

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Butte Mining plc

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the director of the Serious Fraud Office's investigations into the flotation of and share dealings in Butte Mining.

The Attorney-General: The SFO investigation relating to Butte Mining plc is not yet concluded. It is my practice not to give details about investigations which are still in progress.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Gerontology

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the breakdown of the £600,000 spent on basic aging research or gerontology.

Mr. William Waldegrave: The Medical Research Council—MRC—is the main Government agency for the promotion of medical and related research in the United Kingdom. The MRC do not recognise the figure to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but in 1991-92—the last financial year for which figures are available—the MRC's expenditure on projects relevant to aging and the elderly was £9·8 million.

This research refers to work on cognitive performance, hearing, dementia, osteoporosis, Parkinson's, nutrition, cardiovascular, stroke and cancer research. Additional work is also carried out on understanding the processes underlying aging; and on molecular mechanisms in the clonal deletion of auto-reactive T cells by programmed cell death. Because much of this research is interlinked, the financial breakdown of this research would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Office of Public Service and Science

Sir **Rhodes Boyson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the total amount of expenditure on provision within the responsibility of the Office of Public Service and Science in *(a)* England, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* the south-east, excluding Greater London, for each year from 1982-83 to 1992-93, estimated, distinguishing between current and capital expenditure, though excluding local authority credit approvals/capital allocations.

Mr. David Davis: I am able to provide the following information about the Department's expenditure on the administration of public service and science and on the science programme.

(i) Expenditure on the Administration of Public Service and Science

The major part of the Office of Public Service and Science's offices and staff is located in London and the south-east, but the Occupational Health Service, which has its headquarters in Edinburgh, has a small regional network, and the Government Centre for Information Systems has offices in Norwich.

Total expenditure by the Department and its predecessors on administration in the period 1982-83 to 1992-93 was as follows:

£ millions

Year	*Current Expenditure*	*Capital Expenditure*	*Total*
1982-83	53·0	5·6	58·6
1983-84	63·4	1·9	65·3
1984-85	76·1	3·4	79·5
1985-86	79·1	4·3	83·4
1986-87	75·5	8·7	84·2
1987-88	90·6	10·6	101·2
1988-89	98·0	9·6	107·6
1989-90	96·5	7·3	103·8
1990-91	104·3	11·0	115·3
1991-92	123·6	9·1	132·7
1992-93	134·0	11·0	145·0

(ii) Expenditure on the Science Programme

Information on capital and current expenditure from the science budget by the research councils, the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering is not available in the form requested prior to 1992-93.

The expenditure figures for England are as follows:

England

£ millions

	Current Expenditure	*Capital Expenditure*	*Total*
1982-83	n/a	n/a	n/a
1983-84	319·4	68·4	387·8
1984-85	340·4	67·5	407·9
1985-86	351·5	78·3	429·8
1986-87	364·9	80·1	445·0
1987-88	397·0	82·7	479·7
1988-89	434·3	96·4	530·7
1989-90	519·0	115·5	634·5
1990-91	n/a	n/a	n/a
1991-92	[1]554·0	[1]121·6	675·6

n/a = not available.
[1] Estimated Breakdown.

For 1992-93 the figures are as follows:

£ millions

England		*South East excluding Greater London*		*Greater London*	
Current	*Capital*	*Current*	*Capital*	*Current*	*Capital*
599·1	124·3	173·8	36·3	149·5	19·8

WALES

Rabies

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures are being taken at Welsh ports to prevent rabies entering Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: People who bring in unlicensed animals and those who allow their animals on deck in harbour will be committing an offence and may face imprisonment in addition to heavy fines. Local authorities have the chief role in enforcing these provisions, supported by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise officers, port health officers and the police.

Keen surveillance is maintained over vessels from abroad, both commercial shipping and small boats and yachts which are mainly privately owned. This surveillance is supported by the co-operation of harbour-masters, marina owners, yacht clubs and many other members of the public whose work or recreation is connected with ports or sailing.

All-weather noticeboards are provided for use at harbours, ports and marinas, both in the United Kingdom and on the continent. These state, in appropriate languages, that the landing of animals is prohibited, emphasise the danger from illegally landed animals and the penalties for contraventions. A great deal of importance is attached to maintaining general rabies awareness and the present publicity campaign is targeted at the small boat owner.

Rio Declaration

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he has taken to prepare an action plan to guide implementation of the Rio declaration.

Mr. Redwood: The Government are committed to making a report to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development by the end of this year. The Welsh Office is closely involved in the compilation of this report, which will take full account of the Rio declaration.

Fluoridation

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet the chairman of Welsh Water plc to discuss the fluoridation of drinking water supplies in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so at the present time.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it a requirement that NHS hospital trust annual reports should list the salaries of the chief executive and all board members.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: NHS trusts are required to provide information on the emoluments of their board members, excluding pension costs, as part of their annual accounts and this information must include the emoluments of the chairman, the highest-paid member and the chief executive —if not the highest-paid member. They are also required to provide similar information in their annual reports in order to conform with the provisions of the Companies Act 1985, as amended. The information provided in the annual report should be consistent with that provided in the annual accounts and, if there is any less detail, the annual report must make it clear that the full set of accounts is publicly available upon request.

Out-of-Town Developments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many out-of-town large commercial developments were initially refused planning permission by the local authority, but were granted permission on appeal to the Welsh Office since 1979.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Comprehensive information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost, but 11 major retail developments have been approved on appeal against refusal of permission since the end of 1979.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales to whom each of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department is responsible; whether the public bodies or their members in each case are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open Government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens' charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Mr. Redwood: The Welsh Office sponsors 17 executive non-departmental public bodies—NDPBs. Details are available in "Public Bodies" and in the Department's 1993 annual report. The functions and responsibilities of each NDPB are specified in its founding legislation or charter. The Secretary of State is responsible and accountable to Parliament for the resources provided for NDPBs, and the general framework within which they are required to operate. For most NDPBs, the chief executive is designated as the accounting officer and, together with the departmental accounting officer, is liable to appear before the Public Accounts Committee to account for the use of public funds.

(a) and *(d)*: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 15 June *Official Report*, columns *544-45*.

(b) The NDPBs in Wales subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration are:

Sports Council for Wales
Wales Tourist Board
Development Board for Rural Wales
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
Housing for Wales
Countryside Council for Wales
Agricultural Wages Committee

(c) Executive NDPBs in Wales are generally audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General: where the Comptroller and Auditor General is not himself responsible for auditing a particular body, he retains certain rights of inspection.

(e) All NDPBs in Wales have or are developing performance indicators for their own internal management and to enable the Department to monitor their performance.

(f) All NDPBs in Wales are expected to adopt the principles of the citizens charter in their dealings with the public.

Members of NDPBs in Wales are expected to declare any potential conflict of interest.

Welsh Office

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish the Government's response to the first report of the Welsh Affairs Committee, Session 1992-93, House of Commons Paper 259, on the "Work of the Welsh Office".

Mr. Redwood: I am pleased to announce that the response to the Welsh Affairs Committee report on the work of the Welsh Office has been published today as Command Paper 2276. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

Mapping

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any proposals to ensure that the whole of Wales is mapped on a scale of 1:2,500; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* No. The Ordnance Survey is responsible for the official surveying and topographic mapping of Great Britain. Following the advice of a review committee, the Government require Ordnance Survey to survey and map all conurbations at a scale of 1:1,250, all small towns and cultivated rural areas at a scale of 1:2,500 and all mountain and moorland areas at a scale of 1:10,000. This requirement covers Wales.

Housing Capital Receipts

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was held by local authorities in Wales, as at 31 March 1992, in respect of housing capital receipts reserved for debt redemption.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: As at 31 March 1992, local authorities were required to set aside specified proportions of the capital receipts which they acquire for the repayment of debt, to meet payments on credit arrangements, such as finance leases, or in lieu of capital expenditure. Authorities are also required to make minimum provision from their revenue resources to meet credit liabilities. Such capital charges may be met in part by the interest gained on capital receipts, but the individual sources of such provision are not distinguished in the information collected centrally. In addition to the requirements for the application of capital receipts and revenue resources to meet credit liabilities, authorities may choose to apply the unspecified portions of their receipts which are available for new capital expenditure as well as revenue allocations to this end. At 31 March 1992, the outstanding housing loan debt for which provision would be required stood at £1,800,000,000. The scheduled amount of housing capital receipts assigned to meet credit liabilities stood at £180,000,000 at that date but, in addition, part of the £28,300,000 of unreserved housing receipts could also be applied to such use by authorities.

SCOTLAND

School Information

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about school information to be made available for parents under the parents charter.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Having carefully considered the responses made to the consultation paper "Better Information for Parents", my right hon. Friend is today laying regulations before Parliament which provide for the collection and publication of school information covering: attendance and truancy rates; examination results and awards; school leaver destinations; and school costs. A circular which explains in detail the provisions contained in the regulations is also being issued today.

We received more than 300 responses during the consultation period. I am very grateful to all those who responded for their helpful and constructive suggestions. Providing information to parents about the schools their children attend is a central element in the parents charter and something this Government consider to be of the utmost importance. As a result of our consultations, we have clarified and revised the earlier provisions in a number of respects. In particular, the regulations now require that:

school handbooks are to be issued by 15 December in each year;

regional and national average figures by category will include education authority schools and grant-aided schools but not special schools for which results are to be given separately;

attendance and absence rates for pupils in stage S6 need not distinguish between authorised and unauthorised absence;

examination results for SCE are to be shown as percentages of of the number of pupils on each individual school's roll at the start of their S4 year—and a measure of the staying-on-rate to stage S5 is now also to be given; and

awards for national certificates and other SCOTVEC awards are to be shown by stage.

We have also taken all possible steps to minimise the workload on schools which will result from the provision of this information. For example, calculations on examination results will be carried out as far as possible directly by the Scottish Office Education Department and discussions have already taken place between the Department, the Scottish Examination Board and the Scottish Vocational Education Council to this end. The basic information on school leaver destinations will also be collected by the careers service.

Councillors (Mileage Rates)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the methodology used to determine the rates of mileage expenses paid to councillors in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 24 June 1993]:* The motor mileage rates are based on the average price at the pump for unleaded petrol over a 12-month period as applied to the schedule of annual running costs produced by the Automobile Association which covers tyres, oil, servicing and repairs.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to review the current rates of mileage expenses paid to councillors in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 24 June 1993]:* The rates of mileage expenses were reviewed with effect from 1 January 1993. A similar annual uprating exercise will be carried out towards the end of this year.

Secondary School Reorganisation

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date he expects to publish the Scottish Office Education Department's responses to comments on the Howie committee's recommendations for upper secondary school reorganisation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* Decisions have not yet been taken in response to comments on the Howie committee's recommendations for upper secondary reform. I am unable, therefore, to give the date of an announcement.

Coastal Pollution

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the current cleanliness, safety and freedom from pollution of beaches and coastal waters.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* The water quality survey of Scotland 1990 which my Department published in March 1992 assesses the cleanliness and freedom from pollution of Scottish coastal waters. The survey demonstrates that a high proportion of Scottish waters are of satisfactory quality. River purification boards monitor water quality at many beaches and I produce annually a report on monitoring of 23 bathing waters identified for the purposes of EC directive 76/160/EEC. That report is in the House of Commons Library and for 1992 showed that 15 beaches achieved the directive's water quality standards.

Individual local authorities take responsibility for the cleanliness and safety of beaches in their area. However, Keep Scotland Beautiful has assessed the standards achieved at some of the most popular beaches including the nine beaches in Scotland that successfully obtained a seaside award this year.

NHS Property Sales

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the companies and individuals who have purchased NHS property to the value of £250,000 or more over the past five years.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* The information, for the period from 1 April 1988 to date, is set out in the table.

Greenock Medical Aid (Properties) Ltd.

Beazer Homes Ltd.

Morrison Developments

Wimpey Homes Holdings Ltd.

Homehurst Ltd.

Cresta Property Investment Ltd.

Messrs W. B. B. Gammell and P. J. A. Leggate

Leven Glen Ltd.

Hotel Saiyo International Ltd.

Central Regional Council

Balfour Beattie Ltd.

Uppermill Farms Ltd.

E. W. Ferrari

Jarlaw Securities Ltd.

Quantum Claims Compensation Specialists Ltd.

Balgownie Development Co. Ltd.

Balfour Beattie Ltd.

Windex Ltd.

Whatling Homes

Mactaggart and Mickel Ltd.

West of Scotland Housing Association

Charing Cross Housing Association

Tay Homes

Cathcart Housing Association

Miller Homes

E. K. Wallace and Sons Ltd.

Takare

Associated Nursing Services (PLC)

East Kilbride Development Corporation

Glasgow Development Agency

Central Guraduwara Singh Sabha Association

Tulloch Homes Ltd.

Wilson Homes (Stonehouse) Ltd.

Lanarkshire Development Agency

McLean Homes

Hugh McMartin and Partners

John D. Dourley

Barry D. Trentham Ltd.

Farquhar Developments Ltd.

Napier University

Applecross Developments

AMA (New Town) Ltd.

McAlpine Laing Investments

Bryant Homes

Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise

Sunnyhill Developments

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what central Government funds are available in Scotland for specific grants to aid the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* My right hon. Friend does not have the power to pay specific grants for this purpose. If Scottish local authorities faced additional expenditure commitments as a result of resettling refugees and asylum seekers this would be taken into account, in consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, in the determination of the level of aggregate external finance.

Water Supplies

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average amount of water used daily per household in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* A recent study in Scotland indicated that the average domestic consumption for each household was 368 litres per day.

Public Places (Disabled Access)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve access for people with disabilities to museums, galleries, theatres, libraries and sports arenas.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* It is for the management of each organisation to consider how its buildings and, in the case of museums, galleries and libraries, its collections can be made accessible to disabled people. The Government have close links with a range of statutory, voluntary and private sector bodies which are active in encouraging such organisations to increase access for disabled members of the public.

The Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations 1990 require access for disabled people to the ground floor of all buildings other than dwellings and buildings used for storage purposes. These provisions, which were first introduced in 1986, apply to all new buildings and to alterations and extensions to existing buildings. Proposed amendments to the current regulations were the subject of public consultation. They would require access for disabled people to the upper floors of all buildings except dwellings and storage buildings. These amendments should come into force in Scotland in the new year and would apply to all new buildings and to alterations and extensions to existing buildings.

As far as sports stadia are concerned, ground managements are equally responsible for ensuring adequate access. I particularly welcome the provisions for the disabled being made at those stadia currently being redeveloped in terms of Taylor report requirements.

Coastal Planning

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he intends to take to implement the Government's response—Cm 2011—to the Environment Committee's second report of 1991-92. "Coastal Zone Protection and Planning in Scotland"; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 2 July 1993]:* The House of Commons Select Committee on the environment report on coastal zone protection and planning examined coastal issues as they relate to England and Wales only. In their response, the Government accepted that the issues raised have a relevance to the United Kingdom as a whole and should be addressed according to the circumstances in different parts of the United Kingdom.

The Scottish Office is considering how best to take forward the Government's proposals in relation to Scotland and as a first step has commissioned a review of Scottish coastal issues.

The Scottish Office is represented on the interdepartmental group which is responsible for the continued development of coastal policy on a United Kingdom—wide basis.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was given to Scottish further education colleges in 1992-93 to prepare them for incorporation; and what provision was made in the conditions of grant for bonuses to senior staff.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 1 July 1993]:* Grants totalling £2·3 million were made to further education colleges in 1992-93 to meet costs associated with the incorporation process. It was for college councils to determine to what use the grants were put within their statutory powers as set out in the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992.

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq (Sanctions)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Clinton the effects of the imposition of the United Nations sanctions on disease and infant mortality in Iraq.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is in close touch with President Clinton about policy towards Iraq. We and the United States agree that Security Council resolutions 706 and 712 provide the best scheme for financing the United Nation's humanitarian operations in Iraq. Iraq has refused to accept the scheme.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Royal Parks Agency

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what sums are being spent out of public funds by the Royal Parks Agency on the building and equiping of the agency's new stables for constabulary and working horses in Richmond and Hyde parks, on purchase of horses and equipment, on the police riding manège at Richmond and on maintaining public buildings in Richmond park.

Mr. Sproat: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Royal Parks agency under its chief executive, Mr. David Welch. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given and I shall place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Letter from David Welch to Mr. Harry Greenway, dated 2 July 1993:

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for National Heritage has asked me to reply to your Written Parliamentary Question below.

> What sums are being spent out of public funds by the Royal Parks Agency upon the building and equiping of the Agency's new stables for constabulary and working horses in Richmond and Hyde Parks, upon purchase of horses and equipment, upon the police riding manège at Richmond and upon maintaining public buildings in Richmond Park?

No new stables were built at Richmond Park. The existing derelict stables and yard were renovated and equipped at a cost of £63,242. New stables at Hyde Park were built and equipped at a cost of £38,342.

There have been 4 or 5 patrol horses for the last 40 years or so in Richmond Park, with the Metropolitan Police providing mounted officers at Hyde Park until 1 April 1993. There is now a total of 10 patrol and 2 shire horses in Hyde and Richmond Parks, the additional horses being purchased and equipped for £49,000.

The police riding manège at Richmond Park cost £15,000 and maintaining the public buildings (stables) in future is estimated at £3,000 per annum.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if he will list the former Members of this House who have been appointed by his Department to quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations; and if he will list in each case the title of the post, the salary, the duration of the appointment, and the party which the former hon. Member represented;

(2) if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, any salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage does not currently hold the information requested centrally and this could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

National Lottery

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make it his policy, in evaluating tenders from bidders for a clause 5 national lottery licence, not to exclude consortia which include an organisation, whether from the United Kingdom or overseas, which is engaged in existing gambling activity.

Mr. Sproat: The responsibility for evaluating tenders and awarding the licence will lie with the director general of the national lottery.

TRANSPORT

Night Flights

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has reached conclusions following the consultations on night restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: On 28 January this year I published proposals for night restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. These followed a wide-ranging review of how we might best maintain the policy of continuing to protect local communities from excessive exposure to aircraft noise at night.

Our existing policy has brought very considerable benefits to local communities by controlling movements of most jet aircraft at night. At the same time industry has made great strides in phasing out older noisier aircraft. There has been a substantial reduction in the number of people affected by daytime aircraft noise above the recognised disturbance threshold. This trend will continue, and I have separately laid regulations before the House which will ensure that the noisier, chapter 2 jets will be phased out by 2002. These regulations are in line with international agreements which we have worked hard to deliver.

The central element of our consultation paper was a new system to maintain the protection offered to residents around Heathrow and Gatwick and extend similar protection to those around Stansted. Additional features were to move away from restricting numbers of movements to a system of quotas that would further encourage the use of quieter aircraft. Each aircraft type would be assigned a quota count (QC) for take-off or landing in line with certificated noise performance. The noisiest aircraft (QC8 and QC16) would not be allowed to be scheduled at night. We also proposed that there should be a QC0 category for all aircraft with certificated noise levels less than 90 EPNdB to provide a further incentive to airlines to accelerate changes in their fleets and scheduling in favour of the quietest aircraft. Our proposals also include harmonisation of the night restrictions period and other measures to make the system fairer all round.

Responses to the consultation have clearly demonstrated the importance local people attach to night restrictions. At the same time, it is clear that they have benefited from the introduction of quieter aircraft. Industry respondents for their part broadly accepted much of what was proposed although they argued that the threshold for QC0 could have been set higher. Some airlines also stressed the need for modest growth in quota to meet anticipated increases in demand over the next five years. However, leaving the movement of QC0 aircraft unrestricted raised concerns among local people that there could in theory be a major and uncheckable expansion in night flights.

I have concluded that local concerns would best be met by extending the quota system with a new QC½ band to cover larger aircraft below 90 EPNdB. Although the aviation industry will lose some of the benefits of the previous QC0 proposal, they will still be able to use the flexibility of the quota system in scheduling their movements. At the same time local people will have the assurance that the quota will cover all relevant aircraft movements, with a reduction in the types that are currently exempt. This provides an additional measure of protection and meets local concerns about the perceived threat of uncontrolled growth.

I have given careful consideration to whether I should increase the proposed quotas in order to accommodate the introduction of the QC½ category. On balance I concluded that the relatively small number of such movements at Heathrow could be accommodated within my previous proposal but that enhancement of the quotas would be appropriate at Gatwick and Stansted, because of the larger number of QC½ movements particularly at the latter where there is a significant number of mail and empty positioning flights.

I have put a full statement on the new quotas in the House Library.

I pay particular tribute to the commitment of BAA plc in establishing noise and track-keeping systems at the three airports. These systems will complement our new arrangements providing further monitoring—further protection for local people. They will also provide a comprehensive basis for the reviews that I am asking the

aircraft noise monitoring advisory committee (ANMAC) to carry out on current noise limits by night and day and the aircraft noise classification system. The noise and track-keeping systems also give industry a ready means to check on its own performance.

In my decisions I have sought to maintain the essential balance between the aviation industry and local people. The aviation industry makes an important contribution to the economy and it is essential to preserve employment and business opportunities not only for the 100,000 people who work in the industry but also for the wider contribution it makes to the local and national economy. It will be tough on industry and is a challenge to them to maintain progress at introducing quieter aircraft. It is just as important to ensure that local people should be able to enjoy a good night's sleep.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to encourage BR and the relevant private sector interests to seek help from the European investment bank for the upgrading of the west coast main line.

Mr. Freeman: It is not normally appropriate for BR to borrow from the European investment bank (EIB), as it can borrow more cheaply from the Government.

I have recently announced a scoping study to examine how the private sector can be involved in upgrading the west coast main line. The source of finance for the private sector is a matter for any eventual private sector partner in the upgrading project. But the benefits of EIB funding are widely appreciated, and the WCML would almost certainly be an eligible project.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to whom each of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Department of Transport is responsible; whether the public bodies or their members in each case are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens' charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Mr. Norris: Details of the four executive non-departmental public bodies in which the Department of Transport has an interest are listed in "Public Bodies 1992", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The functions and responsibilities of the three General Lighthouse Authorities are specified in their founding legislation. My right hon. Friend is responsible for the operation of the General Lighthouse Fund which funds the authorities. The Traffic Director for London is appointed by my right hon. Friend and is responsible to him. The answers to the other points raised are:

(a) None of the bodies is subject to surcharge. (The concept of surcharge as used in the Local Government Finance Act 1982 applies only to local authorities.)

(b) The bodies subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner are:

Trinity House
Northern Lighthouse Board
Traffic Director for London

(c) Information on audit arrangements is set out in Public Bodies 1992.

(d) No. The provisions of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 apply only to those local authorities specified in the Act.

(e) Performance indicators have been set for the Traffic Director for London and a system of indicators for the lighthouse authorities is under discussion.

(f) All bodies are being encouraged to follow the principles of the Citizen's Charter.

No requirements regarding declarations of interest have been imposed by my right hon. Friend on members of the three lighthouse authorities, the majority of whom he does not appoint. The Traffic Director for London does not have a board but he is required by the terms of his appointment to be alert to the possibility of any conflicts of interest and to consult my right hon. Friend in any case of doubt.

South Rock Light

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether fishing boats in Northern Ireland are required to pay light dues to the Commissioner of Irish Lights; who operates the South Rock light on the most easterly point of Ireland; what navigation aids the South Rock light provides to fishing boats sailing to Portavogie harbour; and if he will make a statement about the future of the South Rock light.

Mr. Norris: The Commissioners of Irish Lights are funded from the General Lighthouse Fund established by Section 1 of the Merchant Shipping (Mercantile Marine Fund) Act 1898. The fund's principal income is from light dues levied on shipping using ports in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Fishing vessels using United Kingdom ports are liable for light dues. In the Republic of Ireland light dues are determined by the Irish Government, who have not extended light dues to fishing vessels using ports in the Republic. The South Rock lightfloat is operated by the Commissioners of Irish Lights. The lightfloat is moored 3·6 miles from Portavogie and is used by all craft for the purposes of marking landfalls, marking coastal passages and as a turning mark for vessels navigating on the north-east coast of Ireland. It clearly marks the dangerous waters to the west and is important for vessels entering or leaving Portavogie. There are no plans to make any changes to the South Rock lightfloat.

Rail Services (Clapham to Willesden)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions he has reached from his study concerning the practicality of introducing a frequent urban passenger service on the newly electrified railway line between Clapham and Willesden junctions; what would be the estimated cost of re-establishing the intermediate stations at *(a)* Wormwood Scrubs, *(b)* Shepherds Bush, *(c)* West Brompton, *(d)* Kings Road, Chelsea and *(e)* York Road, Battersea.

Mr. Norris: The study's main conclusions were that the West London line provides the opportunity to introduce a new inner London rail service at relatively low capital cost, and that the project might be suitable for a joint venture initiative. Analysis of potential usage was inevitably subject to a wide margin of error, but suggested that, while not justified in financial terms, the project's estimated

benefits/costs ratio would be about 1·8, excluding station investment. Detailed estimates of costs for individual stations were not made.

Local Authority Transport Companies

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from employees of local authority public transport companies about the security and comparability of their pension arrangements should their companies pass into private sector ownership.

Mr. Freeman: I have received representations from PTA company employees, the TGWU and ALBUM (the Association of Local Authority Bus Undertaking Managers). I know that this is an important issue and I will take account of the proposals in respect of pensions in each case at the time consent to the sale arrangements is sought under section 75 of the Transport Act 1985.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to allow those local authorities which currently do not have an arrangement with his Department to enable their public transport company employees to remain in the local government superannuation scheme after transfer to the private sector to make such an arrangement.

Mr. Freeman: The guidelines on future membership of public pension schemes, such as the LGSS, were set out in a policy statement of July 1991. I am sending a copy to the hon. Member. We have no plans to extend the arrangements referred to.

Channel Tunnel (Rail Freight)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, further to his answer of 28 June, *Official Report*, columns *403-4*, what is the Government's policy on the desirability of early construction of rail freight terminals to take advantage of the opening of the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: Our authorisation of BR investment exceeding £400 million in preparation for channel tunnel freight services is indicative of the importance we attach to this new market. Terminal facilities are under development and BR expects to be able to meet forecast demand when the tunnel opens.

Roll on/Roll off Vessels

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the outcome of recent negotiations within the International Maritime Organisation on the safety of life at sea convention in regard to the risks posed by roll on/roll off ships and ferries; and what was the United Kingdom's position on the policy matters discussed.

Mr. Norris: Despite some support, the United Kingdom's proposal to amend the convention that would have applied the SOLAS 90 standard to existing ferries within a reasonable timescale did not receive the requisite number of votes at the Maritime Safety Committee. The United Kingdom's position was to obtain similar safety standard for all ferries. This continued to be our objective at the meeting held recently with our European neighbours, which had a more positive outcome.

Motorways (Charges)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans currently exist to put tolls on the motorway network.

Mr. Key: Draft orders were published last month for the construction of the Birmingham northern relief road. This will be this country's first privately built, operated and tolled overland motorway. The Green Paper, "Paying for Better Motorways", was published on 26 May in order to stimulate a public debate on the principle of introducing direct charging on the existing motorway network in Great Britain.

Noise and Pollution

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce measures to reduce the noise and pollution resulting from projected levels of road traffic.

Mr. Key: Increasingly tight noise standards have been introduced for all types of vehicle. Since 1980 the noise from the heaviest lorries has been virtually halved. And tighter limits are now being negotiated in the European Community. These new standards will include for the first time standards for tyre noise.

The annual MOT and HGV and PSV tests include an inspection of the exhaust system. Vehicles can also be subjected to roadside checks. We hope to increase the level of these checks by collaboration between police, DoT inspectors and local authority environmental health officers.

We assess the impact of noise on residential property among other factors which influence the alignment of new roads. And the spread of noise is minimised by the use of cuttings, earth mounds and noise barriers. Quieter road surfaces are being developed.

Compensation is offered to householders where property values are diminished due to new road schemes. We are conducting research on whether the level at which this compensation is triggered is the right one.

Tighter controls on the amounts of carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and the oxides of nitrogen which can be emitted by petrol and diesel engined cars have been agreed in the European Community. These mean that new petrol-engined cars are now fitted with catalytic converters, reducing by about 75 per cent. emissions of the pollutants mentioned above.

A further directive has just been adopted which will bring emissions from light duty goods vehicles into line with those for passenger cars. It will apply to light vans first registered on or after 1 October 1994. The EC Council of Ministers is now discussing a draft directive for stricter limits on emissions from cars leading up to the year 2000.

In 1991, the Council agreed new tighter emission standards for diesel engined lorries and buses, to be implemented in two stages. From 1 October 1993, new vehicles will have to meet a substantially tighter limit on NOx emissions. There is also to be a limit for the first time on particulate emissions. From 1 October 1996 the NOx limit will be reduced to about half its present value, and the particulate limit will have a level of stringency similar to that to be applied in the United States from 1994. Limits for the year 2000 will soon be discussed within the EC.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which system of motorway charging he proposes to introduce; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Green Paper "Paying for Better Motorways" is a consultation document. The Government have taken decisions neither on the principle of introducing direct charging on existing motorways nor on the method of doing so, other than to rule out conventional tolling with toll plazas and barriers.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost of introducing motorway tolls; what consideration he has given to ways of meeting these costs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Green Paper, "Paying for Better Motorways" (Cm 2200) describes a number of possible systems of direct charging. Their costs of introduction would vary and would be influenced by the detailed design chosen. It is not possible at this stage to estimate reliably the cost of introducing motorway charges.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the amount of money which could be raised by introducing tolls on the motorway network.

Mr. Key: We estimate that an electronic toll of around 1½p per mile for cars and light goods vehicles and an average of around 4½p per mile for other vehicles would generate revenue of some £700 million a year. A permit priced at, say, £50 a year for cars up and to £500 a year for the heaviest goods vehicles would raise some £500 million a year.

Traffic Calming

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many members of his staff are employed currently *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time solely to promote traffic calming (i) in Marsham street and (ii) in each of his Department's regional offices.

Mr. Key: Traffic calming is a very important area of work in the Department because of the significant safety and environmental benefits it can bring. A substantial amount of effort is devoted to carrying out research and practical studies and to developing regulations, guidance and advice to help local authorities implement successful and cost-effective schemes on their roads. No staff spend all their time on this work, as it overlaps with the wider subjects of traffic management and road safety.

Quangos (Appointments)

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the former Members of this House who have been appointed since 1988 by his Department to quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations; and if he will list in each case the title of the post, the salary, the duration of the appointment and the party which the former hon. Member represented;

(2) if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department since 1988 to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, any salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Norris: Detailed information on past and present appointees to non-departmental public bodies—formerly known as quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations—is not held in the Department and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, from such limited information as is available on present members of NDPBs, there is no evidence that any individual falls within the categories listed at *(a)*, *(b)* or *(c)*. As regards *(d)*, it is known that two serving members of the Disabled Persons Advisory Committee have been party candidates for Parliament. These are Sir John Hannam, MP and a former Labour Member of Parliament, Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones. Both were re-appointed as members of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee in December 1992 for a three year period to December 1995. Committee members are not paid a salary, but the Department meets their travel and subsistence costs.

Rail Users' Consultative Committees

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how often the franchising director will be required to attend the rail users' consultative committees hearings to answer questions.

Mr. Freeman: We have made it clear that the franchising director will be expected to liaise with the rail users' consultative committees and we will be covering this in the Secretary of State's published objectives for him. I expect that the franchising director will attend meetings of both the central and regional committees from time to time as part of this liaison.

ENVIRONMENT

Dangerous Activities (Convention)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will sign the Council of Europe convention on civil liability for damage resulting from activities dangerous to the environment.

Mr. Yeo: The Government have no plans to do so.

Carbon

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the cost to the economy of the measures announced to date for achieving a saving of 10 million tonnes of carbon per annum.

Mr. Yeo: Most of the measures announced to date as part of the United Kingdom's CO_2 programme are aimed at improving the efficiency of energy use in the economy, with a net benefit to the economy.

Savings are also expected to be achieved through an increase in the objective for renewable energy. This is part of the Government's continuing strategy to promote the development of new sources of energy to the point at which they become economic and can compete in the market place.

Drinking Water

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to amend the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 to impose a maximum permitted concentration of cryptosporidium oocyst contamination in drinking water; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 already require that for water supplies to be wholesome they must not contain any organism at a concentration which is detrimental to public health.

Waterways Ombudsman

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to announce the new ombudsman to deal with issues in relation to the British waterways network.

Mr. Yeo: This is principally a matter for the chairman of the British Waterways Board, but I understand that British Waterways hopes to make an announcement within the next month.

Peatlands

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what safeguard he has proposed for the preservation of lowland peatlands.

Mr. Yeo: A working group on peat extraction is preparing advice for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. The Government's strategy for peatlands will be announced after receiving their advice and considering all the relevant information. Meanwhile, the future of peatlands has been secured by: their notification as sites of special scientific interest; purchase; the arrangements between English Nature and Fison's and the co-operation of the members of the Peat Producers Association, whose members have agreed not to make any planning applications to work existing or proposed peatlands SSSIs without the prior agreement of the appropriate nature conservation agency.

Coastal Policy

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the purpose of the inter-departmental group on coastal policy; what issues it will consider; when its formation was announced; when it has met; and if he will list the names of those persons present on each occasion and the Departments they represent.

Mr. Yeo: The inter-departmental group on coastal policy was formed in 1991, prior to the start of the inquiry into coastal zone protection and planning undertaken by the Environment Select Committee. It is composed of officials from all relevant Government departments including Treasury, DoT, DTI MAFF, MoD, DNH, Home Office, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Ireland, Crown Estate and other representatives. Its existence was announced in the Government's response to the inquiry in July 1992.

Key issues being considered by the group include the control of development below the low water mark, coastal management planning and links to implementation of the EC habitats directive.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to publish minutes of the meetings of the interdepartmental group on coastal policy; what recommendations have been made; and what response he has issued following the meetings of the group.

Mr. Yeo: The results of the work of the inter-departmental group on coastal policy will be published in discussion papers later this summer. There are no plans to publish minutes of the meetings of this group.

Waste Management

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *470*, on the waste management licensing timetable, what representations he has received about a new timetable.

Mr. Yeo: I have received a joint representation on behalf of the Institute of Wastes Management, the National Association of Waste Disposal Contractors, and the local authority associations concerned with waste regulation. I shall meet them on 15 July to discuss the matter. I have also had correspondence from a number of individual waste regulation authorities; and I have met representatives of UK Waste Management Ltd.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will reconsider proposed waste management licensing to avoid sites accepting very small quantities of hazardous waste and civic amenity sites having to pay higher rates.

Mr. Yeo: The charging scheme's financial objective is to ensure full recovery of waste regulation authorities' relevant costs on the inspection and monitoring of licensed sites. The Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980 define as "special" waste which is so dangerous or difficult to treat, keep or dispose of that special provision is required for dealing with it. The higher rates of subsistence charge proposed for sites authorised by their licence to accept special waste were intended to reflect the higher level of inspection and monitoring required of such sites. As such, they would be necessary to ensure fulfilment of the scheme's financial objective. In response to consultation on the charging scheme, we have received a number of representations about the treatment or keeping of certain special wastes destined for recovery, notably the contents of waste car batteries. We shall consider these representations before making the final scheme.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will implement the proposed new legislation for waste management licensing.

Mr. Yeo: As the then Minister for the Environment and Countryside announced on 29 April at column *470*, the introduction of waste management licensing has had to be postponed pending further consideration of the impact of European Community measures dealing with waste management. On 18 May at column *101*, the then Minister gave further details of the particular technical problems we need to solve. We are working to solve these problems as quickly as possible. As soon as I am in a position to give a revised date for the implementation of licensing, I shall do so.

Limehouse Link Road

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give a breakdown of the costs of the funfair which formed part of the Limehouse link road celebrations on 16 May including any rent waived; how much revenue was raised from funfair ride charges; and how much was raised for the community fund by *(a)* the funfair and *(b)* the sponsored walk through the Limehouse link tunnel.

Sir George Young: The London Docklands development corporation gave free use of a site for the funfair. The Isle of Dogs community trust was responsible for the sponsored walk and I have no information about the money raised. The costs of, and revenue earned by, the funfair are matters for its operator, as is any contribution made to the community fund.

Waste Framework Directive

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has made to the European Councils waste framework directive 91/156/EEC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The EC framework directive on waste (91/156/EEC) came into force on 1 April this year. Much of it is already implemented in the United Kingdom through the Control of Pollution Act 1974, the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989, and those parts of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 which have already been brought into operation. The Government are considering what further measures are needed to implement the remaining provisions of the directive. Some of these will be included in the proposed regulations to bring into force the new waste management licensing provisions in part II of the Environmental Protection Act.

Aggregates

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps the Government are taking to actively increase the use of recycled and waste materials as aggregates.

Mr. Baldry: The Government are committed to making greater use of waste and recycled materials in construction. An extensive research programme is in hand to support this. Research has identified the availability of these materials and on how to increase usage. A current project is examining steps to encourage greater recycling of demolition materials. We are also participating in an EC priority waste streams project on recycling building and demolition wastes. The revised Minerals Planning Guidance Note 6 on aggregates, which is currently in draft, will also set out policies to increase the use of recycled and waste materials. Final guidance is expected later this year.

Ozone-depleting Substances

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department takes to ensure enforcement of section 33(1)(c) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to the disposal of waste ozone-depleting substances by releasing them to the atmosphere.

Mr. Yeo: The disposal of waste ozone-depleting substances by releasing them to the atmosphere is an offence under section 33(1)(c) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Enforcement of this section is principally a matter for waste regulation authorities. Further guidance on the effect of section 33 will be issued when section 33 is brought into force in its entirety.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many prosecutions and convictions there have been so far under section 33(1)(c) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to the disposal of waste ozone-depleting substances by releasing them to the atmosphere.

Mr. Yeo: Information on the substances involved in particular cases is not held centrally.

London Docklands (Exhibition Centre)

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account was taken in the decision to develop a new exhibition centre in London docklands of the effect on other major exhibition centres within 150 miles of London.

Sir George Young: The London Docklands development corporation will wish to decide whether to continue its promotion of a new exhibition centre in the light of a market-testing exercise now being undertaken.

Air Pollution

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to expand the air pollution detection network; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: My Department will be issuing a consultation document in the summer on the extension of national air quality monitoring by the further integration of local authority and central Government funded monitoring.

Construction Industry

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to enhance his Department's sponsorship of the construction industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Following an initiative taken by my predecessor, a review of my Department's sponsorship function of the construction industry has been completed. The review looked at the current strengths and achievements of the Department's construction policy directorate and how these could be developed to meet the present and future needs of the industry. I will announce the conclusions of the review on 7 July and copies of the final report will be available in the Libraries of the House from 11 am on that day.

Forestry

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account he took of purchasing policies in the United Kingdom regarding the specification of certain species of timber on environmental grounds when he signed the "United Nations Principles on Forestry" at the Earth summit in 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 1 July 1993]:* Purchasing policy was not addressed specifically in the discussions on

the principles on forestry, the main objective of which is to ensure that the world's forests are managed sustainably. Nevertheless, we believe that it is important that consumers should be able to distinguish between timber from sustainable and unsustainable sources. We are therefore supporting the development of standards for forest management and timber labelling schemes.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made in selling the Building Management Businesses.

Mr. Curry *[pursuant to his answer, 24 June 1993, col. 247]:* I am pleased to be able to announce the exchange of contracts for the sale of the PSA building management business BM Scotland. The business has been sold to Serco.

This sale will benefit taxpayers, staff and customers. The next step is for staff to choose individually whether to transfer to the privatised business. The future of the business now lies in the private sector and I hope many staff will choose to transfer with it. Completion of the sale is expected at the end of August.

Serco will pay the Government £3·5 million for the business. The Government will, in addition, meet the costs of redundancies, should they be necessary, up to an agreed figure in the first five years following completion of the sale. The redundancy entitlement of transferring staff will be guaranteed by the Government for five years after the sale. Further details cannot be released until all the sales have been completed.

Serco is a leading company in the facilities management field. I am confident that the combination of its commercial skills with the strengths of the BM Scotland work force will give the business a sound future in the private sector.

I hope to make further announcements soon about the sales of the other two BM businesses.

Buckingham Palace

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment has been made of the number of additional Royal Parks Constabulary police officers that will have to be deployed and the number of officers that will have to be redeployed consequent upon the opening of Buckingham palace to the public; and what assessment he has made of the cost implications.

Mr. Sproat: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its chief executive, Mr. David Welch. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given and I shall place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Letter from Mr. D. Welch to Andrew Mackinlay, dated 30 June 1993:

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage has asked me to reply to your Written Parliamentary Question asking:

> what assessment has been made of the number of additional Royal Parks Constabulary police officers that will have to be deployed and the number of officers that will have to be redeployed consequent upon the opening of Buckingham Palace to the public; and what assessment he has made of the cost implications.

The Royal Parks have been in close contact with Buckingham Palace about their arrangements for opening to the public. The Royal Parks Constabulary already police St. James's Park and we do not envisage that any additional manpower will be required.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Haiti

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest situation in Haiti.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We support the efforts of the Organisation of American States and the United Nations to bring about a political settlement. We supported the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 841 on 16 June and are implementing legislation to give it effect in the United Kingdom and dependent terrorities. We welcome the convening of talks between President Aristide and the coup leaders and hope they may lead to a lasting settlement.

Nepal

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent disturbances in Nepal.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Following controversy following the death in a road accident of Madam Bhandari, the secretary general of the Unified Marxist Leninist Party, protest action by this party and other left-wing factions led to violent disturbances in Kathmandu and the surrounding area on 25 June. These became increasingly serious, and resulted in an official death toll of 10 in the following few days. The situation is now relatively calm.

We regret the violence and loss of life. We hope that all parties involved will now resolve any differences peacefully and in the spirit of the parliamentary traditions Nepal has adopted.

Lord Owen

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the basis on which the salary and allowances of Lord Owen as a peace envoy relating to former Yugoslavia is fixed and on the United Kingdom's contribution.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Lord Owen's remuneration and other terms of service are the responsibility of the presidency of the European Community—currently Belgium—and the international conference on the former Yugoslavia—ICFY.

The United Kingdom contributes 7·19 per cent. to the total ICFY budget, which includes Lord Owen's remuneration and all other costs directly related to the Conference. The United Kingdom's contribution for the period 1 March to 31 August 1993 was $194,850.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to oppose the lifting of the arms embargo against any participants in the Bosnian civil war until an effective and lasting settlement to the crisis is in place and operating.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The arms embargo was imposed on the former Yugoslavia under United Nations Security Council resolution 713 on 25 September 1991, and is applied equally to all republics. There has been considerable recent debate in international fora on the lifting of the arms embargo for the Bosnian Muslims. We have repeatedly made it clear that this option is not ruled out, but we believe that in present circumstances this would do nothing to assist the achievement of a peace settlement—indeed it could make it less likely and threaten the vital humanitarian relief efforts.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds exist from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Serbia to pay monthly sums to Serbian families who agree to accommodate refugees and displaced persons; what is the total of such monthly payments; what guarantees have been given to UNHCR about how long such funds will be available; and what comparable data he has on funds available on a similar basis in *(a)* Croatia, *(b)* Slovenia and *(c)* Bosnia-Herzegovina; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The UNHCR is paying cash grants to host families in Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia. The UNHCR's 1993 programme envisages payments of US$ 27 million, US$ 5,055,000 and US$ 2,115,600 respectively. Full implementation of the programme will depend on the availability of funds: so far only a small proportion of the sums envisaged has been paid. The cash grant scheme does not operate in Serbia or Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports his Department has received of activities in the village of Gladovici in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the past 12 months; and if he will list the source of such reports and the action which has been taken as a result.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have seen a report from the UNPROFOR press office in Zagreb concerning the bombing of Gladovici and Osatica on 13 March. There is evidence to suggest that the aircraft were operated by the Bosnian Serbs. Since the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 816 enforcing the no-fly zone over Bosnia, there have been no reports of further combat raids.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information Her Majesty's Government have received to confirm that no arms have been included in supplies to Gorazde distributed from NATO transport planes; if Her Majesty's Government have been apprised of the loading and inspection procedure for such missions; and what complaints have been made regarding supplies to Gorazde.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are established loading and inspection procedures for NATO aircraft leaving Rheinmain in Germany on humanitarian air drop missions. Monitors from all three sides of the Bosnian conflict are present when the aircraft are being loaded to check that they contain only aid supplies. We are aware of allegations to suggest that ammunition has been transported, but have seen no evidence to substantiate this.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs from what source Her Majesty's Government first received information regarding the bombing of Gladovici on 13 March; on what information a view was taken as to where the aircraft involved took off and landed; what further information has since come to light; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Information concerning the bombing of Gladovici was first received from United Nations personnel, and published in an UNPROFOR press release of 16 March 1993. The aircraft were observed flying across the River Drina into Serbia, which would be consistent with the use of Serbian air space to lose altitude prior to landing. No further information has since come to light.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times Her Majesty's Government or her representatives have met President Slobodan Milosevic since January 1991; and what was the purpose of each meeting.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our representatives have met President Milosevic and his staff on numerous occasions since January 1991, most recently on 18 June 1993 when Her Majesty's chargé d'affaires in Belgrade delivered a letter from the Prime Minister to President Milosevic expressing his concern at the arrest and detention of opposition leader Mr. Draskovic, and requesting his immediate release. The main purpose of our representations has been to press President Milosevic to co-operate fully with the efforts of the international community to achieve lasting and equitable settlements to the conflicts of the former Yugoslavia, particularly in Bosnia, and in the Krajina and Kosovo, based on the principles established by the London conference.

Tibet

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions Her Majesty's Government have taken to secure the release and safety of those arrested in the recent demonstrations in Lhasa.

Mr. Goodlad: We and our EC partners have urged the Chinese authorities at a high level in Peking to release all those detained in Lhasa and to allow EC diplomats in Peking early access to them meanwhile. The EC has also issued a public statement reiterating these points. We continue to press the Chinese authorities to guarantee full respect for human rights throughout China, including Tibet, in keeping with their obligations under the United Nations charter.

Entry Clearance Applications (Sana'a)

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the level of consular staff in Sana'a to cope with applications for entry clearance to the United Kingdom from Sana'a and Djibouti.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Entry clearance staffing in posts overseas, including Sana'a is determined by the volume and nature of the demand. The lack of resident career representation in Djibouti inevitably imposes constraints on the service available there. If the hon. Member is aware of any particular problems, I would be glad to have them looked into.

Tunisia

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding the torture and imprisonment of women in Tunisia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have raised human rights issues on several occasions with the Tunisian Government who are well aware of our concerns.

Burma

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government and the EC towards Burma (i) overall and (ii) in respect of trade sanctions and arms embargoes.

Mr. Goodlad: We and our Community partners have closely co-ordinated policies on Burma. We take every opportunity, bilaterally and as the Community, to urge the Burmese authorities to respect their human rights obligations and the results of the democratic elections in May 1990.

There has been an EC embargo on arms sales to Burma since July 1991. We have also severed defence links. Wider trade sanctions against Burma do not command the necessary international support.

British Council

Mr. Radice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the level of operations by the British Council in the Nordic countries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The council's long-standing operations in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark have helped to creat the current extensive network of bilateral contacts.

Recently, in order to release resources—human and financial—the council has reduced its staffing and overheads in the area while maintaining programmes as far as possible.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to whom each of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department is responsible; whether the public bodies or their members in each case are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open Government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Mr. Goodlad: The non-departmental public bodies—(NDPBs)—sponsored by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are responsible to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

The answers to points *(a)* to *(f)* are as follows:

(a) No.

(b) The British Council.

(c) Yes, where the non-departmental public bodies has a budget.

(d) Not applicable.

(e) Yes. Financial management and polices of non-departmental public bodies are subject to review every five years.

(f) All non-departmental public bodies are subject to the citizen's charter. Chairpersons and members of boards are required to declare an interest.

The Crown Agents and Commonwealth Development Corporation are public corporations of a trading nature, rather than executive non-departmental public bodies. Their classification in the publication "Public Bodies" will be corrected in the 1993 edition.

Colombia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the EC report on the human rights situation in Colombia.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have seen no such report.

Hong Kong

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legislation and which agency covers the prudential annual supervision of *(a)* company and *(b)* bank accounts in the case of companies and banks registered in Hong Kong; and in what form and to which representative assembly such agencies report.

Mr. Goodlad: Requirements on the incorporation, management and winding up of companies are set out in the companies ordinance, administered by the Registrar of Companies. The banking supervision department of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority is responsible for the prudential supervision of banks in Hong Kong in accordance with the provisions of the banking ordinance. Members of Hong Kong's Legislative Council may ask questions and conduct investigations on any matter of concern to them in respect of regulation of banks or companies.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what agency is responsible for the supervision of the tax affairs of *(a)* residents of Hong Kong, *(b)* companies registered in Hong Kong and *(c)* banks registered in Hong Kong; and in what form and to which representative assembly such agencies report.

Mr. Goodlad: The Inland Revenue Department of the Hong Kong Government is responsible for the collection of tax on Hong Kong residents, and on companies and banks registered in Hong Kong. The Commissioner of Inland Revenue reports to the Financial Secretary who is a member of Hong Kong's Legislative Council.

North Korea

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on North Korea's recent suspension of its intention to withdraw from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Hurd: We welcome this announcement and the news that the North Korean and United States Governments have agreed to continue their discussions. We hope that these will lead to a permanent solution of the

problem of North Korea's nuclear intentions. We urge North Korea to folow this positive step by reaffirming its commitment to the non-proliferation treaty and complying fully with its safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

We also call on North Korea to reaffirm its commitment to the north/south bilateral nuclear agreement with the Republic of Korea.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Anti-abortionists

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what preparations he is making to control the entry into the United Kingdom and the activities in the United Kingdom of American anti-abortionists visiting the United Kingdom in September and to protect clinical staff and women seeking legal abortions from intimidation and harassment.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Citizens of the United States of America are subject to immigration control and must qualify to enter under the terms of the immigration rules. My right hon. and learned Friend may direct exclusion if a person's presence would not be conducive to the public good. Considerations will be given to any evidence which may justify the exclusion of individuals identified as members of the group intending to visit the United Kingdom in September.

Enforcement of the Public Order Act 1986 as it relates to behaviour which may cause harassment or fear of violence is the responsibility of chief officers of police.

Firearms

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 June 1992, *Official Report*, columns *411-14*, if he will update the table for homicides involving shotguns in domestic incidents.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the table.

Offences currently recorded as homicide in which the relationship between the suspect and victim was domestic and where a shot gun was used—England and Wales

Police Force Area	*Year* 1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Avon and Somerset	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
Bedfordshire	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Cheshire	—	1	—	—	—	1	1
Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumbria	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
Devon and Cornwall	—	8	—	1	—	—	—
Dorset	—	—	—	1	1	1	—
Durham	1	—	1	—	—	1	—
Essex	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Greater Manchester	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Hampshire	2	—	—	—	—	—	1
Hertfordshire	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Humberside	—	—	—	—	2	—	1
Kent	—	1	2	1	1	—	1
Lancashire	—	—	—	1	—	1	—
Leicestershire	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
London, City of	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Merseyside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Metropolitan Police District	1	—	2	1	—	2	—
Norfolk	4	1	—	—	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northumbria	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	1	—	1	—	—	1	—
Nottinghamshire	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Yorkshire	—	—	1	—	—	1	—
Staffordshire	—	—	—	—	2	—	—
Suffolk	1	1	—	1	—	2	—
Surrey	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Sussex	—	—	1	1	1	—	—
Thames Valley	—	1	—	—	1	—	1
Warwickshire	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
West Mercia	—	1	—	1	1	1	1
West Midlands	—	3	—	—	—	1	—
West Yorkshire	—	2	—	—	—	1	—
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Dyfed-Powys	—	—	—	—	1	2	—
Gwent	—	—	1	—	—	1	2

Police Force Area	Year 1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
North Wales	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
South Wales	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
England and Wales	16	23	15	12	11	17	11

Information for 1992 is not yet available.

Notes:

1. Offences currently recorded as homicide as at 14 September 1992.
2. The term "domestic" includes the following relationships of victim to suspect: daughter; parent; spouse; cohabitant or former spouse or cohabitant; other family; lover or former lover including spouse's lover or lover's spouse or other associate.

Wolds Prison

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Wolds prison severe incident of 28 and 29 June was reported to him; and what and who was involved in this incident.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated July 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about an incident at Wolds remand prison on 28 and 29 June.

The incident occurred late on 28 June. The Controller at Wolds was informed at home in the early hours of 29 June, and she in turn informed the appropriate official at Prison Service Headquarters. A report on the incident was faxed to the offices of the Home Secretary and the Minister of State soon after the start of business that morning.

Police are investigating the incident, in which two prisoners allegedly assaulted three Group 4 staff and one prisoner started a fire within a unit which resulted in smoke and water damage.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to whom each of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department is responsible; whether the public bodies or their members in each case are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Mr. Howard: The executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Home Office are as follows:

Alcohol Education and Research Council*
Commission for Racial Equality
Community Development Foundation*
Fire Service Examination Board
Fire Service Research and Training Trust*
Gaming Board
Horserace Betting Levy Board
Horserace Totalisator Board
Office of the Data Protection Registrar
Police Complaints Authority
Police Promotion Examinations Board

* Indicates a charity

In addition, the Home Office sponsors the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, which performs some executive functions.

The readily available information on these bodies is as follows:—

Responsibility

Chairmen and members are appointed by the Home Secretary and are ultimately responsible through him to Parliament.

Surcharge

NDPB members are not subject to 'surcharge'. However, in the case of those NDPBs which are charities Trustees have potential financial liabilities under the Charities Act 1992.

Investigation by Parliamentary Commissioner

The Commission for Racial Equality, the Horserace Betting Levy Board and the Office of the Data Protection Registrar are listed in schedule 2 to the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967, as amended, as among those bodies subject to investigation by the PCA.

Scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office

The Audit Commission has responsibility only for local government. The following bodies are subject to NAO scrutiny either by statute or by agreement:

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
Community Development Foundation
Commission for Racial Equality
Gaming Board
Office of the Data Protection Registrar
Police Complaints Authority

Statutory provisions for open Government which apply to local authorities

NDPBs are subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984. They are not subject to legislation which specifically applies to local authorities.

Performance Indicators

NDPBs are encouraged, wherever appropriate, to develop performance indicators and associated targets and to publish these.

Citizens Charter

The Home Office is encouraging those NDPBs which offer a service to the public to adopt the principles set out in the citizens charter and to publicise how these are being reflected in their working arrangements.

Declaration of Interests

There are no statutory requirements for members or chairpersons to declare an interest. Nevertheless, in those bodies where a potential conflict of interest might arise, arrangements have been made to ensure propriety.

Pet Animals

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) of 19 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *295*, if he has now completed consideration of the legislative changes required to enable the United Kingdom to be a party to the Council of Europe convention on pet animals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Consideration of the legislative changes required in order to comply with the convention is continuing.

Criminal Justice

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the report of the Royal Commission on criminal justice.

Mr. Howard: The Government welcome the royal commission's wide-ranging report which was published today. I and my right hon. and learned Friends, the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General, are grateful to Viscount Runciman and his colleagues for their endeavours, and I congratulate them on completing their work on time.

The report deals with difficult questions of great long-term importance, and it will no doubt provoke much public debate and discussion. The Government do not propose that there should now be a formal consultation period, but we will welcome any early observations on the report's proposals, before reaching our own conclusions.

Although the royal commission's terms of reference extended only England and Wales, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has indicated his intention to consider the implications of the report for the criminal justice system of Scotland. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to say that, in consultation with the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General, he similarly wishes to consider the implications of the report in the context of Northern Ireland.

Sheehy Inquiry

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department hwo many free copies of the report of the Sheehy inquiry have been made available to the police federations of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Two each.

Triads

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to take to make membership of triad organisations illegal.

Mr. Maclean: None. It is not an offence in this country to belong to any association, with the exception of certain proscribed terrorist organisations. If members of triads or other organisations are individually guilty of specific offences or of conspiracy, the police and the courts can take action against them in the same way as against anyone else.

Police Forces (Pay)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will appoint a committee of inquiry into the structure, pay and conditions of service of the non-Home Office police forces as a complement to the Sheehy report, on the same basis as the Wright report 1979, Cmnd. 7623.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This would be a matter for the Secretaries of State with responsibility for such police forces.

EDUCATION

Student Awards

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what saving there would have been in the latest year for which information is available if all students in receipt of a mandatory award had been paid at the level for living at the parental home.

Mr. Boswell: In 1991-92, the latest year for which provisional data are available, the effect of restricting all mandatory award holders to the existing maintenance grant rate for living at the parental home would—taken in isolation—have resulted in savings of some £270 million in England and Wales.

Grant-maintained Schools Centre Ltd.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will place in the Library a copy of the report from his chief accountancy adviser following his visit to the Grant-maintained Schools Centre Ltd. in February.

Mr. Robin Squire: No. This is an internal document concerning a company with a trading activity and is commercial in confidence. It has, however, been sent to the Public Accounts Committee in response to a request from the Committee.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many copies have been printed of the revised edition of the booklet, "How to Become a Grant-Maintained School", published in June; what was the cost of *(a)* the design and *(b)* the production; when he proposes to make a further revision to take account of the provisions of the Education Bill; and how many copies he expects to distribute during the summer holiday period.

Mr. Robin Squire: A total of 60,000 copies of the fourth edition of this booklet have been printed so far, at a cost of £4,611 for design, £9,950 for printing and £2,957 for other production costs. Distribution is predominantly in response to requests for copies of the booklet, which over the past year have averaged almost 15,000 a month. A fifth edition will be published shortly before the provisions in the present Education Bill on acquiring grant-maintained status are brought into effect.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education to whom each of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Department of Education is responsible; whether the public bodies or their members in each case are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open Government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens' charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is given in the table.

Name of NDPB	*Surcharge*	*Investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner*	*Scrutiny by Audit Commission or National Audit Office*	*Statutory provisions for open government applied to local authorities*	*Performance indicators*	*Citizens' Charters*	*Requirement to declare an interest*
Business and Technology Education Council	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	[1]—	Yes
Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	[1]—	Yes
Centre for Information on Language Teaching	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	[1]—	No
Council for the Accreditation of Teachers Education	No	No	Yes	No	No	[1]—	No
Education Assets Board	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	[1]—	Yes
Further Education Funding Council (England)	No	No	Yes	No	No	[1]—	Yes
Further Education Unit	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	[1]—	Yes
Higher Education Funding Council (England)	No	No	Yes	No	No	[1]—	Yes
National Council for Education Technology	No	No	Yes	No	No	[1]—	No
National Curriculum Council	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	[1]—	No
National Youth Agency	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	[1]—	Yes
Schools Examination and Assessment Council	No	No	Yes	No	No	[1]—	Yes
Teaching as a Career Unit	No	No	Yes	No	No	[1]—	No
University Commissioners	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	[1]—	No

[1] Not yet formally adopted.

Student Unions

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consultations he had with *(a)* vice-chancellors and *(b)* the National Union of Students before his statement of 1 July on students' unions.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend's announcement of the Government's proposals for the reform of student unions followed an extended period of consultation with universities, colleges and students. This included discussions with vice-chancellors, both individually and collectively, and the NUS.

Standard Spending Assessments

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to alter the way in which education standard spending assessments reflect social and ethnic factors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: In consultation with the local authority associations, we are currently reviewing in the light of the 1991 census data the ways in which the education elements of standard spending assessments reflect the different social and ethnic characteristics of local authorities. The review is not yet complete. Before reaching decisions on the outcome, we shall take into account all the available relevant evidence.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the former members of this House who have been appointed since 1988 by his Department to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations; and if he will list, in each case, the title of the post, the salary, the duration of the appointment, and the party which each represented as an hon. Member.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is given as follows.

Name of member	NDPB and post held	Salary	Duration of appointment	Political party
Mr. N. Bennett	Further Education Funding Council (England) Member of the Council	£4,000 pa honorarium	3 years	Conservative
Mr. M. Fallon	Higher Education Funding Council (England) Member of the Council	£4,000 pa honorarium	2·5 years	Conservative

School Leavers

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the expected number of school leavers who will join the labour market in each region in England in July/August.

Mr. Boswell: Information on intended destinations of school leavers is no longer collected by the Department. However, the estimated results from the 1992 schools examination survey indicated that 147,000 school leavers in England intended to enter employment, including youth training. The estimated figures for the individual regions are as follows:

	Thousands
Northern	13·74
Yorkshire and Humberside	19·24
North Western	23·80
East Midland	12·68
West Midland	19·29
East Anglia	3·93
Greater London	13·87
Other South East	28·26
South Western	11·79
ENGLAND	146·59

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Development Assistance

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what official development assistance was provided by the United Kingdom in 1992 as a percentage of gross national product.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: United Kingdom's official development assistance in 1992 amounted to 0·31 per cent. of GNP. This more than maintains Britain's average performance over recent years of 0·30 per cent.

The ratio includes Britain's official development assistance to developing countries. It does not include assistance to countries in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which are not included on the Development Assistance Committee list of developing countries, or contributions to the global environment facility and the Montreal protocol multilateral fund.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Trinidad Terms

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Government intend to press for the full implementation of the Trinidad terms.

Mr. Nelson: The United Kingdom has an excellent record of helping those developing countries with debt problems. It was a direct result of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's initiative for the poorest and most indebted countries following International Monetary Fund-sponsored programmes of reform, that the Paris club of major creditor Governments began implementing the Trinidad terms in December 1991. The recent announcement by the United States Administration of its intention to join the international consensus in implementing debt reduction on Trinidad terms is very welcome.

But the Government are aware that for some of the most desperate cases the terms as currently applied will not be enough. We are, therefore, taking every opportunity to pursue improvements to the terms with our creditor country colleagues.

Specifically, we would like to see the degree of concessionality increased to a range of 50 to 80 per cent. on a case-by-case basis for those countries that need it. We would also like to see quicker action on the stock of debt for those countries that already have a proven track record of reform with the IMF. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be raising this issue at the forthcoming Tokyo summit.

Corporate Taxation (Shipping)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the corporate tax rates and systems of the members of the European Community as they apply specifically to the shipping industry.

Mr. Dorrell: Corporate tax systems operating in European Community member states are complex and diverse, and comparisons are notoriously difficult. Lists of all the numerous tax provisions applying to shipping industries in each country are not readily available. Information available on national corporate tax rates on profits of shipping companies in EC countries is as follows:

	Tax rates[1] (Per cent.)
Belgium	39
Denmark	[3]34
France	33⅓
Germany	[2]36
Greece	[3]0

	Tax rates[1] (Per cent.)
Ireland	[4]10
Italy	36
Luxembourg	[5]33
Netherlands	[5]35
Portugal	36
Spain	35
United Kingdom mainstream rate	33
United Kingdom small company rate	25

[1] Companies may also be subject to local income or profits taxes (eg 16·2 per cent. in Italy and averages of 20 per cent. in Germany and 10 per cent. in Luxembourg).

[2] Undistributed profits taxed at 50 per cent.

[3] Ships subject to annual tonnage tax.

[4] Rate applicable to "qualifying shipping activities"; non-qualifying activities taxed at 40 per cent.

[5] Denotes classical system—profits taxed once in hands of company and again in hands of shareholder.

Drug Trafficking

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on preparations for the control of drug trafficking at frontiers by 1995.

Sir John Cope: Control of drug trafficking at frontiers is the primary responsibility of HM Customs and Excise. Customs' anti-smuggling controls are founded on selective, targeted checks, based on detailed risk assessment, intelligence and the use of indicators. These controls are regularly monitored and evaluated so as to maintain, and wherever possible enhance, their effectiveness, and to allow for refinement in response to changes in the threat posed to the United Kingdom.

Taxation

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many actions special office 2 of the Inland Revenue has brought for non-payment or avoidance of tax.

Mr. Dorrell: The special offices settle their investigations cases by recovery of tax lost, and where appropriate interest and penalties due under the Taxes Acts. Special office 2 settled 83 cases in the year ended 5 April 1993 and it has 176 cases under inquiry at present.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what grades of officers of the Inland Revenue are allowed to make settlement agreements in cases of possible tax avoidance; and if he will place the written guidance to officers covering such matters in the Library.

Mr. Dorrell: The agreements in these cases would normally be to settle appeals, which inspectors or other proper officers of the Crown may do under section 54 of the Taxes Management Act, 1970. The grade level of the inspector or other officer responsible would depend on the size and difficulty of the case and could vary from pay bands A to C—formerly principal inspector/grade 5 and below. The officer responsible for handling the case would also deal with any contract agreement with the taxpayer for the payment of unassessed tax, where settlement was reached in this way. There is no written guidance to officers specifically on agreements covering cases of possible tax avoidance, but technical advice is given by head office specialists on many areas of avoidance.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what internal procedures are in force to decide whether to undertake prosecutions for tax non-payment or avoidance; what grade of officer would normally decide such matters; and if he will place the written guidance to officers covering such matters in the Library.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue take proceedings in examples of all categories of serious tax fraud provided there is evidence to the standard of proof required by the criminal courts. Investigation of cases for possible criminal proceedings is the responsibility of officers in parts of the special compliance office. After legal advice from the office of the solicitor of Inland Revenue, in accounts fraud cases decisions to proceed are taken at under secretary level and in other cases at pay band A—formerly principal inspector/grade 5—level. I am arranging for a copy of the board's current order covering such matters to be placed in the Library.

Inland Revenue (Performance Reviews)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what performance review procedures are in force for special investigation offices of the Inland Revenue; what factors are taken into account in such reviews, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: For staff in the special investigation offices the same procedures apply as in the rest of the Inland Revenue: individual performance is reviewed regularly against objectives set out in the agreement made between job holder and immediate line manager at the beginning of the year. A formal assessment is made at the end of the year.

The performance of each special investigation office is regularly reviewed by senior officers from the headquarters of the special compliance office by means of analysis of management information, visits and discussions and scrutiny and quality assessment of casework.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much Mr. Ernest Stern is to be paid as vice-president of the European bank for reconstruction and development; whether United Kingdom income tax is payable on this salary; and what assessment he has made of the implications of the level of the salary for the vice-president of the European bank for reconstruction and development for the salaries of other senior managers in international institutions.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* Mr. Stern has not been appointed as vice-president of the EBRD.

Tax Evasion

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 June, *Official Report*, column *455*, how many full-time equivalent staff were employed by the Inland Revenue on tax evasion investigations in each year since 1988-89.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* Approximate numbers of staff units were as follows:—

Year	Number
1988-89	2,900
1989-90	3,100
1990-91	3,200
1991-92	3,400
1992-93	3,500

Council Tax

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints about council tax valuation bandings in the Chelmsford parliamentary constituency have been resolved since 1 April.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* Valuation lists for council tax are maintained in billing authority areas and not by parliamentary constituencies. As at 30 June 1993, 100 proposals seeking alterations to council tax bands have been resolved in the area covered by Chelmsford borough council. With regard to the arrangements for dealing with proposals to alter council tax valuations I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Planning on Tuesday 29 June, *Official Report*, column *416*.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints have been received about valuations for council tax purposes in the Chelmsford parliamentary constituency since 1 April.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* Valuation lists for council tax are maintained in billing authority areas and not by parliamentary constituencies. As at 30 June 1993, 1,600 proposals seeking alterations to council tax bands have been received in the area covered by Chelmsford borough council. With regard to the arrangement dealing with proposals to alter council tax valuations, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Planning on Tuesday 29 June, *Official Report*, column *416*.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many appeals against banding for the council tax in the area of Waveney district have been determined to date; how many are still awaiting determination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* As at 30 June 1993, 58 proposals seeking alterations to council tax bandings have been resolved in the area covered to Waveney district council and there are 1,112 proposals awaiting determination. With regard to the arrangements for dealing with proposals to alter council tax valuations, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Planning on Tuesday 29 June, *Official Report*, column *416*.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many appeals against valuation for the uniform business rate in the area of Waveney district have been determined since its inception; how many are still awaiting determination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* As at 30 June 1993, 1,117 appeals against assessments in the non-domestic rating list for the area covered by Waveney district council have been resolved. There are 654 awaiting determination.

Capital Allowances

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the direct effect on revenue in the year 1992-93 had the clauses in chapter II, part II of the Finance (No. 2) Bill of 1993 been brought into effect from the beginning of the 1992-93 tax year.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* If the Finance Bill proposals for the taxation of foreign exchange gains and losses had been introduced from April 1992, corporation tax receipts in 1992-93 would not have been affected because mainstream corporation tax is not due for payment until nine months after the end of the accounting period. Accruals of tax would have started to be affected but many of the accounting periods first affected are not yet finished. Also, the tax change may itself have affected the levels of borrowing.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much corporation tax has been repaid in each year since 1986-87 by industry, classified as in table 9.3 of Inland Revenue statistics 1992.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* Information on total repayments of corporation tax was given in my reply to the hon. Member on 28 June, *Official Report*, column *372*. I regret that further information by industry is not available.

Non-domicile Tax Status

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to discover how many individuals benefit from non-domicile tax status; and how much revenue has been lost to the Exchequer through the availability of this status.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* The answer to the first part of the question could be calculated only at disproportionate cost. Information is not available under the present law to answer the second part of the question.

Mr. Asil Nadir

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations the holder of his office received from right hon. and hon. Members concerning the conduct of Inland Revenue special office 2's investigation into the affairs of Mr. Asil Nadir.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* I am not aware that any such representations have been received.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Nuclear Fuels plc

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what criteria he applied when deciding whether to approve British Nuclear Fuels plc corporate plans from 1985 onwards.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 5 July, *Official Report*, column *36*.

Japan

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received regarding access for British exports to the Japanese market.

Mr. Needham: In recent years, great strides have been made by Japan in opening her markets, but problems persist in a few areas. The Department is in regular contact with the exporters concerned. Like our EC partners, United Kingdom Ministers and officials take every opportunity to impress on Japan the need for unrestricted access to her markets.

Aid, Rochdale

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the aid given by his Department to firms in the borough of Rochdale.

Mr. Sainsbury: In the three years ending 30 March 1993, the following sums were paid to firms in the borough of Rochdale:

	£
Regional Selective Assistance:	
(This represents 103 payments made to about 55 projects).	3,090,055
Support for Products Under Research (SPUR):	
One Offer of	21,187
Payment made on 5 November 1992 of	18,009
Enterprise Initiative Consultancies:	
Number of Initiatives = 132	—
Number of Companies Assisted = 108	—
Cost of DTI	523,366

Company Law Reform

Mr. Cash: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a list of the members of each of the DTI working groups examining the scope for company law reform.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The following is a list of the external members of the working groups formed to date:

Financial Assistance for the Purchase of a Company's Own Shares:

Ms Rosemary Cairns, Mr. Clive Edrupt, Mrs. Wendy Gadd, Mr. Martyn Jones, Mr. William Knight, Mr. Neil Matthewson, Mr. Ronald Paterson, Mr. Stuart Russell.

Private Companies

Mr. Robin Bell, Mr. Richard Brown, Ms Rosemary Cairns, Mrs. Judith Freedman, Mr. Jeremy Pope, Mr. Derek Scott, Mr. Christopher Swinson, Mr. Piers Wolf.

Group Law

Ms Rosemary Cairns, Ms Harriet Creamer, Mr. Michael Garner, Mr. Michael Levitton, Mr. Stuart Murray, Professor Daniel Prentice, Miss Isobel Sharpe, Mr. Kevin Sweeney, Ms Pauline Wallace.

Registration of Company Charges

Mr. Trevor Aldridge QC, Mr. Peter Graham, Mr. Michael Hall, Mr. Bruce Patrick, Mr. Michael Ryden.

Company Voluntary Arrangements

Miss Mary Arden QC, Mr. W. G. Bradford, Professor I. Fletcher, Mr. I. Fletcher, Mr. Mark Goldstein, Mr. Mark Homan, Mr. J. Pollard, Mr. H. Rajak.

I intend to consult widely on proposals for reform enabling everybody concerned to have a full opportunity to comment.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money each country in the European Community has received from the European regional development fund in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sainsbury: The amount of European regional development fund grant received by each member state of the European Community in the years 1987 to 1991 is given in the table. Figures for 1992 are not yet available.

million ecu, current prices

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Belgium	23	30	41	44	46
Denmark	17	10	15	19	11
Germany	73	97	164	89	95
Greece	294	313	418	543	537
Spain	345	544	980	1,407	1,489
France	311	436	284	331	323
Ireland	135	137	191	250	412
Italy	564	597	787	910	711
Luxembourg	4	7	1	0	18
Netherlands	20	13	29	33	35
Portugal	223	331	397	452	971
United Kingdom	527	578	612	465	530
Total	2,536	3,093	3,919	4,543	5,178

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which regions in the United Kingdom currently benefit from the European regional development fund.

Mr. Sainsbury: All regions designated for objectives 1, 2 and 5(b) of the European structural funds are eligible for the European regional development fund. Northern Ireland is designated for objective 1. The areas designated for objective 2 were listed in the Official Journal of the European Communities No. L 112 of 25 April 1989 and No. C 177 of 18 July 1990, and those designated for objective 5(b) in No. L 198 of 12 July 1989.

In addition Gibraltar and parts of London, Kent and Stoke-on-Trent benefit from the European regional development fund under article 10 of Council regulation (EEC) 4254/88.

Insurance (Commission Disclosure)

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about commission disclosure in general insurance business; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has received no recent representations specifically on the subject of commission disclosure in general insurance business. The Insurance Brokers Registration Council has a code of conduct, and the Association of British Insurers a code of practice, both of which require commission disclosure in general insurance business by independent intermediaries on request.

Sellafield (Incidents)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent incidents have been reported from the British Nuclear Fuels reprocessing plant.

Mr. Eggar: Details of all incidents at British Nuclear Fuels plc's reprocessing plant at Sellafield are recorded in site logs and published in widely circulated weekly site newsletters. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) to a question from the then Member for Sherwood on 30 April 1987, *Official Report*, columns *203-4*.

Coal Privatisation

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what Government assistance will be available to support management and employee teams bidding for the privatisation of British Coal.

Mr. Eggar: Government support for management and employee teams bidding for the privatisation of British Coal will be at a maximum rate of 50 per cent. of the eligible costs of employing consultants and or advisers. Support for any team will not exceed £200,000.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on issues discussed and decisions taken at the meeting of the European Community's Foreign Affairs Council on 2 July.

Mr. Sainsbury: I attended a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on 2 and 3 July. Subject to a reservation by the Irish Republic, which at present remains outstanding, the Council reached conclusions on the regulations on the future of the European structural funds. The Council also heard a report by the Commission on the state of play in the GATT Uruguay round.

Subject to the Irish reservation, the outcome on the structural funds was as follows. It is fully satisfactory for the United Kingdom.

1. The Objective 1 regions, which receive the highest grants, will include Northern Ireland, Merseyside and the whole of the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area, including the Argyll, Bute and West Moray areas, which the European Commission had proposed to omit.
2. The clear priority of the European Social Fund will remain Objective 3, training for the unemployed, particularly the long-term unemployed and young people. Expenditure on this will be at least four times greater than expenditure on Objective 4, for training people affected by industrial change, particularly those threatened with unemployment. Moreover the majority of expenditure on Objective 4 will be for people employed in small and medium-sized enterprises.
3. The introduction of future Community Initiatives, which will be limited to 9 per cent. of the total of the Funds, will be subject to control by a new management committee of Member States. Maritime border areas will also be eligible for assistance.
4. There will be new simplified procedures for the administration of the Funds, balanced by a new requirement for cost-benefit appraisal and for strengthened monitoring and evaluation to improve value for money. Assistance will henceforth be allocated where appraisal shows commensurate benefits.

The total size of the funds, up to 1999, had already been settled by the Edinburgh European Council. If the Irish reservation is withdrawn it should be possible for the Council to adopt the reguations definitively at its meeting on 19 and 20 July. But several matters remain to be settled before the new arrangements can be implemented, with effect from 1 January 1994:

1. No firm decisions have yet been taken on the financial allocations to any region.
2. The maps of Objective 2 and 5(b) areas have to be drawn. This will be done by a new procedure based on national proposals and taking due account of national priorities. This represents a major improvement on the present system. The Government intends to launch this procedure in the United Kingdom as soon as the regulations have been adopted definitively.
3. The United Kingdom's and other Member States' plans for the future use of the Funds will have to be drawn up and approved.
4. The Council is to discuss the future content of the Community Initiatives during the Autumn.

The Commission's report on the Uruguay round covered in particular progress in the current quadrilateral talks between the Community, the United States, Canada and Japan. The Council fully supported the Commission's efforts to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion by the end of the year.

Council of Energy Ministers

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on issues discussed and decisions taken at the meeting of the European Community's Council of Energy Ministers on 25 June.

Mr. Eggar: The Council considered several major issues and received reports from the Commission on other matters of interest. I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council reached political agreement on the ALTENER programme for the promotion of renewable energy sources and the SAVE directive, an energy efficiency measure. Formal adoption will take place at an early date.

The Commission also reported on progress in implementing the Community's nuclear safety assistance programmes to the countries of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The Council called for the urgent implementation of practical measures to improve safety at nuclear plants in the region.

Progress was made on the Commission's proposals for a new coal state aids decisions to replace the existing one which expires at the end of this year. The United Kingdom emphasised the importance of moving towards economic viability in the light of international market prices for coal and the Council agreed on the need for the Community's coal industry to make progress in that direction through reduction of production costs and capacities in order to achieve degression of aids.

Under the heading of the internal energy market, the Council discussed the proposed directives on liberalisation of the gas and electricity markets. The Commission outlined new ideas on access to networks in response to the invitation by the Council on 30 November to modify its proposals. The Council agreed that discussions should continue while the opinion of the European Council is awaited. The Commission also gave a preview of the second report on the internal energy market. The Council discussed the hydrocarbons licensing directive and agreed

that outstanding issues should be resolved with the intention of achieving a common position under the Belgian presidency.

The Council also considered the progress of negotiations on the European energy charter.

The Commission reported on forthcoming proposals for a directive on the energy efficiency requirements for household refrigerators and freezers and for guidelines on trans-European energy networks. The Presidency reported on discussions in ECOFIN on the proposed CO_2/energy tax.

Warren Spring Laboratory

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to relocating Warren Spring Laboratory to share facilities with the Building Research Establishment at Garston.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 29 June 1993]:* None.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what conditions of service will be offered to Warren Spring Laboratory staff who are transferred to the Atomic Energy Authority.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 29 June 1993]:* The staff will become employees of the Atomic Energy Authority. The Transfer of Undertaking (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 will apply to this transfer. This means that those staff who transfer to AEA will take with them their current DTI terms and conditions.

Training

Ms. Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many non-United Kingdom owned companies and subsidiaries of non-United Kingdom owned companies are providing training services in the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.
This information is not available.

EMPLOYMENT

Market Testing

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much the market-testing programme has cost his Department since November 1992.

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Department group's market-testing programme is being developed within existing resources.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment to whom each of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department is responsible; whether the public bodies or their members in each case are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open Government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens' charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The following executive non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by this Department:

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members
Construction Industry Training Board
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board
Equal Opportunities Commission
Health and Safety Commission
Health and Safety Executive
National Council for Vocational Qualifications
Remploy Ltd.
Wages Councils
Women's National Commission

With the exception of the special arrangements which exist in relation to the Health and Safety Commission and Executive, all are responsible to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

The Health and Safety Commission is responsible to my right hon. Friend and other Secretaries of State which have a relevant interest, and the Health and Safety Executive is responsible to the Commission.

(a) These bodies and their members are not subject to surcharge;

(b) The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, Commisioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members, Equal Opportunities Commission, Health and Safety Commission and Health and Safety Executive are subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner as they come within the ambit of schedule 2 to the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967, as amended;

(c) the bodies either subject their accounts to full audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General, head of the National Audit Office, or, in the case of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications and Remploy Ltd., provide him with access to their books and records;

(d) none of these bodies is subject to any statutory provisions for open government which apply to local authorities;

(e) performance indicators are agreed as part of the normal departmental planning process; and

(f) citizens charter provisions are agreed where appropriate.

No register of interests is kept by the Department.

European Social Fund

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about objective 4 of the European social fund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* The Department has consulted those organisations involved in the management of projects supported by the European social fund—ESF—in the United Kingdom about the reform of the European structural funds, including the proposed new objective 4. Most respondents shared the Government's view that the European social fund should continue to be concentrated on assisting the unemployed, particularly the long-term unemployed and young people. The reform of the European structural funds was discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council on 2 July where, subject to an Irish reservation on the overall package, it was agreed that training for the unemployed should remain the priority for expenditure under the ESF.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any proposals to secure the future funding of voluntary organisations following the proposed reduction in the European social fund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* Across the European Community resources allocated to the European structural funds, including the European social fund—ESF—are set to increase by 40 per cent. over the period 1993-99. Training and employment measures supported by the ESF are selected on an open and competitive basis to ensure value for money.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the absolute number and percentage of the labour force unemployed for *(a)* under three months, *(b)* over three months, *(c)* over six months, *(d)* over 12 months, *(e)* over two years, *(f)* over three years and *(g)* over four years in each OECD and European Community country since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* The available information can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Unemployment data, on the International Labour Organisation basis, for particular durations are published by the statistical office of the European Communities—EUROSTAT—in its annual "Labour Force Survey Results" copies of which are available in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Powers of Entry

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what powers her officials have, and are contemplating, to enter farmland without prior notification.

Mr. Jack: As far as the integrated administration and control system is concerned, the Control System Regulations 1993—SI 1993/1317—provide authorised persons with powers of entry at all reasonable hours for the purpose of carrying out control measures required to meet EC obligations. In using these powers, we shall have regard to the requirements of the EC regulation, which are designed to combat fraud, but will try to minimise unnecessary inconvenience to farmers.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the former Members of this House who have been appointed since 1988 by her Department to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations; and if she will list, in each case, the title of the post, the salary, the duration of the appointment, and the party which each represented as an hon. Member.

Mr. Jack: Of the new appointments made by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food since 1988 and listed in "Public Bodies 1992", our records show that four are former members of the House of Commons. The details requested by the hon. Member are as follows:

Name	*Title of post*	*Salary*	*Duration*	*Party*
Lord Mackay of Ardbreknish (John Jackson Mackay)	Chairman[1], Sea Fish Industry Authority	£28,780 p.a.	3 years from 1 October 1990	Conservative (Argyle and Bute, 1983-87)
Sir Peter Mills	Chairman, South West Regional Panel (following reorganisation in 1992 became Chairman of new South West Panel)	None	3 years from 1 August 1988 3 years from 1 August 1991 (resigned June 1993)	Conservative (Torrington, 1964-74, Devon, West, 1974-83, Torridge and West Devon, 1983-87)
Andrew Stewart	Chairman[2], Agricultural Training Board	£15,600 p.a.	3 years from 1 October 1992	Conservative (Sherwood, 1983-92)
David Myles, CBE	Member[2], Potato Marketing Board	—[3]	3 years from 1 January 1988 3 years from 1 January 1991	Conservative (Banff, 1979-83)

[1] Appointed jointly with Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
[2] Appointed jointly with Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales.
[3] As set by Potato Marketing Board.

Set-aside

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers have a dispute or contested claim for set-aside for the most recently available period.

Mr. Jack: A total of 28 claims under the five and one year set-aside schemes for the 1991-92 period are currently subject to dispute. Claims for land set-aside under the new arable area payments scheme are still being processed.

Equine and Bovine Tests

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action her Department is taking to ensure that the Czech and Polish authorities meet the costs before 1 August of the owners and farmers who have suffered as a consequence of the import of animals testing sero-positive to equine viral arteritis and foot and mouth disease.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My officials have met representatives of the Czech and Polish veterinary authorities on a number of occasions and there have also been exchanges of correspondence between them in respect

of the importation of foot and mouth disease—FMD—seropositive animals from the Czech republic and from Poland.

The Czech authorities accept that the animals concerned must have been vaccinated against FMD and have agreed to accept the return of any of the affected animals. My officials have made clear to the Czech authorities on a number of occasions our view that they should ensure a fair and satisfactory outcome to the problem.

With the help of the Polish authorities, my officials are continuing to investigate how cattle vaccinated against FMD came to be exported from Poland with certification claiming that the animals had never been vaccinated.

It cannot be concluded from the evidence available so far that the stallion imported last September from Poland is necessarily the primary source of the current outbreak of equine viral arteritis. Nevertheless, my officials have now written to the Polish veterinary authorities informing them of the possible link with the imported stallion and seeking information about the disease status of the stud of origin in Poland at the time the stallion was imported.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the same veterinary certification procedures have been applicable to farmed livestock originating from Poland as for horses.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The certification procedures are basically the same, with official certification being required for horses and farmed livestock imported from third countries. However, the detailed animal health conditions applicable to such imports are diffetent.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to whom each of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department is responsible; whether the public bodies or their members in each case are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Mr. Jack: Of the executive NDPBs listed in "Public Bodies" 1992 as coming under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the regional flood defence committees now report to the National Rivers Authority and have not, therefore, been covered in this reply. Of the remainder, all are responsible to my right hon. Friend the Minister with the exception of the Agricultural Wages Board—AWB—and agricultural wages committees—AWC—which were set up to be statutorily independent. The AWB reports its proceedings each year to the Minister for inclusion in her annual report to Parliament on agricultural wages: the AWCs function in accordance with the rules of procedure set out in statutory regulations. None of the bodies or their members is subject to surcharge and only the agricultural wages committees and the Agricultural Training Board can be investigated by the Parliamentary Commissioner. There is no relationship between the NDPBs and the Audit Commission. All the bodies save the AWB and AWCs are subject to scrutiny either statutorily or by agreement by NAO. NDPBs are not subject to statutory provisions for open government which apply to local authorities. All the bodies, with the exception of the AWB and AWCs, produce performance indicators. All public servants are subject to the citizens charter and NDPBs are being encouraged to adopt charter principles. Appointments of chairpersons and members of boards are made in accordance with the NDPB guide for departments to avoid any conflict of interests.

Food Premises

Mr. Brandreth: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the statistical information on the inspection of food premises for 1992 as required by the EC Commission under directive 89/397 is available.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom figures for inspection of food premises during 1992 have been forwarded to the EC Commission as required by directive 89/397. They are based on returns received from local authorities. A copy of these statistics has been placed in the Library of the House together with extracts covering England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively. Returns from individual authorities are available for inspection at my Department; copies can be provided for a small charge to cover expenses.

Equine Viral Arteritis

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to her answer of 15 June, *Official Report*, column *482*, what steps she is taking to stop the spread of equine viral arteritis by casual contact including aerial transmission; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames *[pursuant to the reply, 25 June 1993, c. 327-28]:* I am pleased to announce that the outstanding quality points identified by the Veterinary Products Committee at its meeting on 24 June in respect of an application for an inactivated equine viral arteritis vaccine, have since been resolved and an animal test certificate now granted. The first batch of the product is currently undergoing final testing before clearance for use.

The animal test trial design is based on the current geographical spread of the disease and the known epidemiology of the infection. The vaccine will therefore be made available through veterinary surgeons on application to the certificate holder, for use in stallions in England, and in mares in those counties of England where there is a recognised risk of infection. Premises where vaccine is to be used will be notified to the licensing authority.

DEFENCE

Overseas Defence Costs

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution was received in the latest available year from the Governments of the Channel islands, the Isle of Man and Bermuda to the cost of defence.

Mr. Hanley: No contributions to the cost of defence have been received from the Government of Bermuda in

recent years. As to the contributions made by the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office on 2 July, *Official Report*, column *635*.

Market Testing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the market-testing programme has cost his Department since November 1992.

Mr. Aitken: The market-testing programme is largely the responsibility of the management areas concerned: some staff are dedicated to market testing but most carry out this function as part of their normal duties. The information requested could not, therefore, be identified in each area without incurring disproportionate cost. However, the cost of the central market testing service, which offers advice and assistance to managers, is about £475,000.

Menwith Hill Station

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the annual cost to his Department for policing the interior of Menwith Hill station.

Mr. Hanley: I will write to the hon. Member.

Rosyth Dockyard

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names and dates of commissioning of those warships for which the refit contract is to be allocated to Rosyth dockyard in the years up until 2005; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) on 29 June, *Official Report*, column *492*.

Rosyth and Devonport Dockyards

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he proposes to introduce primary legislation for full privatisation of Rosyth and Devonport dockyards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: No decisions have been taken on arrangements to succeed the present term contracts for the operation of the royal dockyards.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to whom each of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department is responsible: whether the public bodies or their members in each case are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested about the executive non-departmental bodies sponsored by my Department is as follows:

(a) None is subject to surcharge;
(b) None is within the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration;
(c) Except for the Services Sound and Vision Corporation—SSVC—accounts for all bodies are subject to audit by the National Audit Office. An external auditor does however audit the accounts of the SSVC and the Comptroller and Auditor General has access to the SSVC's books and records;
(d) None is subject to the statutory provisions for open government applicable to local authorities;
(e) Performance indicators have not been adopted within the service museums, but they are being addressed and it is intended to introduce indicators in the near future. Both the SSVC and the Oil and Pipeline Agency have performance indicators;
(f) The principles of ensuring an accountable, responsive and quality service to the public, directly or indirectly, apply to all publicly funded organisations.

Appointees, except for those as trustee of the service museums are required to declare any personal interest.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

University College, Swansea

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will publish the report by Sir Michael Davies into complaints relating to University college, Swansea.

Mr. Newton: Sir Michael Davies's report to the visitor of the university of Wales on matters relating to the University college of Swansea has been forwarded formally to the college. Copies have also been made available to those who made submissions to his inquiry either as individuals or as representatives. I do not proposes to arrange for the report actually to be published.

Public Bodies

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the names, occupations and current employers of those who currently hold positions in each public body to which he makes appointments; if he will make a statement on the considerations taken into account when making such appointments; and if he will list details of the posts and salaries or allowances payable which have changed since the publication of "Public Bodies 1992".

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 25 June 1993]:* As Lord President, I am responsible for the appointment of the panel of experts from which members are drawn to sit on registered homes tribunals. The information requested in respect of the 51 members is not held centrally and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost. Panel members are selected primarily on the basis of their experience in social work, medicine or nursing. Since the publication of "Public Bodies 1992", the daily allowance payable to a member sitting on a tribunal has been increased from £138 to £141.

HEALTH

NHS Pay

10. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions she or her representatives have had regarding reumuneration of national health service employees.

Dr. Mawhinney: Settlements have recently been reached for pay increases for some 90 per cent. of the national health service work force.

Social Workers

11. **Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trained social workers are currently employed by local authority social services departments.

Mr. Bowis: From the latest information available—"Local Authority Social Services Statistics: Staff of Local Authority Social Services Departments 30 September 1991: England"—there are some 25,500 whole-time equivalent field social work posts in local authorities—an increase of 36 per cent. over the 10 years to 1991—with about 90 per cent. professionally qualified.

Waiting Lists

13. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the latest figures for national health service waiting lists.

Dr. Mawhinney: Provisional figures for the quarter ending 31 March are available in the Library. These show that the patients charter guarantee is being met and there are no patients waiting longer than two years for treatment in any region. In addition, no patient has to wait longer than 18 months for hip, knee or cataract surgery.

18. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in reducing waiting times for patients in the South Western region.

Dr. Mawhinney: Provisional figures for March 1993 show that, over the last two years, South Western regional health authority has reduced the number of patients waiting over a year from 14,500 to only 295.

NHS Performance Indicators

14. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health is she will make a statement on the publication of comparative performance indicators in the national health service.

Dr. Mawhinney: I attach considerable importance to developing the use of comparative performance indicators in the national health service. They are a valuable tool in enabling standards in all areas to rise to the levels of the best. A considerable amount of comparative performance information is already available and the task now is to ensure that it is spread and used more widely to inform choices about health care. To that end, I am pleased to say that the first hospital league tables will be published in June 1994.

Free Dental Treatment

15. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on her current plans for the future of free dental treatment for pregnant women and nursing mothers.

16. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the future of free dental treatment for pregnant women and nursing mothers.

Dr. Mawhinney: Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's review of the remuneration of general dental practitioners suggested that pregnant and nursing women should no longer be automatically exempt from dental charges. We have consulted widely on his report and shall announce our proposals in due course.

GP Lists

17. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average number of patients on each family doctor's list *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which figures are available.

Dr. Mawhinney: At 1 October 1979, the average number of patients on family doctors' lists in England was 2,286; the figure for 1 October 1992 is 1,922.

GP Fund Holders

19. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has for the further development of the general practitioner fund-holding initiative.

Dr. Mawhinney: Fund holding is an acknowledged success and clearly delivers benefits to patients. We want to see these benefits extended as far as possible. Almost 3,000 general practitioners joined the scheme this year, taking the total to over 6,000. Around 3,000 more are preparing to join next year. We are also looking at ways to encourage more smaller inner-city and rural practices to join the scheme.

25. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration she is giving to extending fund holding to smaller general practices.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have always encouraged small practices to group together to join the scheme. Seventy such groups have already done so and around 150 more are preparing to join from April 1994.

Terrence Higgins Trust

20. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has carried out an investment appraisal into the funds donated by her Department to the Terrence Higgins Trust.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health carried out a full financial appraisal of the Terrence Higgins Trust in 1988. The trust's financial position continues to be carefully monitored each year in connection with its section 64 grant award.

Ambulances (Paramedics)

21. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on progress towards placing a paramedic on each front-line ambulance.

Mr. Sackville: In December last year, I announced that the paramedic target was to be brought forward by one year to the end of 1995. I am pleased to say that ambulance services and health authorities have responded positively and they are well on the way to achieving the required target.

Post-operative Care

22. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to introduce charges for post-operative care in the national health service.

Mr. Sackville: There are no such plans.

Specialist Medical Training

23. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the specialist medical training review contained in the Calman committee report.

Mr. Sackville: The working group chaired by the Chief Medical Officer was established last year at my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's request to consider specialist medical training in the light of the EC medical directives. The group has produced a report containing comprehensive recommendations with the twin aims of meeting the requirements of European Community law while ensuring that standards of specialist training are maintained and, indeed, improved. The period of consultation on the report concluded last week and comments from an extensive range of interested parties will be considered before a decision on implementation is reached.

Mentally Ill People

24. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made to improve the health and social functioning of mentally ill people in the past 12 months.

Mr. Bowis: In line with the three strategies set out in "The Health of the Nation", we have taken a number of steps towards improving information and understanding; developing comprehensive local services; and continuing the development of good practice. This includes funding the first national survey of psychiatric illness; issuing the "Mental Illness Key Area Handbook"; distributing good practice guidance on the care programme approach and establishing a mental health task force.

We will be producing a report on activity in the mental illness key area of "The Health of the Nation" in the autumn. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will consider the need for further measures to deal with mental illness within the community care programme with particular reference to schizophrenia.

Mr. Bowis: We introduced the care programme approach in April 1991 to provide better co-ordinated care in the community for people with a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia. The inclusion of mental illness as one of the five key areas in the Government's strategy for health. "The Health of the Nation" has given impetus to the work being done by health and local authorities to improve community mental health services. "The Health of the Nation" sets a broad and demanding target of improving the health and social welfare of people with serious mental illness such as schizophrenia and builds on the care programme approach.

A departmental review team has been at work since January examining current provisions in the Mental Health Act 1983 for the care in the community of people with serious mental illness. It is considering the need for the introduction of a new power and whether changes in the law are necessary. The review team will report its findings to the Secretary of State in the summer.

Limited List Prescribing

26. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a further statement on the limited list proposals.

Dr. Mawhinney: We expect the Advisory Committee on National Health Service Drugs to complete its review of drugs in the categories of the extended selected list scheme by the end of the year, and for regulations to bring these changes into effect to be laid before Parliament.

HIV

27. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions she has had with the George House Trust in Manchester regarding the spread of HIV in the north-west; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The George House Trust has corresponded with the Department of Health about section 64 grant aid and the use and allocation of earmarked AIDS moneys made available by health and local authorities. The Department's view is that local organisations such as the George House Trust should negotiate funding agreements with health and local authorities.

Infant and Perinatal Mortality

29. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest information about the rates of infant and perinatal mortality in the north-western region.

Mr. Sackville: For the north-western region, the 1992 infant mortality rate was 7·7 per 1,000 live births and the perinatal mortality rate was 8·5 per 1,000 total births. These are the latest figures in what represents a continuing downward trend.

It should be noted that on 1 October 1992 the legal definition of a stillbirth was altered from a baby born dead after 28 completed weeks' gestation or more to one born dead after 24 completed weeks' gestation or more.

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest information about the rates of infant and perinatal mortality in the Mersey region.

Mr. Sackville: In Mersey region, the 1992 infant mortality rate was 5·7 per 1,000 live births, compared to the 1991 rate of 6·7, and the perinatal mortality rate was 6·6 per 1,000 total births, compared to the 1991 rate of 7·1.

It should be noted that on 1 October 1992 the legal definition of a stillbirth was altered from a baby born dead after 28 completed weeks' gestation or more to one born dead after 24 completed weeks' gestation or more.

Project 2000

30. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money will be available in 1993-94 to fund the Project 2000 initiative for nurses; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: An extra £114 million is available to fund Project 2000 in 1993-94 in addition to the existing resources for nurse training and education.

NHS Management Costs

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the capital and revenue cost of the national health service management executive and each regional health authority in each of the last five years; and what are the projected costs for the next two years.

Mr. Sackville: Expenditure figures for the national health service management executive (NHSME) are shown in table 1. The distribution of functions between the NHSME and other parts of the Department of Health is evolving from year to year and figures cannot, therefore, be directly compared from one year to the next. Figures are not available prior to 1990-91 or for future years —allocations have not been made beyond 1993-94.

Table 1
NHSME expenditure

Year	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93 (estimated)*	*1993-94 (allocation)*
Running costs (£)	29,933,505	29,402,541	42,883,317	32,939,954
Capital (£)	339,000	483,712	511,745	6,415

Note: Figures are not adjusted for inflation and exlcude accommodation and related costs.

Expenditure on headquarters administration by regional health authorities for the financial years 1987-88 to 1990-91 is shown in table 2.

Figures derived from RHAs' 1991-92 annual accounts are shown in table 3. The 1991-92 figures are not comparable with those for the earlier years and should be interpreted with caution. Simple comparison between authorities is misleading because RHAs devolved their non-core functions at varying times and bore different costs on their regional budgets.

Relevant capital costs are not readily available.

Table 2
Regional Health authorities expenditure on headquarters administration £000

RHA	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Northern	6,146	6,236	7,475	9,329
Yorkshire	8,675	8,962	10,706	13,158
Trent	11,963	12,648	11,498	11,797
East Anglian	6,220	7,309	8,140	11,487
N. W. Thames	5,919	7,361	9,119	12,110
N. E. Thames	10,237	11,130	13,065	15,335
S. E. Thames	10,733	12,347	15,044	16,516
S. W. Thames	10,388	11,103	13,720	15,234
Wessex	4,436	4,891	6,244	8,578
Oxford	3,334	3,639	4,704	6,266
South Western	5,296	6,180	8,000	10,556
West Midlands	13,318	13,946	18,019	27,353
Mersey	4,020	4,440	6,044	6,336
North Western	13,149	12,805	12,356	13,634

Source: annual accounts of regional health authorities. (Figures not adjusted for inflation).

Table 3
Regional health authorities:
Expenditure on administration, purchasing and other expenses
1991-92

Regional health authority	*£ thousand*
Northern	18,715
Yorkshire	[1]64,532
Trent	18,169
East Anglian	8,003
North West Thames	19,582
North East Thames	31,872
South East Thames	16,519
South West Thames	13,133
Wessex	19,974
Oxford	26,741
South Western	15,546
West Midlands	22,338
Mersey	23,961
North Western	12,952

[1] See Note 3 to the tables.

Notes:

1. Headquarters administration covers the total current—revenue—expenditure on the pay and accommodation costs of staff of all disciplines, including general and senior managers, and their support staff employed at regional health authority —RHA—headquarters levels.
2. The figures for the years prior to 1991-92 vary between regional health authorities, as regions were managed in an integrated way and the balance of management between regional health authorities and their respective district health authorities—DHAs—differed between regions. The figures were also influenced by other factors including differences in the geographic size of regions, in the numbers of district health authorities they included and in the extent to which regional health authorities directly managed operational services.
3. Following the implementation of the national health service reforms, the role of regional health authorities is changing and this has a major impact on the figures for 1991-92. There are significant variations in the extent to which regional health authorities have retained or devolved management, support and operational services functions and in the extent to which their costs are borne or recharged to users. Some regional health authorities are directly involved in the purchaser function while the figures for others include additional significant costs—notably the payments of funds for nursing and other staff training to health providers.

Dementia

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of carers looking after younger people with dementia have access to special services.

Mr. Bowis: The needs of carers will be assessed under the new community care arrangements at the same time as those of the dementia sufferers whom they look after.

The detailed information requested is not available centrally.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the equivalent at current prices of the prescription charge in force on 18 October 1964.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is £1·05.

Joint Prostheses

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the major joint prostheses that have been approved by her Department for use by surgeons within the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: The Department does not have a scheme for the approval of individual joint prostheses.

The medical devices directorate within the Department, operates a voluntary manufacturer registration scheme. This scheme identifies manufacturers whose facilities and practices enable them to manufacture to a consistent standard of quality and who are able to give declarations of compliance with safety and performance standards. All major manufacturers of joint prostheses are registered under this scheme. The national health service is advised to buy these devices only from registered sources.

Eye Tests

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of people over the age of 60, 65 and 70 years are eligible for an NHS eye examination.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally as not all the categories of exemption can be broken down into age bands.

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the average cost of a visit to a hospital ophthalmic out-patient department and *(b)* the current fee payable to an optometrist and an ophthalmic medical practitioner for an NHS eye examination.

Dr. Mawhinney: In 1991-92, the average total cost per ophthalmology out-patient attendance was approximately £39.

The current national health service sight test fees payable to optometrists and ophthalmic medical practitioners are £12·75 and £10·15 respectively.

Nurses (Pregnancies)

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses who have left NHS employment as a result of pregnancy since 1987 have subsequently returned to NHS employment.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trained nurses have left employment with the NHS in each of the last six years as a result of pregnancy.

Mr. Sackville: The table shows the available information.

Persons leaving the NHS who have departed for reasons of maternity

	Year ending 31 March	
	1988[1]	*1989*[1]
Management and Tutorial Grades	30	20
Registered Nurses and Health Visitors	1,110	1,150
Enrolled Nurses	780	600
Midwives	220	190
Student Nurses	150	110
Student Midwives	20	30
Other Nursing Staff	670	680
Total Nursing and Midwifery	3,010	2,800

	Year ending 31 March	
	1990[1]	*1991*[1]
Senior Nursing Grades	10	20
Health Visitors (to G)	40	40
Midwives	160	110
Scales C to G (excluding Midwives and Health Visitors)	1,300	810
Scales A and B	410	300
Student Midwives	20	10
Other Nursing Staff	80	60
Total Nursing and Midwifery	2,030	1,350

[1] All figures have been rounded to the nearest ten.

Notes:

1. The data necessary to identify leavers due to pregnancy were not collected centrally after 1991.
2. The format of the data collection was changed between 1989 and 1990, consequently the listing of staff groups for 1990 and 1991 differ from those given for 1988 and 1989.
3. For year ending 31 March 1988 and 1989 information was not available from 11 data suppliers (regional health authority headquarters (RHA HQ), district health authorities (DHAs) and the London ambulance service (LAS)). Information for 1991 excludes 27 data suppliers (RHA HQs, DHAs and LAS) who either did not supply data or data were unusable.
4. Some 60 per cent. (1988), 59 per cent. (1989), 57 per cent. (1990) and 58 per cent. (1991) of all nursing and midwifery leavers to the national health service were recorded as "Voluntary Resignation".

Source of data: KM46 return 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Chiropractors

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to introduce legislation for the regulation of chiropractors.

Mr. Sackville: We have no such plans. We understand, however, that the chiropractic profession is looking to secure the support of an hon. Member to introduce a private Member's Bill during the next Session.

Supraregional Centres

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make available a summary of the funding levels of activity agreed for 1993-94 with centres designated to provide supraregional services, following her announcement of 23 December 1992, press release H92/467.

Mr. Sackville: A summary of this information has been placed in the Library as an addendum to the document "Supra regional services 1993-94: announcement by the Secretary of State for Health".

Medical Negligence Claims

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 8 June, *Official Report*, columns *236-37*, if she will give the membership and remit of the joint Department of Health/national health service working group on medical negligence claims in the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: The terms of reference of the joint departmental/national health service working group on the financial arrangements for clinical negligence are:

"To consider the issues, opportunity and risks involved in setting up a mutual insurance scheme under Section 21 of the NHS and Community Care Act 1990. To prepare a specification for a tender document inviting proposals by open tender process for the management of such a scheme and to consider the merits of each proposal and recommend a management company.

To consider, in parallel with work on the scheme, any other arrangements in the area of clinical negligence, risk management and claims management which may be required."

The working group is composed of officials from the Department and representatives from regional health

authorities, NHS trust bodies and independent NHS trusts; NHS representatives provide a wide range of practical experience in the legal, financial and risk aspects of clinical negligence.

BST Milk

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been conducted on the likely effects of bovine somatotropin milk on diabetics; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We are not aware of any research specifically on this subject.

All cows' milk contains IGF-1, an insulin-like growth factor. Administering artificially produced bovine somatotropin to dairy cows results in marginally increased levels of IGF-1 in their milk.

IGF-1 does not have the same hormonal action as insulin, nor does it interfere with the action of insulin, and is not absorbed from the gut. It should therefore pose no risk to diabetics.

Prescribed Items (Cost)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated percentage of prescribed items dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors which cost less than *(a)* 40p, *(b)* 60p, *(c)* 80p and *(d)* £1·00.

Dr. Mawhinney *[pursuant to his reply, 2 July 1993, columns 647-48]:* I regret that the table in the previous reply did not indicate that the figures for the number of items dispensed are in thousands. A revised table is as follows.

Prescribed items with a net ingredient cost of less than (a) 40 pence, (b) 60 pence, (c) 80 pence and (d) £1·00 dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors in England in 1992.

	(a)	*(b)*	*(c)*	*(d)*
Net Ingredient Cost less than (pence)	40	60	80	100
Number of items dispensed (thousands)	32,690	49,753	61,449	73,937
Percentage of all prescribed items	8·5	12·9	15·9	19·1

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many inquiries there have been to the family credit helpline since April.

Mr. Burt: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) on 5 July at column *40*.

Income Support

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of single women aged 18 to 24 years in receipt of income support are also in receipt of housing benefit.

Mr. Burt: The latest available figures are those for 1991. At that time approximately 48 per cent. of women aged 18 to 24 in receipt of income support were also receiving housing benefit.

Notes:

1. Income support statistics annual inquiry May 1991.
2. Housing benefit and community charge benefit management information system May 1991.
3. Percentages rounded to nearest whole figure.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many 16-year-olds on youth training schemes receive an income support top-up of £5·30 in addition to their training allowance; and how much are the administrative costs of each income support claim.

Mr. Burt: The requested information is not available as top-up payments are not separately identifiable from other income support payments. The cost of administering claims for income support is an average of £6·44 per claim. This cost is not constrained to a single week of benefit payment.

Young People's Income

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the income per week of a single 18-year-old, who is paying £30 per week rent and who is *(a)* a student and *(b)* unemployed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: On the assumption that insufficient contributions had been paid to give title to unemployment benefit, a lone, unemployed 18-year-old with a rent liability of £30 per week would normally be entitled to income support of £34·80 per week and would, through housing benefit, receive up to 100 per cent. of his rent, less any ineligible items. This equates to about £64·80 per week.

An 18-year-old following a full-time course of higher education, but otherwise in the same circumstances, would not normally be eligible for income support of housing benefit but would receive support through the educational maintenance system. During the period of study, the standard maintenance grant outside London, for the coming academic year, equates to £59·60 per week over 38 weeks, with income available from the full-year student loan of £15·38 per week. This equates to about £74·98 per week.

In addition, if a student in higher education faces particular financial difficulties he may be able to receive assistance from the access funds. The access funds are administered on a discretionary basis by the educational establishments.

It is not possible to estimate students' income during the long vacation because some students will find work during that period.

Maintenance Allowance Assessments

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to change the process of maintenance allowance assessments to ensure that

mothers who are out of work and wishing to receive an assessment do not have to wait longer than mothers who are in work.

Mr. Burt: The Child Support Agency is introducing the new child support maintenance arrangements from scratch and it would have been unrealistic to take on cases over a four-year period.

Parents with care who do not receive income support, family credit or disability working allowance and do not have an existing court order or other written maintenance agreement may apply to the agency immediately. Those with an order or agreement will be taken on by the agency between April 1996 and March 1997: in the interim, they may apply to a court for a variation in their order or agreement.

Parents with care who receive income support will be taken on over the three years to April 1996. Those who make a new claim to benefit will be taken on immediately. Existing cases will be taken on when there is a change of circumstances which affects maintenance or, if there is no such change, on a random basis.

Changes of circumstances do not affect the benefit payable to parents with care who receive family credit or disability working allowance since awards are fixed for six months. These cases will be asked to apply to the agency when they make a renewal claim—and are therefore new claimants—so take on of this group will be completed before the end of 1993.

We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which groups with incomes below income support levels are ineligible for housing benefit.

Mr. Burt: In the main, most people in registered residential care and nursing homes, and the majority of full-time students are ineligible, regardless of income.

Crisis Loan Claim

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the administration costs of a crisis loan claim.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to him on 21 April at columns *140-41*.

Invalidity Benefit

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what revised medical criteria will be used to define an individual's incapacity for work for the purpose of invalidity benefit.

Mr. Scott: No decisions have been made.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much of the total of suspended invalidity benefit payments has been withheld to date, pending the hearing of the appeal against the social security commissioner's decision; and how many women have had their benefit withheld in each constituency.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to whom the Occupational Pensions Board is responsible: whether it or its members are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Mr. Hague: The Occupational Pensions Board—OPB—is an independent statutory body established by the Social Security Act 1973. It is composed of a chairman, deputy chairman and up to 12 other members, appointed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The board has an executive office whose officials are made available by the Secretary of State.

The OPB is not subject to a surcharge, nor is it listed in schedule 2 to the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967, as among the bodies subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. It is subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office under the National Audit Act 1983. The OPB is not subject to the provisions for open government which apply to local authorities, not to performance indicators, but is committed to the principles of the citizens charter. The board's constitution requires the chairman, deputy chairman and other members of the board to declare an interest, whether financial or otherwise, in any issue under consideration and to withdraw from the meeting when there is a serious conflict of interest.

Retirement Pension Ages

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his current estimate of the likely date of the hearing of the appeal against the social security commissioner's decision in relation to the incompatibility with European Community law of the different state retirement pension ages of men and women and its implication for access to invalidity benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The appeal against the commissioner's decision—CS/27/91—has been listed by the Court of Appeal for hearing on either 26 or 27 July. This case concerns the rate of invalidity pension payable to claimants over state pension age the upper age limit for entitlement to invalidity allowance. The compatibility with European Community law of different state pension ages for men and women is not an issue in the commissioner's decision. EC law permits unequal state pension ages. Other forms of discrimination in the benefits system are also permissible if they are necessarily linked to that difference.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 7 July 1993

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the 73 countries whose nationals require visas for all member states of the European Community referred to in the press release issued by Ministers responsible for immigration at the conclusion of their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 and 2 June.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The nationals of the following 73 countries at present require visas for all member states of the European Community.

Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Angola
Armenia
Azerbaijan
Bangladesh
Belarus
Bhutan
Bulgaria
Burma
Burundi
Cambodia
Cameroon
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Chad
China
Comoros
Congo
Cuba
Djibouti
Egypt
Equatorial Guinea
Ethiopia
Gabon
Georgia
Ghana
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Haiti
India
Indonesia
Iran
Iraq
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kirgizstan
Laos
Lebanon
Liberia
Libya
Madagascar
Mali
Mauritania
Moldova
Mongolia
Morocco
Mozambique
Nepal
Nigeria
Oman
Pakistan
Philippines
Romania
Russia
Rwanda
Sao Tome-e-Principe
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Somalia
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syria
Tajikistan
Tunisa
Turkey
Turkmenistan
Ukraine
Uzbekistan
Vietnam
Yeman
Zaire

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many and what proportion of cases in each year since 1979 he and his predecessors have exercised their discretion outside the immigration rules where, on hearing an appeal under the Immigration Act 1971 the adjudicator has upheld the Home Secretary's decision to refuse indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom but made a recommendation for the exercise of such discretion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is not available. All recommendations made by adjudicators receive careful consideration.

Police

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many free copies of *(a)* the recent White Paper on the future of the police and *(b)* the report of the Sheehy inquiry have been made available to the superintendents' associations, the police federations, the trade unions and police associations representing officers in the (i) British Transport police, (ii) Ministry of Defence police, (iii) Atomic Energy police, (iv) Northern Ireland Airports police, (v) Royal Parks constabulary, (vi) Port of Tilbury police, (vii) Port of Dover police, (viii) Port of Liverpool police and (ix) Port of Bristol police;

(2) how many free copies of the White Paper on the future of the police have been made available to *(a)* the superintendents' associations and *(b)* the police federations of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Twelve complimentary copies of the White Paper on Police Reform were sent to the Superintendents Association of England and Wales. Six complimentary copies were sent to both the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Police Federation of England and Wales. The proposals contained in the White Paper relate to the police service in England and Wales and are concerned primarily with reforms to police forces maintained under the Police Act 1964 and the Metropolitan and City of London police forces. The Superintendents Associations and the Police Federations of Scotland and Northern Ireland were therefore not provided with complimentary copies. Nor were the trade unions and associations representing officers in the other forces mentioned.

Each of the associations and forces mentioned received two complimentary copies of the report of the Sheehy inquiry into police responsibilities and rewards. The Superintendents Association of England and Wales subsequently requested, and received, a further 60 free copies.

Heathrow (Passenger Questioning)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many intending passengers for Northern Ireland have been detained for questioning at Heathrow in the past 10 years; how many were subsequently charged with terrorist-related offences; and how many have been convicted.

Mr. Maclean: The information is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, a search of records by the Metropolitan police reveals that in 1992 a total of 1,627 people were asked, during examination under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 at Heathrow, to complete an embarkation card in accordance with paragraph 5 of schedule 5 to the Act. One passenger en route to Northern Ireland was detained under paragraph 6 of the schedule. He was not subsequently charged with a terrorist-related offence.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the weekly cost of remanding an individual in Belmarsh prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange a reply.

Letter from Mr. D. Lewis to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 7 July 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to write to you in response to your Parliamentary Question about the weekly cost of remanding an individual in Belmarsh prison.

The cost for 1992-93 is not yet available. It will be published in the Annual Report for 1992-93 on the work of the Prison Service in November 1993.

The 1991-92 figure for the average weekly cost of holding an individual in Belmarsh prison was £673. A rise in the average weekly population from 558 in 1991-92 to 732 in 1992-93 is expected to reduce this cost considerably.

Greater Manchester Chief Constable

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chief constable for Greater Manchester; and what was discussed.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend has not yet met the chief constable of Greater Manchester Police.

Drug Squads

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are now employed in regional crime squad drugs wings.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There are currently 375 police officers employed in regional crime squad drugs wings.

Tourist Resorts (Crime)

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about property-related crimes in tourist resorts.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Centrally held statistics of reported crime do not distinguish between tourist and other areas.

Rochester Row Police Station

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cells at Rochester Row police station are available to hold prisoners; how many people have been held in those cells for more than 24 hours during the past three months; what is the average June temperature in those cells at 5 am; whether heating pipes are, in summer, increasing the temperature in those cells; and how those cells are ventilated or cooled in summer.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There are 10 cells and 12 detention rooms at Rochester Row police station. Not more than five prisoners have been held at Rochester Row for more than 24 hours between 1 April and 30 June 1993. The average temperature in the cells and detention rooms is not recorded. There are no heating pipes. Ventilation is by air brick.

Drug Traffickers

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest totals for assets confiscated from convicted drug traffickers and assets frozen pending trials for drug trafficking offences.

Mr. Maclean: For information regarding assets confiscated under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 27 May at col. *722*.

The 1992 data will not be available until the autumn.

Information on assets frozen pending trials is not collected centrally.

Police (Stress-related Illness)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* custody officers, *(b)* custody sergeants and *(c)* rota sergeants have taken five or more days off work through stress-related illness in (i) North Wales and *(b)* Dyfed Powys police force areas in each year since 1990.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is not held centrally and could be collected from the forces in question only at disproportionate cost.

National Firearms Board

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *743*, what progress is being made on establishing a national firearms board.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend is currently considering whether to establish a new civilian firearms control board. A comprehensive revision of the original feasibility study which was circulated with the consultation paper last year is currently under way.

Crime Statistics

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the incidence of *(a)* burglary, *(b)* car theft and *(c)* assault for each year since 1990 for (i) Hammersmith and Fulham, (ii) Leicestershire, (iii) Derbyshire, (iv) Cleveland and (v) Greater Manchester.

Mr. Maclean: The available information relates to the numbers of notifiable offences of burglary and theft of a vehicle and is given in the table. Assault is now a summary offence and is not included in the notifiable offence series.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police

	Burglary			*Theft of vehicle*		
	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Hammersmith and Fulham	4,512	4,728	4,630	1,322	1,534	1,635
Leicestershire	16,057	21,526	23,251	8,499	10,751	11,219
Derbyshire	12,527	18,500	22,225	5,559	7,410	9,070
Cleveland	16,559	17,278	20,504	11,712	11,712	12,498
Greater Manchester	87,855	97,715	103,390	55,338	55,338	57,985

Homicide

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 November 1992, *Official Report*, columns *104-5*, if he will update the table for women homicide victims involving shotguns.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the table.

Offences currently recorded as homicide in which the victim was female and a relationship between the suspect and victim was domestic and where a shotgun was used—England and Wales

Police force area	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Avon and Somerset	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
Bedfordshire	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Cheshire	—	1	—	—	—	1	1
Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumbria	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Devon and Cornwall	—	4	—	1	—	—	—
Dorset	—	—	—	1	1	1	—
Durham	1	—	1	—	—	1	—
Essex	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Greater Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Hampshire	2	—	—	—	—	—	1
Hertfordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Humberside	—	—	—	—	2	—	—
Kent	—	1	1	—	—	—	1
Lancashire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leicestershire	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
London, City of	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Merseyside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Metropolitan	1	—	1	1	—	—	—
Norfolk	2	1	—	—	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northumbria	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Nottinghamshire	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Yorkshire	—	—	1	—	—	1	—
Staffordshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Suffolk	1	1	—	1	—	1	—
Surrey	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Sussex	—	—	1	1	1	—	—
Thames Valley	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Warwickshire	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
West Mercia	—	1	—	—	1	1	1
West Midlands	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
West Yorkshire	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Dyfed-Powys	—	—	—	—	1	1	—
Gwent	—	—	—	—	—	1	2
North Wales	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
South Wales	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
England and Wales	10	13	10	10	9	11	9

Notes:

1. Offences currently recorded as homicide as at 14 September 1992.
2. The term "domestic" includes the following relationships of victim to suspect: son or daughter; parent; spouse; cohabitant or former spouse or cohabitant; other family; lover or former lover including spouse's lover or lover's spouse or other associate.

Information for 1992 is not yet available.

Art Smuggling

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce the level of international art smuggling through London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The detection of attempted evasions of the United Kingdom's import and export regulations are matters for Her Majesty's Commissioners of Customs and Excise. The Government deplore the illegal export of works of art and other cultural goods and is working in international forums to reduce it.

A recently agreed EC directive provides for the restitution of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of one member state to that of another. The Government are also participating in the drafting of a possible UNIDROIT convention on the restitution of stolen and illegally exported cultural objects.

The Government welcome the initiative by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to establish an artefacts classification and identification system, which has

already led to the recovery of stolen works of art, and support the continuing use of Interpol to trace stolen objects abroad.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions for smuggling works of art were obtained in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: For England and Wales records held centrally from 1987 to 1989 show no prosecutions under the relevant sections of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. Information collected centrally for 1990 and 1991 does not identify offences committed under the aforesaid Act from other summary offences.

Similar information is not collected centrally for Northern Ireland and is not separately identifiable for Scotland.

Icklingham Bronzes

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what legal investigation is to be carried out by his Department into the case of the Icklingham bronzes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: After an investigation by Suffolk Constabulary the Crown Prosecution Service decided that there was insufficient evidence to charge anyone with criminal offences. The question of ownership of the Icklingham bronzes is now a matter for the civil courts and not something in which the Home Office can intervene.

Sheehy Inquiry

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many copies of the report of the Sheehy inquiry into "Police Responsibilities and Rewards" were released to the press before 9 am on Wednesday 30 June.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None.

Metropolitan Police (Empty Property)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list of empty residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham in the ownership of the Metropolitan police and the type of accommodation available; how long each property has been vacant; and what is the intended future use.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information is as follows:

Property	*Type*	*Period vacant (months)*	*Future use*
16 Bearsted rise	House	3	Under offer[1]
Havelock house, Forest hill	Flat	27	Awaiting allocation[2]
Havelock house, Forest hill	Flat	11	Awaiting allocation[2]
Havelock house, Forest hill	Flat	6	Under offer[1]
Moore house, Willow way	Flat	25	Under disposal[3]
Moore house, Willow way	Flat	21	Under disposal[3]
Moore house, Willow way	Flat	17	Under disposal[3]
Moore house, Willow way	Flat	12	Under disposal[3]

[1] "Under offer"—allocated to a police officer.
[2] "Awaiting allocation"—available for offer.
[3] "Under disposal"—the flats at Moore house are being sold to a local housing association.

Samuel Kulasingham and Premraj Sivalingham

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *635*, on what date a police inquiry began into the evidence surrounding the conviction of Samuel Kulasingham and Premraj Sivalingham; when the evidence was completed; on what date it was presented to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The police were asked in April 1992 to make inquiries into allegations that Samuel Kulasingham and Premraj Sivalingham had been wrongfully convicted. A report of these inquiries was received in March 1993. After considering further representations which were received on 22 June from the solicitors acting for Mr. Kulasingham and Mr. Sivalingham, my right hon. and learned Friend decided on 5 July to refer the cases back to the Court of Appeal.

Health Care (Prisoners)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to publish the first report of the director of health care for prisoners and the Health Advisory Committee's commentary on the report.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The report and commentary are published today. Copies are available from the Libraries of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Villages

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on arrangements made to co-ordinate policy between the Departments for Education, of the Environment and of Social Security, on the encouragement of village communities and village life.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Environment has overall policy responsibility for rural affairs in England and liaises with other Government Departments, including the Departments for Education and Social Security, on matters affecting the social and economic well-being of rural England, and matters affecting village communities. The Government's countryside agencies also have a statutory duty to advise the Government. In particular, the Rural Development Commission, which is sponsored by the Department of Environment, has a number of programmes directed specifically to the enhancement of village life.

EDUCATION

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are members of the

House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department since 1988 to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, any salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Boswell: Information relating to those appointed to our non-departmental public bodies since 1988 who are members of the House of Lords is as follows. Appointments to these bodies are made solely on the basis of the aptitude, merit and suitability of the candidates concerned. Information relating to marital circumstances or possible party candidature for Parliament is not collected and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Name of NDPB and peer	*Post*	*Remuneration*	*Duration of appointment*
Council for National Academic Awards			
Baroness MacFarlane	Member	—	4·5 years
Lord Pearson	Member	—	2 years
National Council for Educational Technology			
Lady Parkes	Chairman	—	3 years (served 1)
Schools Examination and Assessment Council			
Lord Griffiths	Chairman	£275 per day (P/time)	2 years
Lord Skidelsky	Member	—	3 years (served 1)
University Commissioners			
Lord Butterworth	Member	£246 per day (P/time)	4 years
Universities Funding Council			
Lord Chilver	Chairman	£14,000 per annum (P/time)	3 years
Visiting Committee of the Cranfield Institute of Technology			
Lord Lewis	Chairman	—	10 years

Student Loans

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education in what circumstances the student loan scheme extends to European community students attending universities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Boswell: European Community students may be eligible for a student loan if they have been ordinarily resident in the British islands for three years before the start of their course; or are refugees; or have established migrant worker status.

Student Unions

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what account he took, in preparing his statement of 1 July on student unions, of the court judgment in the case of the university of Greenwich; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: In its plans for the reform of student unions, the Government took into account the scope for abuse that exists in the current arrangements, illustrated by the judgment in the case of the university of Greenwich. Our proposed reforms are intended to curb politically motivated activity and strengthen accountability by limiting the purposes for which institutions can pass public funds to their campus unions.

Class Sizes

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 17 May, *Official Report*, column *23*, if he will list the research studies from the United States of America related to the impact of class sizes which have been considered in his Department in the last four years.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has noted the findings of the STAR project in Tennessee.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) how many households covered by a concessionary television licence are *(a)* living in a residential or nursing home and *(b)* living in a sheltered scheme as defined by the relevant concessionary licence scheme regulations;

(2) how many additional households would qualify for a concessionary television licence if the present scheme's definition of sheltered housing were replaced by the definition of sheltered housing in paragraph 10 of schedule 5 to the Housing Act 1985;

(3) how many householders enjoy the benefit of a concessionary television licence due to preserved rights; and how many of these live in *(a)* residential or nursing homes and *(b)* in sheltered schemes;

(4) how many additional households would be eligible for a concessionary television licence if the present requirement for all occupants of qualifying schemes to be both tenants and fully retired persons of state pensionable age or disabled were replaced by a requirement that only *(a)* 90 per cent. and *(b)* 75 per cent. of occupants need satisfy this criterion.

Mr. Brooke: I understand from TV Licensing that 490,203 households hold a concessionary television licence by virtue of meeting the criteria laid down in the current regulations (SI 1991/436). Of these, 86,582 households are in residential homes, nursing homes and almshouses, while 403,621 are in sheltered housing schemes managed by a local authority or housing association. A further 171,415

households qualify for preserved rights to a concessionary licence, although their accommodation no longer qualifies under the regulations. Statistics on preserved rights are not broken down by the type of accommodation occupied.

The remaining information requested by the hon. Member is not available and could not readily be estimated.

National Lottery

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether the licensing structure he proposes for the national lottery will require retailers or advertisers to have a licence under the Bill; and what effect those arrangements will have on the ability of Post Office Counters Limited to bid to sell tickets.

Mr. Sproat: The references in the National Lottery etc. Bill to the "promotion" of lotteries relate to the running of lottery games.

The Bill provides that one body may be licensed to run the lottery business as a whole, and that the same, or additional, bodies may be licensed to run lottery games which are part of the national lottery. Any body licensed to run a game must have a contract with the single main licence holder. Licences are to be issued by the director general of the national lottery. Any other company or individual which provided a service to the lottery operator, for example by printing tickets, selling tickets or producing or displaying advertisments, would operate under a contract with the licence holder, and would not be directly subject to a licence condition.

However, such a company, just as anyone else in the United Kingdom, would be required to abide by regulations which the Secretary of State will be able to make under clause 12 of the Bill (for example, governing the age at which a person may sell or be sold lottery tickets).

If Post Office Counters Limited [POCL] wished to enter into an agreement with a licence holder to sell lottery tickets, a licence would not be required. POCL would require the formal consent of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to compete for such work. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms confirmed on 26 November 1992 that such a consent would be forthcoming, on condition that the Bill received Royal Assent.

HEALTH

Child Care Facilities

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are set down for the maintenance of workplace child care facilities for health service staff where facilities are provided for a number of different health units by one health unit if that unit acquires trust status.

Dr. Mawhinney: This is a matter for local decision.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to improve child care facilities for NHS staff;

(2) how many day nurseries are provided for NHS staff; and what are their capacities and occupancies.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is for individual national health service authorities and trusts to provide for the child care needs of staff in the light of local recruitment and retention needs. Detailed information on the level of provision is not available centrally.

HIV and AIDS

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how the figure of £150,000 as the maximum grant available to organisations in the HIV-AIDS field was calculated; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what new areas of work will now receive funding using money released by the reduction on grants previously made to HIV-AIDS organisations over the sum of £150,000.

Mr. Sackville: The substantial maximum grant of £150,000 provides scope for significant help to be given to a wide range of HIV and AIDS organisations. It also allows a balance to be struck between HIV and AIDS and other health priorities for example within the mental health field. The decision should also be seen in the context of the substantial sums made available to the HIV and AIDS voluntary sector—nearly £12 million since 1985-86.

GP Contracts (Health Promotion)

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) of 14 June, *Official Report*, columns *429-30*, what estimate has been made of the volume increase in prescribing resulting from the Department's new initiative to encourage health promotion by general practitioners to improve prevention of coronary heart disease and strokes and to set up asthma and diabetes management programmes; and what assessment has been made of the consequent savings in other health care costs, such as hospital treatment, as a result of these new programmes.

Mr. Sackville: As part of our "Health of the Nation" initiative, some 90 per cent. of general practitioners are planning to run health promotion programmes with the aim of encouraging people to adopt healthier lifestyles and thus to reduce morbidity and mortality. It is not possible to quantify what effect this new initiative may have on prescribing or other health care costs separately from other health care improvements.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the number of hospital operations which have been cancelled within three days of the agreed date for the operation in each of the four regional health authorities covering the Greater London area during the last 12 months.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Deaths (Firearms)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* suicides of people under 16 years involved the use of (i) shotguns and (ii) other firearms in each year since 1979.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Numbers of suicides involving firearms (ICD E955) in England and Wales from 1979 to 1992

Year	Shotgun (E955.1)		Handguns (E955.0)		Hunting rifle (E955.2)		Military firearm (E955.3)		Other firearm (E955.4)		Total (excluding shotguns)		Total (including shotguns)	
	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s
1979	72	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	114	0	114	0	186	3
1980	73	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	143	2	145	2	218	2
1981	55	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	132	1	132	1	187	1
1982	70	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	101	0	105	0	175	0
1983	87	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	128	1	131	1	218	1
1984	100	0	3	0	1	0	1	0	109	2	114	2	214	2
1985	78	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	124	1	126	2	204	2
1986	99	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	91	1	94	1	193	1
1987	80	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	105	0	107	0	187	0
1988	101	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	110	0	111	0	212	0
1989	82	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	77	0	77	0	159	0
1990	78	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	79	0	80	0	158	0
1991	98	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	47	0	48	0	146	0
1992	80	1	4	0	0	0	1	0	83	0	88	0	168	1

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide a table listing the number of deaths other than suicides and homicides involving *(a)* shotguns and *(b)* other firearms in each year since 1979, listing separately the number of under-16s.

Mr. Sackville: The information available is shown in the tables.

Numbers of deaths involving firearms undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted (ICD E985), in England and Wales from 1979 to 1992

Year	Shotgun (E985.1)		Handguns (E985.0)		Hunting rifle (E985.2)		Military firearm (E985.3)		Other firearm (E985.8)		Total (excluding shotguns)		Total (including shotguns)	
	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s
1979	7	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	19	0	20	0	27	0
1980	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	7	1	16	1
1981	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	8	0	15	0
1982	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	8	0	16	0
1983	12	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	16	0	17	0	29	0
1984	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	1	19	1	28	1
1985	12	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	1	17	0	29	2
1986	16	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	20	0	21	0	37	0
1987	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	0	18	0	32	0
1988	14	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	13	0	14	0	28	2
1989	24	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	14	1	16	0	40	0
1990	21	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	10	0	31	1
1991	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	16	0	29	0
1992	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	1	14	1	22	1

Numbers of accidental deaths involving firearms (ICD E922) in England and Wales from 1979 to 1992

Year	Shotgun (E922.1)		Handguns (E922.0)		Hunting rifle (E922.2)		Military firearm (E922.3)		Other firearm (E922.4)		Unspecified (E922.9)		Total (excluding shotguns)		Total (including shotguns)	
	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s
1979	6	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	5	2	8	2	14	2
1980	6	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	7	2	9	2	15	3
1981	9	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	7	1	9	3	18	7
1982	11	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	9	1	11	1	22	4
1983	9	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	5	1	14	2
1984	2	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	9	1	12	3	14	4
1985	10	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	4	2	8	2	18	2
1986	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	2	10	2	16	4
1987	7	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	5	0	12	0
1988	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	9	1	13	2	17	2
1989	11	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	6	0	17	0
1990	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	6	0	8	0
1991	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	5	0
1992	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	6	0	8	0

Numbers of deaths due to legal intervention involving firearms in England and Wales from 1979 to 1992. ICD E970.

Year	Total	
	all ages	under 16s
1979	2	0
1980	0	0
1981	0	0
1982	0	0
1983	0	0
1984	0	0
1985	0	0
1986	0	0
1987	0	0
1988	2	0
1989	1	0
1990	2	0
1991	2	0
1992	6	0

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department since 1988 to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, any salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Goodlad: The information requested in points (a) to (d) is as follows:

(a) None

(b) (i) Lord Desai, Member of Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission, appointed August 1992 for three years, no salary payable.

(ii) Lord Chorley, British Council Deputy Chairman, appointed April 1991 for three years, no salary payable.

(iii) Baroness Flather, Governor, Commonwealth Institute, appointed January 1993 for three years, no salary payable.

(c) Lady Howe JP, Governor of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, appointed March 1993 for three years, no salary payable.

(d) This information is not held centrally (and could be provided only at disproportionate cost).

EC Council of Ministers

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community's Council of Ministers.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The following meetings are planned:

12 July—ECOFIN Council
19-20 July—Foreign Affairs Council
19-20 July—Agriculture Council
22 July—Budget Council

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

ECOFIN Council—12 July
Multilateral surveillance
Follow-up to Copenhagen European Council

Foreign Affairs Council—19-20 July
Commission opinions on Cyprus and Malta
Structural Funds
Relations with European Parliament
GATT Uruguay Round
Right to vote in and eligibility for EP elections
Report on EC-Japan Summit
Dual Use of Goods
G7 Summit follow-up
Ex-Yugoslavia
TACIS
Relations with the FSU

Agriculture Council—19-20 July
Greek islands (5946/93; 6981/93; 7184/93)
GATT agriculture (poss) (5813/93; 6612/93)
SLOM compensation (milk quotas) (5713/93)
Minced meat quality (poss) (6953/93)

Budget Council—22 July
First reading of EC Budget for 1994

The *ECOFIN Council* will meet on 12 July to have its usual six-monthly discussion of multilateral surveillance. The Council will also consider follow-up work arising from the conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council.

The *Foreign Affairs Council* will meet on 19-20 July to discuss the Commission opinions on Cyprus and Malta, a Dual Use of Goods regulation, the GATT Uruguay round and structural funds. Relations with the European Parliament and voting rights in European Parliament elections will also be discussed. Finally, discussions will take place on the report on the EC-Japan summit, ex-Yugoslavia, relations with the FSU, PECOS and the follow up to the G7 summit.

The *Agriculture Council* will meet on 19-20 July. Ministers will discuss Greek islands and SLOM compensation. They may also discuss agricultural aspects of the GATT negotiations and minced meat.

The *Budget Council* will meet on 22 July to establish the Council's first reading of the EC draft budget for 1994.

Draft EC Legislation

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many items of draft EC legislation, within the categories listed in the House of Commons demand form for European printed papers, are currently being progressed by the European Commission.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The precise information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the Commission's work programme for 1993-94 (SEC(93)58 final) and its legislative programme for 1993 (COM(93)43 final), deposited in the House of Commons on 18 February and 1 March respectively, show the items on which the Commission intends to bring forward proposals.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Tools for Self Reliance

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on help given to the Tools for Self Reliance Group for Zimbabwe.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Tools for Self Reliance has not yet applied to the ODA for assistance. As I indicated in my

reply to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on 22 March at column *607*, it is welcome to apply.

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the terms of reference of the review of aid and trade provision and a list of the non-governmental organisations and commercial organisations that were contracted.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The review of aid and trade provision (ATP) covered the scheme's objectives, criteria, efficiency and effectiveness, value for money and management. It also considered the relationship between ATP and export credits, and the international rules.

All companies which had undertaken projects supported by ATP since the scheme began in 1977 were contacted, along with a number of other companies with outstanding applications and interested trade associations.

Bosnia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to ensure the security of humanitarian supplies to Bosnia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The security of humanitarian aid supplies to Bosnia is kept under continuous review in concert with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees who coordinates the international community's response to the humanitarian crisis and the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) who are responsible for providing protection for the aid convoys.

Malawi

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has towards gradual restoration of development aid to Malawi in the light of constitutional and political developments following the referendum.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 6 July 1993]:* The constitutional and political developments since the referendum are encouraging. We are reviewing our policy on aid to Malawi, taking account of these developments and progress on economic reform.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Association Grants

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what definition of affordability for housing association rents he uses in making decisions on the level of housing association grants.

Sir George Young: The Government do not define affordability. In setting grant levels each year, I make a judgment based on various factors. In this I am assisted by a Housing Corporation model which enables us to calculate an affordability ratio representing the average model rent, at certain levels of cost and grant, as a proportion of earned income after tax, excluding housing benefit. The affordability ratio resulting from the grant rates set has remained unchanged since 1989-90 at around 35 per cent. of a working housing association household's net income before housing benefit.

The model, however, is only a mechanism to test the impact of changes in grant rates. It is for housing associations to consider what rents are affordable taking account of all local circumstances. Outturn rents show that there is a considerable gap between the rents implied by the model and actual Sellafield rents on the ground.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State? for the Environment what requests he has received from the European Commission on the application by British Nuclear Fuels to construct a mixed oxide nuclear fuels fabrication plant at Sellafield in regard to its requirement to be covered by a full environmental impact assessment under the 1985 EC directive.

Mr. Yeo: None.

Housing Associations

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of reduced rates of housing association grant on the ability of households with incomes just above the housing benefit eligibility level to afford housing association rents.

Sir George Young: I have received advice on this and other issues, which I am currently considering.

DSS Hostels

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider introducing planning regulations to limit the spread of bed-and-breakfast accommodation occupied mainly by claimants of income support.

Mr. Baldry: Local authorities continue to make progress in reducing their use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. My right hon. Friend is reluctant to use the planning system to impose restrictions on where people choose to live. There are no immediate plans to amend the Use Classes Order 1987, although its operation is kept under continuous review.

Priority Waste Streams Initiative

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of the European project priority waste streams initiative.

Mr. Yeo: Six priority waste streams projects have been launched by the European Commission. In a note to members of the various project groups issued on 1 July, the Commission stated that in the light of budgetary constraints, it had been decided to concentrate efforts on the work of the groups dealing with used tyres, chlorinated solvents, end of life vehicles and health care waste. These projects had been planned to finish towards the end of 1993 and early 1994. The outcome of the projects will be evaluated and used in guiding decisions about work on the remaining projects dealing with demolition waste and electronic and electrical waste.

The United Kingdom has participated fully in this work, which is aimed at devising Community-wide action to reduce the environmental impact of difficult wastes. My

Department has provided the project leadership for the project on health care waste; the project group had its fourth meeting on 1 and 2 July and is accelerating its programme of work so as to be in a position to produce some results by the end of the year.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Government's policy for the management of radioactive waste in Britain with particular reference to spent advanced gas-cooled reactor fuel.

Mr. Yeo: The latest statement of Government policy for radioactive waste management is set out in chapter 15 of the 1990 White Paper "This Common Inheritance", and updated in chapter 14 of the 1991 first anniversary report and chapter 15 of the 1992 second anniversary report. Spent advanced gas-cooled reactor fuel is not a waste but a resource which may be reprocessed.

Local Government Commission

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to give effect by order to the recommendations of the Local Government Commission without modification.

Mr. Baldry: The Local Government Commission has submitted its final report on only one area, the Isle of Wight, and the Secretary of State is still considering the recommendations. Final reports on other first tranche areas have yet to be submitted by the commission.

THORP

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what planning conditions or consents relating to any part of the BNFL plant at Sellafield there are which assume or require operation of the proposed thermal oxide reprocessing plant;

(2) how many planning conditions or consents relating to any part of the BNFL plant at Sellafield will require revision or renewal if the proposed thermal oxide reprocessing plant does not operate.

Mr. Yeo: Information about planning permissions issued in respect of BNFL's Sellafield plant is not held centrally.

Pollution

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times in the last 12 months Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has monitored airborne pollution in Barrow and Furness; and what were the results.

Mr. Yeo: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has not monitored airborne pollution in Barrow and Furness in the last 12 months. The monitoring of air quality is the responsibility of the local authority.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish equal opportunities policy guidelines to companies bidding to run Government services contracted out to the private sector.

Mr. Gummer: EC Council Directive 92/50 lays down criteria for the award of contracts but prohibits the imposition of any non-commercial criteria. Nevertheless, companies invited to tender will be asked to state how equal opportunities policies would be reflected in the performance of their duties. In addition, the terms and conditions of any contract will include a requirement that the contractor shall not discriminate unlawfully within the meaning and scope of the Race Relations Act 1976 or the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and 1986.

Redundant Workers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from workers previously employed by local authorities who have been made redundant after their work has been contracted out to private companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend receives a great many representations about local authority compulsory competitive tendering matters, including representations from private firms which have won contracts to provide services and taken on new staff, as well as from former council employees.

He also receives representations from members of the public who are grateful for the improvement in services which CCT has brought about.

Waste Management

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will reconsider proposed regulations to make exempt from waste management licensing suppliers of automotive paints storing waste flammable solvents who hold a petroleum licence.

Mr. Yeo: *[holding answer 6 July 1993]:* My Department issued consultation papers on waste management licensing in August 1992. These included draft regulations prescribing certain exemptions from the need to have a waste management licence. We did not then propose an exemption for waste solvents. Waste flammable solvents are categorised as "special waste" under the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980, and are likely in due course to be categorised as "hazardous" under the EC Directive on Hazardous Waste (91/689/EEC). That directive constrains our freedom to exempt the management of such waste from the need to have a licence. This may only be done where the waste is destined for recovery. We have received representations from the vehicle paint spraying industry about the possibility of exempting the storage of small quantities of waste solvent destined for recovery. We will be considering their case very carefully in the context of finalising the waste management licensing regulations.

Blackwall River Crossing

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what environmental impact assessments have been obtained in connection with the proposed third river crossing at Blackwall in Tower Hamlets.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 29 June at columns *404-5*.

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements he has made for compensation to property owners in the neighbourhood of the Blackwall tunnel, Tower Hamlets for loss of value to their properties blighted by the third river crossing proposals.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

Part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973 makes provision for compensation in such circumstances. In addition, the London borough of Tower Hamlets has been invited to consider measures to mitigate the effect of the crossing on local residents.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

THORP

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Government will prepare and publish a study of the alternative ways in which staff involved in the construction of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant could be re-employed on alternative cleaning up work on the Sellafield site or on work elsewhere.

Mr. Eggar: No. British Nuclear Fuels plc has advised me that operating the thermal oxide reprocessing plant is expected to support some 2,000 permanent jobs in West Cumbria. This major employment benefit is in addition to the employment arising from the decommissioning programme at Sellafield which is already under way and is appropriate to the requirements of the site.

Isobutyl Nitrate

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will ban the sale of isobutyl nitrate poppers.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government continue to keep this matter under review in order to access whether measures to control the misuse of isobutyl nitrate poppers might be appropriate in the future.

EC Energy Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the matters discussed and decisions taken at the Energy Council in Luxembourg on 25 June.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on 6 July, *Official Report*, columns *106-7*.

Steel Imports

Ms Gordon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the import quota for steel from the Commonwealth of Independent States for the European Community for 1993; what proportion of this quota has been allocated to the United Kingdom; and what is the expected United Kingdom quota for 1993.

Mr. Needham: The European Community quota of 321,000 tonnes for steel imports in 1993 from the former Soviet Union (excluding the Baltic states) covers only heavy plate, coils, other flat-rolled products, beams and wire rods. All other products are liberalised. The quota is administered in three tranches, the distribution within each of which depends on the number of licence applications made and on past trade patterns. United Kingdom importers' share in total of the first and second tranches is 15,541 tonnes. It is not yet possible to determine what the total quantities available to United Kingdom importers for the year as a whole will be.

Research and Development

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those companies based in north Staffordshire which have received Government help with investment in research and development.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government offer assistance for research and development in a variety of forms from more than one Department. The details requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the citizens advice bureaux on the funding requirements of their advice service.

Mr. McLoughlin: The funding of individual citizens advice bureaux is a matter for local authorities. The Department is responsible for the funding of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and Citizens Advice Scotland, which provide support services to local bureaux. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms met representatives of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux twice in the past year, on 12 October 1992, when funding for the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux was one of several issues discussed, and on 24 March 1993 when the issue of funding was not raised.

Computer Imports

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the percentage of the home market of electronic computers supplied by imports.

Mr. Sainsbury: The United Kingdom production of electronic computers and parts in 1991 was £6·4 billion compared with domestic sales of £7·5 billion. Exports were £5·8 billion which accounted for 90 per cent. of United Kingdom manufacturers' sales. Imports were £6·8 billion, of which 37 per cent. was attributed to parts. This gives an apparent import penetration of 91 per cent. It is likely that many of the imported computers were subsequently re-exported, but separate figures for re-exports are not available.

High-technology Industries

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives he plans for the improvement of high-technology British industries.

Mr. McLoughlin: Our policies contribute to high technology as well as other industries. In addition, as outlined in the recent Science and Technology White Paper, and my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade's statement of 26 May, *Official Report*,

columns *583-85*, the Government are mounting a technology foresight programme, with the Office of Science and Technology in the lead and substantial assistance from DTI. This will establish priorities among generic technologies and encourage industrialists and academics to develop clear strategies for the contribution of emerging science to high technology industry. DTI will facilitate access to overseas technology and provide technology and innovation consultancy through the diagnostic and brokerage services planned to succeed the consultancy initiative.

Insurance Companies

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has about United Kingdom life insurance companies proposing to transfer business to Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The International Financial Services Centre, established in Dublin under EC state aid rules, offers certain tax incentives for financial services business conducted with non-residents. I am aware that one United Kingdom assurance company has set up business additionally in the centre. However, the benefits offered by the centre, in so far as the life assurance industry is concerned, affect only a narrow range of products, and I have received no indication that United Kingdom life assurance companies generally are proposing to transfer business there.

Power Stations

Mr. Pike: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what special provisions apply to the proceeds accruing to National Power or PowerGen arising from the closure of any power station subsequent to privatisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: All the privatised electricity companies are subject to provisions which, above certain thresholds, entitle the Government to half the gain resulting from property disposals. No payment is due from the disposal of a specialised property such as a power station as a going concern, provided that it continues in operational use until 31 March 2000.

Quangos (Appointments)

Mr. Grocott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the former Members of this House who have been appointed since 1988 by his Department to quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations; and if he will list in each case the title of the post, the salary, the duration of the appointment, and the party which the former hon. Member represented.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is as follows:

Name	*Post*	*Salary*	*Duration*	*Party*
John Corrie	Chairman of the Transport Users Consultative Committee for Scotland	£6,310	6 years	Conservative
Robin Hodgson	Member of the West Midlands Industrial Development Board	Unpaid	5 years	Conservative
Charles Longbottom	Non-Executive Director of British Shipbuilders	£5,000	5 years	Conservative
Sir Julian Ridsdale	Member of the Simpler Trade Procedures Board	Unpaid	2 years	Conservative

Regulations

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out the terms of reference for his Department's inquiry into unnecessary regulations.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The seven deregulation task forces have the following terms of reference.

To advise Ministers on priorities for the repeal or simplification of existing regulations and enforcement methods so as to minimise the costs on business; to advise Ministers on the best way of developing and maintaining consultation on the introduction and enforcement of new regulations including those arising from EC measures; bearing in mind the consideration of public health, safety and security which underlie the regulatory system.

Nuclear Review

Mr. McGrady: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he will take to ensure that the Government's 1993 nuclear review is wide-ranging and comprehensive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The scope, timing and format of the review of the future prospects for nuclear power are under consideration within Government. A further announcement will be made in due course.

Logic Control Systems Ltd

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to bring disqualification proceedings in the case of the move of Logic Control Systems Ltd of Clowne, Derbyshire into liquidation or to make an application under section 7(2) of the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 for leave to extend the period for taking such disqualification proceedings.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: On present information, it is the Secretary of State's intention to commence disqualification proceedings against the principal director of Logic Control Systems Limited (In Liquidation) by 19 July 1993.

RECHAR

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's policy on the proposal for a second RECHAR; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 30 June 1993]* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) on 29 June, *Official Report*, column *439*.

British Nuclear Fuels

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions his Department has *(a)* rejected and *(b)* required amendment of corporate plans produced by BNFL.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 22 June 1993]:* My Department discusses the corporate plans produced by British Nuclear Fuels plc with the company and comments on them as appropriate.

Warren Spring Laboratory

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library the report prepared by PA Consultants on the future of the Warren Spring Laboratory.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 15 June 1993]:* Yes. I have today placed copies of the report in the Library of the House.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidelines his Department has introduced concerning visits by hon. Members to his Department's executive agencies.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 29 June 1993]:* Each case is assessed in the light of the particular circumstances at the time. Where appropriate, Ministers should act as host to hon. Members in order to assist on matters of Government policy.

NATIONAL FINANCE

EC Convergence Criteria

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to set policy in the medium term by reference to the convergence criteria of the treaty of Maastricht.

Mr. Nelson: There is a long-established practice in the United Kingdom of setting economic policy in a medium term framework. The Government's economic strategy, as set out in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", is based on the principles of low inflation, stable monetary conditions and sound public finances. The convergence criteria are designed to achieve the same objectives.

Decommissioning Levy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what contribution has been made to date to the national fund by the former Central Electricity Generating Board, Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear from their decommissioning levy; and what benefits accrue from this investment to the public sector borrowing requirement.

Mr. Nelson: In England and Wales, under orders made by the President of the Board of Trade, the regional electricity companies—RECs—are obliged to contract for a certain amount of non-fossil fuel generating capacity. Most of this is nuclear capacity owned and operated by Nuclear Electric. The additional costs to the regional electricity companies of meeting this obligation are met by a fossil fuel levy on consumers, set in 1993-94 at 10 per cent.

Revenue to Nuclear Electric from selling electricity in the market and from the premium paid by the RECs and financed by the levy reduces the company's net external financing requirement. The impact of the arrangements to support non-fossil fuel generation is therefore to reduce the overall public sector borrowing requirement, although the precise impact cannot sensibly be calculated as it depends on the assumptions made about how the additional costs of non-fossil fuel generation would have otherwise been met.

Public Expenditure

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on the control total for public expenditure in 1994-95 of restraining public sector pay to an increase of *(a)* 0 per cent., *(b)* 2 per cent., *(c)* 3 per cent., *(d)* 4 per cent. and *(e)* the latest estimate of the rate of inflation which will be used for the annual uprating of pensions and benefits.

Mr. Nelson: None. The Cabinet agreed on 17 June that the new control total in 1994-95 would be set by sticking to existing ceilings. Within these ceilings, a responsible approach to public sector pay will ensure the best outcome in terms of service delivery.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the proportion that public spending represented of the gross domestic product and *(b)* the level of unemployment in each year since 1976.

Mr. Nelson: The latest figures for general Government expenditure, excluding privatisation proceeds, as a percentage of money GDP are shown in table 2B.1 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report". The Central Statistical Office will be publishing revised figures for general Government expenditure in the July edition of "Financial Statistics".

Figures for the level of unemployment are shown in "Economic Trends Annual Supplement" table 21 and "Economic Trends" table 20.

Financial Advisers Commissions

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to make his decision on the Office of Fair Trading report on disclosures of commissions for independent and tied financial advisers.

Mr. Nelson: As soon as is compatible with proper consideration of the issues and representations received during the consultation period.

Employment Changes

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in which commercial sectors the Inland Revenue has identified the greatest movement *(a)* from schedule D to schedule E and *(b)* from schedule E to schedule D.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that this information is not available. But looking at the total work force, the proportion that are self-employed and paying tax under schedule D has risen from 7 per cent. in 1978-79 to 10 per cent. in 1992-93.

Tax Inspectors

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many trained Inland Revenue tax inspectors were working for the Inland Revenue in each year since 1979; and how many were working in the areas of *(a)* capital gains tax, *(b)* schedule D tax, *(c)* corporation tax, *(d)* PAYE and *(e)* national insurance contributions in each year.

Mr. Dorrell: Excluding inspectors employed on central administration and in specialist offices, the table sets out the total numbers of Inland Revenue staff in the Department's inspector grades working within its network of local offices for each year since 1978-79 and how many were working in the areas of *(a)* capital gains tax, *(b)* schedule D tax, *(c)* corporation tax, and *(d)* schedule E tax in each year. Under *(d)* figures have been provided for schedule E tax rather than PAYE, as PAYE is simply a mechanism for collecting schedule E tax. Inspector resource usage on national insurance contribution work is incidental to mainstream tax work. It is not separately recorded.

Year	*Total*	*Capital gains*	*Schedule D tax*	*Corporation tax*	*Schedule E tax*
1978-79	5,651	343	2,858	1,397	1,054
1979-80	5,654	343	2,860	1,397	1,054
1980-81	5,553	337	2,808	1,372	1,035
1981-82	5,421	329	2,742	1,340	1,011
1982-83	5,381	326	2,721	1,330	1,003
1983-84	5,497	333	2,780	1,358	1,025
1984-85	5,377	326	2,719	1,329	1,003
1985-86	5,440	330	2,751	1,344	1,014
1986-87	5,587	339	2,826	1,381	1,042
1987-88	5,788	351	2,927	1,430	1,079
1988-89	6,144	356	3,154	1,511	1,123
1989-90	6,365	370	3,284	1,563	1,148
1990-91	6,624	382	3,429	1,652	1,161
1991-92	6,737	374	3,434	1,725	1,205
1992-93	6,808	372	3,546	1,721	1,170

Child Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the savings would be of taxing child benefit at the higher rate.

Mr. Dorrell: If child benefit were added to the father's —or lone mother's—taxable income and the part of it which came above the basic rate limit was taxed at 40 per cent., the revenue yield at 1993-94 levels would be about £250 million. The equivalent yield if it were added to the mother's—or lone father's—taxable income would be about £30 million.

TRANSPORT

Railways Directorate

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff have been employed in the railways directorate (railways 1 and railways 2) *(a)* in grades 1 to 7 and *(b)* in total.

Mr. Freeman: The number of staff employed in the Railways Directorate at 1 April this year, and in the four preceding years, in grades 3 to 7, as well as the total number of staff, is set out in the following table.

	Grade 3	*Grade 5*	*Grade 6*	*Grade 7*	*Total Staff (all grades)*
1 April 1989					
Railways 1	1	3	0	9	40
Railways 2	0	0	0	0	0
1 April 1990					
Railways 1	1	4	2	10	47
Railways 2	0	0	0	0	0
1 April 1991					
Railways 1	1	4	1	12	54
Railways 2	0	0	0	0	0
1 April 1992					
Railways 1	1	5	1	13	54
Railways 2	1	3	0	4	43
1 April 1993					
Railways 1	1	4	1	11	57
Railways 2	1	5	0	10	47

Staff at grade 1, the permanent secretary, and grade 2, deputy secretary, have wider responsibilities which go beyond the Railways Directorate.

A13

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what toxic waste, asbestos or related material has been excavated over the past two months during the course of construction and related works on the Wennington-Mar Dyke section of the part of the new A13 road stretching one mile either side of the boundary of the borough of Thurrock with the London borough of Havering.

Mr. Norris: On the Heathway-Wennington section, laboratory analysis continues of the samples collected for the chemical ground investigation. The exact content of the samples will not be certain until the results are available and these will be placed in the Library.

On the Wennington-Mar Dyke section, no toxic waste or asbestos was excavated. All other arisings were deposited at suitably licensed landfill sites in accordance with the latest regulations.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who was responsible for surveying and supervising the extraction of materials excavated over the past two months on that section of the Wennington-Mar Dyke section of the new A13 road stretching one mile either side of the boundary of the borough of Thurrock with the London borough of Havering.

Mr. Norris: On the Heathway-Wennington section, only samples were removed for analysis from pits and boreholes and all other materials were replaced. On the Wennington-Mar Dyke section, the work was supervised by the Department's consultants W. S. Atkins.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what quantity of materials extracted as part of the construction of the Wennington-Mar Dyke section of the new A13 road stretching one mile either side of the boundary of the borough of Thurrock with the London borough of Havering has been deposited in *(a)* Aveley No. 2 pit and *(b)* Aveley No. 3 pit; and what was the nature of those materials.

Mr. Norris: On the Heathway-Wennington section, only samples have been removed for analysis and no material deposited elsewhere.

On the Wennington-Mar Dyke section, approximately 1,500 cu m of material was excavated for the advance works contract. Less than 500 cu m was landfill refuse material which was deposited in Aveley No. 2 pit.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what requirements exist for a chemist, or other comparable analyst, to witness the excavation of materials of the nature of those moved as part of the construction of the Wennington-Mardyke section of the new A13 road stretching one mile either side of the boundary of the borough of Thurrock with the London borough of Havering; and which such officials and for what occasion and periods were present in the case of that road section.

Mr. Norris: On the Heathway-Wennington section of the proposed A13, an extensive chemical ground survey was carried out. A copy of the results will be placed in the Library of the House when they are available. Trial pits and boreholes were dug along the line of the proposed new road east of the London to Tilbury railway and across the marshes. Appropriately qualified personnel, including chemists, supervised the field work.

On the Wennington-Mardyke section, the Department would consider, if appropriate, the appointment of a chemist or other analyst to witness the excavation of landfill materials on the road works contract. A chemist was not present during the recently completed advance works contract. The work involved some compaction of the landfill for part of a length of future temporary road diversion.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the results of the geological and other surveys showing the composition of the soil and ground along the Wennington-Mardyke section of the new A13 road; and what details are held by his Department that relate to the previous dumping of waste along this section.

Mr. Norris: The results of the geological and other surveys in respect of the Wennington Mardyke section of the proposed A13 run to 23 volumes. It would not be practicable to place these in the Library. They may be viewed on request and by arrangement by writing to the Department's consultants, W. S. Atkins at Woodcote Grove, Ashley road, Epsom, Surrey KT18 5BW, telephone 0372 726140.

The infill of the mineral extraction pits was uncontrolled and was carried out during the 1950s and 1960s. W. S. Atkins carried out a desk survey of the mineral workings in 1987 which included information provided by Essex county council, Thurrock borough council and London borough of Havering.

Rail Privatisation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions he has made in the railway privatisation proposals to ensure a high and sustained level of investment is maintained in infrastructure enhancements or renewal and the provision of new rolling stock and traction.

Mr. Freeman: From April 1994 Railtrack will have the lead responsibility for investment in track and related infrastructure and will make charges to operators allowing it to recoup investment expenditure and earn a rate of return on it. The Government will provide indirect support through subsidy for franchised passenger services, and direct support for investment in schemes not earning an adequate financial return but which provide a satisfactory cost-benefit return when wider benefits are taken into account.

In last year's autumn statement the Government gave approval to British Rail to lease £150 million worth of new rolling stock. This and the establishment of three publicly owned rolling stock companies will encourage the development of a leasing market. The Government's intention is that provision of rolling stock should in future pass increasingly to the private sector and so be outside the constraints of public expenditure.

Clause 46 of the Railways Bill is also designed to encourage investment in railway assets with an economic life longer than a franchise.

Inter-rail

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had concerning the future of Inter-rail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Discussions have taken place between British Rail and my advisers. As to future arrangements, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the Member for Cunninghame, North on 25 June, *Official Report*, column 282.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he will take to minimise the damage to Eltham and to Oxleas Wood of the road to the proposed east London river crossing.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government remain fully committed to meeting the need for a new road link across the Thames in east London as a key element in the strategy

to regenerate the east Thames corridor. However, following a reappraisal we have been undertaking, the Transport Minister for London and I have decided that the current scheme, designed and chosen some time ago, fails to meet the high environmental standards we now apply to new road schemes.

We have therefore decided not to proceed with current plans. We shall examine alternative solutions which meet the same strategic objectives, but which will have less impact on the local environment. We will bring forward new proposals for the scheme and in so doing will explore opportunities for greater involvement by the private sctor and a design competition for the bridge over the Thames, as suggested by the Royal Fine Arts Commission.

This decision is quite independent of the infraction proceedings instigated by the European Commission. The Government remain clear that the environmental impact assessment directive should not apply to projects which were in the pipeline when it came into force, and it will continue to contest the proceedings brought by the Commission.

Motorways

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has made for a system of permits for the use of motorways; and when he plans to publish his conclusions.

Mr. Key: The conclusions of the study that the Government have so far made of the use of permits for charging for motorways are included in the Green Paper "Paying for Better Motorways', Cm 2200, published on 26 May. Copies are available in the Library.

Network SouthEast

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what has been the percentage increase in fares in cash terms in Network SouthEast over the whole period since May 1979; and what was the percentage increase in the retail prices index over the same period;

(2) what has been the percentage increase in fares in Network SouthEast in real terms since May 1979.

Mr. Freeman: The overall cash increase in Network SouthEast fares between 1979 and 1992-93 was 234 per cent. The retail prices index increased by 146 per cent. over the same period, giving an overall fare increase in real terms of 36 per cent.

School Buses

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to lower the age limit at which three children may share a double bus seat.

Mr. Key: The Department is currently considering, with the Department of Education, various aspects of school transport, including the Public Service Vehicles (Carrying Capacity) Regulations—the three-for-two concession. It would not be right to anticipate the outcome of this work.

Residential Property

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham are owned by his Department; and if he will publish a list of such residential properties which are currently empty, giving the type of accommodation available, the length of time each property has been vacant and the intended future use.

Mr. Norris: My Department owns 22 residential properties transferred from the London residuary body in 1987. These were acquired for trunk road improvements and all are currently let. In addition five residential properties were transferred to the Department from the National Bus Company on its dissolution in 1991. These are currently vacant, three are to be demolished to enable a housing development to take place and two are required for the trunk road improvements. Consideration is being given to the possibility of letting them in the meantime. It is not my Department's practice to publish the addresses of vacant properties.

The Department also owns 14 commercial properties, with integral living accommodation, all acquired for road schemes. Nine of these are let on a commercial basis and attempts are being made to find suitable commercial tenants for the other five.

Repeater Signs

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the need to approve the use of repeater signs within 30 mph speed limit areas.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* There have been a number of such requests. I am currently considering the wider problem of vehicle speeds in villages.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Forged Letter

Sir David Steel: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his oral statement of 30 June, *Official Report*, column 975, if he will make a further statement on the source of the forged letter in the name of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale; what inquiries were made as to the origins of the notepaper used; and what disciplinary action was taken against the offender.

The Attorney-General: The letter to which the right hon. Member refers was produced by an officer of the City of London police engaged on the Bank of Credit and Commerce International inquiry. It was a misguided April fools joke intended to be confined to those employed on the inquiry and not designed in any way to influence any aspect of the investigation.

Disciplinary procedures relating to police officers are the responsibility of the chief officer of the force concerned. In October 1992 I suggested to the right hon. Member that if he wished to pursue the disciplinary aspect he should contact the Commissioner of the City of London police.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Citizens Charter

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many charters make specific reference to the needs of disabled people.

Mr. Davis: I should like to correct a minor error to the answer given to this question on Monday 8 March 1993 at column 657 by my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), the then Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science. On that date the number of charters that made specific reference to the needs of people with disabilities was 24, not 25. I apologise for this error.

Today, 27 out of 32 published charters make a reference to people with disabilities.

WALES

Minority Languages

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further deliberations have taken place on the subject of the United Kingdom ratifying the European charter on minority languages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Government Departments with an interest in the European charter for regional or minority languages have been considering its implications for the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom decision on ratification must take into account the situation of each of the indigenous minority languages spoken within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration he has given to a ratification of the European charter on minority languages with a derogation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Article 21 of the European charter for regional or minority languages states that reservations to the charter may be made only to one or more of paragraphs 2 to 5 of article 7. The United Kingdom Government will announce their response to the charter in due course.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the total salaries paid in 1993-94 to *(a)* chief executives, *(b)* executive members and *(c)* non-executive members of hospital trust boards in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on salaries paid to chief executives and executive members of NHS trust boards is not held centrally but will be included in the accounts and annual report which each trust is required to make publicly available.

Trust chairmen receive remuneration of between £15,125 and £19,285 dependent upon the level of income of the trust. Each non-executive member receives remuneration of £5,000 per annum. In addition, travel and other expenses may be payable.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to advertise all NHS hospital trust *(a)* chief executive posts, *(b)* chairs and *(c)* non-executive posts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I am advertising for nominations for inclusion in the register the Welsh Office holds of candidates suitable for public appointment. This will enable anyone interested in undertaking work of public service, including chairmanship or non-executive membership of an NHS trust, to put their name forward for consideration. The post of chief executive must be advertised except when a trust is first established.

GP Fund Holders

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the mechanisms that he has put in place or proposes for the patients of general practitioner fund holders to have an involvement in decisions about their doctors' health care purchasing priorities.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is generally recognised that GPs as the gatekeepers of the NHS are uniquely placed to improve patients' choice of good quality services. It would be inappropriate for me to interfere with this relationship.

Unemployment

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is the current level of unemployment among manufacturing workers in Wales; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the current level of unemployment among workers in the service industries in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Information is not available in the form requested. However, labour force surveys conducted between December 1992 and February 1993 reported that 20 per cent. of the 138,000 unemployed had a previous job in the manufacturing sector and 41 per cent. in the service sector. These percentages are likely to be underestimates, because 14 per cent. of unemployed respondents did not give a previous industry.

These figures are based on the International Labour Organisation definition of unemployment. Labour force survey estimates, being derived from a sample of the population, are subject to sampling variability.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of TEC leavers went on to secure full employment from each of the TECs in Wales last year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The latest information available for leavers securing full-time employment is for the period September 1991 to August 1992 and is set out in the table. I encourage the training and enterprise councils to continue to improve performance in training for young people and the unemployed.

Percentage of leavers[1] going into full-time employment[2]

TEC	*Youth training[3]*	*Employment training*
Mid Glamorgan	43	34
South Glamorgan	38	26
Gwent	37	32
Powys	[4]n/a	38
North East Wales	66	22
North West Wales	[4]n/a	[4]n/a
West Wales	32	32
Wales	40	34

Source: YT and ET national follow-up surveys.

Notes:

[1] All leavers from September 1991 to August 1992—the latest available 12 months.

[2] Full-time work including self employment.

[3] Includes youth credits.

[4] n/a: Too few responses to give a reliable figure.

Job Vacancies

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many vacancies there were for jobs in service sector industries in each of the last 12 months in each county in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

(2) how many vacancies there were for jobs in manufacturing sector industries in each of the last 12 months in each county in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: This information, for those months for which data are available, can be accessed on-line by the staff of the Library of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Lait: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the working of the common fisheries policy; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Article 38 of the treaty of Rome provides for a common fisheries policy (CFP). The CFP is principally concerned with managing and sustaining a limited resource in the common interest of all member states.

The United Kingdom benefits from the CFP. The 1983 settlement, which established it, took good account of United Kingdom interests. We secured 37 per cent. of the quotas for the seven main species caught in the North European waters, a figure higher than our historical level of catches, and we reduced the access rights of other member states on our coastal waters by nearly three quarters.

The CFP is subject to continuing assessment by the EC Fisheries Council and in order to fulfil its treaty of Rome requirements it continues to evolve and change when circumstances make this desirable. Improvements in the CFP, notably involving strategies for conservation, were introduced in the mid-term review of the CFP, which was brought to a successful conclusion at the end of 1992 under the United Kingdom Presidency. In last month's Council of Fisheries Ministers, agreement was reached on a new control regulation which will provide for better and more effective enforcement. This regulation is due to take effect on 1 January 1994 and will significantly strengthen the Commission's powers to ensure that Community rules are properly implemented in all member states.

To be effective the CFP must include measures to prevent over-exploitation. Without such measures fish stocks would decline, which would be in no-one's long-term interest. Inevitably controls on fishing are unwelcome to fishermen. I understand that and will continue to defend United Kingdom interests in negotiations on the CFP while recognising the need for an effective CFP which is equitably applied and enforced in all Member States. I do not support calls for the United Kingdom to take unilateral action or withdraw from the CFP.

Market Testing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much the market-testing programme has cost her Department since November 1992.

Mr. Jack: Over the period November 1992 to date the Department's market testing programme is estimated to have cost some £546,000 including external consultancy support.

Live animals (Transport)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are being taken to ensure the transport of live animals from the United Kingdom to the EC is conducted in a humane fashion; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1992 places controls on the transport of animals to safeguard their welfare during all journeys, including those to destinations in other EC member states.

Horses and Cattle (Diseases)

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what would be the estimated cost of reimbursing owners of horses and cattle testing sero-positive to equine viral arteritis and foot and mouth disease;

(2) whether she will be authorising compensation to be paid to the injured parties for all direct and consequential losses arising from her Department's import checking procedures in connection with each incident of equine viral arteritis;

(3) whether she will authorise compensation to be paid for direct and consequential losses arising from the importation of cattle testing sero-positive to foot and mouth disease.

Mrs. Shephard: The Ministry has no legal obligation nor statutory authority to pay any form of compensation in these circumstances, which is a commercial matter between the owners, importers and exporters.

Abattoirs

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many abattoirs operating in England and Wales conform fully to EC standards;

(2) how many authorised abattoirs operating in England and Wales currently fail to conform to EC standards; and by what date full conformity with these standards will be required.

Mr. Soames: In England and Wales 65 abattoirs fully comply with the EC standards, and 352 abattoirs are operating under temporary derogations from some of the EC structural standards. All premises comply in full with the hygiene standards. Temporary derogations may run for a three-year period up to 31 December 1995, but many premises are scheduled to complete upgrading work well before this date.

Fish Farms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fish farms use waste water generated by power stations.

Mr. Jack: There are currently two fish farms using water warmed by waste heat from power stations on the register of fish farm businesses held by Fisheries Departments.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Council Tax

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will change the current practice of taking each £250 of savings in excess of £3,000 to represent £1 of income per week when calculating council tax rebates for pensioners.

Mr. Burt: The rules on the treatment of capital are kept under review, but we have no plans to change the present arrangements.

Sickness and Invalidity Benefit

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of people currently claiming invalidity benefit are women; and what percentage of these women head single-parent households.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested.

At 30 March 1991, the latest date for which information is available, 25 per cent. of invalidity benefit claimants were women[1].

There is no information available on what percentage of women claimants head single-parent households.

[1] Figure based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were found to be fraudulently claiming invalidity benefit in each year since 1980; and if he will give the figure so far for 1993.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the number of people claiming *(a)* sickness and *(b)* invalidity benefit for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Scott: Available information about the numbers claiming sickness and invalidity benefits is in the table.

Date	*Sickness benefit claimants*[2]	*Invalidity benefit claimants*
29 May 1982	469,000	684,000
2 April 1983	408,000	737,000
31 March 1984	[3]247,000	797,000
30 March 1985	225,000	849,000
5 April 1986	237,000	899,000
4 April 1987	[3]187,000	968,000
2 April 1988	228,000	1,047,000
1 April 1989	266,000	1,126,000
31 March 1990	309,000	1,209,000
30 March 1991	372,000	1,306,000
1991-92[4]	120,000	1,365,000
1992-93[4]	135,000	1,490,000

Notes:

[1] Figures based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants, at a point in time, rounded to the nearest thousand.

[2] Figures include claimants who are not receiving sickness benefit but receive national insurance credits.

[3] Statutory sick pay introduced from 6 April 1983 for a maximum eight weeks sickness absence in a tax year. From 6 April 1986 statutory sick pay was payable for up to 28 weeks in any one period of incapacity for work.

[4] Information is not yet available for later than March 1991. For 1991-92 and 1992-93 figures come from the estimates appearing in the departmental report 1993.

Quangos (Appointments)

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the former Members of the House who have been appointed since 1988 by his Department to quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations; and if he will list in each case the title of the post, the salary, the duration of the appointment, and the party which the former hon. Member represented.

Mr. Hague: None to those bodies listed in "Public Bodies 1992".

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department since 1988 to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, and salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for a large number of public appointments. The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Income Statistics

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the total weekly income including benefits of *(a)* a single unemployed person aged 21 years and paying £40 a week in rent and *(b)* a student of the same age on full grant and loan paying the same rent.

Mr. Burt: On the assumption that insufficient contributions had been paid to give title to unemployment benefit, a lone, unemployed 21-year-old with a rent liability of £40 per week would normally be entitled to income support of £34·80 per week and would, through housing benefit, receive up to 100 per cent. of his rent, less any ineligible items. This equates to about £74·80 per week.

A 21-year-old student following a full-time course of higher education, but otherwise in the same circumstances, would not normally be eligible for income support or housing benefit but would receive support through the educational maintenance system. During the period of study the standard maintenance grant outside London, for the coming academic year, equates to £59·60 per week over 38 weeks, with income available from the full-year student loan of £15·38 per week. This equates to about £74·98 per week.

In addition, if a student in higher education faces particular financial difficulties he may be able to receive assistance from the access funds. The access funds are administered on a discretionary basis by the educational establishments.

It is not possible to estimate students' income during the long vacation because some students will find work during that period.

Maxwell Pension Funds

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest position in relation to the recovery of Maxwell pension funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: The liquidators of Bishopsgate Investment Management Ltd., which managed Maxwell pension scheme funds, have located and secured assets presently worth some £300 million. The Maxwell pension scheme trustees are now cautiously optimistic about meeting their pension liabilities in full in the long term. Much now depends on claims against third parties. Sir John Cuckney and the Maxwell pensions unit are encouraging all concerned to an early resolution of disputes. They are available to facilitate this process with the consent of the parties concerned.

Mais Lecture

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to publish the analysis and projection of social security provision to which he referred in his Mais lecture on 23 June.

Mr. Lilley: I will publish a document entitled "The Growth of Social Security" on Thursday 8 July. It contains the analysis of the growth of social security provision and projections up to the end of the century prepared in the course of the Government's long-term review of social security. It will be sent to all right hon. and hon. Members. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Child Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the cost would be of disregarding child benefit in the calculation for income support and family credit.

Mr. Burt: It is estimated that the cost of disregarding child benefit in income support would be £1,490 million. Child benefit is already disregarded in family credit. Disregarding child benefit in all the income-related benefits would cost around £1,680 million.

SCOTLAND

West Coast Main Line

16. **Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will next meet the Scottish director of British Rail (ScotRail) to discuss the job implications for Scotland of future decisions on the west coast main line.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Regular contact is maintained with British Rail by Scottish Office Ministers and officials. Such contacts cover a wide range of topics relating to rail services in Scotland.

25. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the British Rail main line coast services; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has received a small number of representations about rail services on the west coast main line. Responsibility for railway matters however lies with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. The detailed operation of the railways, including the precise level of services to be offered on individual lines, is a matter for British Rail.

Stobhill Hospital

17. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many acute bed places were available in Stobhill hospital during the months of November 1992, December 1992 and January 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: For each month during the period November 1992 and January 1993 there were between 191 and 193 acute beds available at Stobhill hospital.

Crown Estate Commissioners

18. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to give directions to the Crown estate commissioners as to the discharge of their functions in relation to fish farming in Scotland under section 1(4) of the Crown Estate Act 1961; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend has no plans to give directions to the Crown Estate Commissioners as to the discharge of their functions in relation to fish farming in Scotland. These responsibilities have been reviewed most recently by the Agriculture Select Committee. Following that report, the Scottish Office issued draft guidance on the location of marine fish farms, which was widely welcomed.

Rented Housing

19. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he will take to encourage the provision of low cost rented housing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am already encouraging considerable investment in low cost rented housing through the Government's funding of Scottish Homes. Over 70 per cent. of its development programme, amounting to some £230 million, will be spent in the current financial year on the provision of rented accommodation through the housing association and co-operative movement. This investment will result in over 5,000 new house starts in 1993-94.

Scottish Enterprise

20. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise to discuss the underlying trends in the Scottish economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: As I have indicated to the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), my right hon. Friend and I frequently meet the chairman and chief executive of Scottish Enterprise to discuss a range of issues relevant to the Scottish economy. I am pleased to note that independent forecasters continue to predict that the present recovery in Scottish output will be sustained. I am also delighted that unemployment has fallen over the past four months. We continue to have an unemployment rate significantly below the United Kingdom average.

Economy, Lanarkshire

21. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the Lanarkshire economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend has received no recent representations regarding the Lanarkshire economy.

Health and Education Spending

22. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the spending per head on *(a)* health and *(b)* education in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: The latest available figures for identifiable general government expenditure are for 1991-92. They show spending in Scotland of £787 per head on health and personal social services and £646 per head on education.

Timex

23. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to meet representatives of Timex Electronics Corporation to discuss the grants made to its plant in Dundee.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend has met senior Timex management twice in recent weeks.

Following the announcement of the Dundee factory's closure the company and the Scottish Office Industry Department have discussed grant assistance made to the plant.

Local Authority Services

24. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further steps he is taking to encourage local authorities to deliver high quality, low cost services.

Mr. Stewart: The Government are committed to the provision of high quality, low cost local services and have taken a number of steps to achieve this. These include:

- our plans to reform the structure of local government;
- the introduction of the citizens charter, the principles of which my right hon. Friend hopes will be adopted by all authorities;
- the requirement that authorities subject certain services to competitive tendering;
- support for action by the Accounts Commission to improve value for money in Scottish local government;
- the provisions in the Local Government Act 1992 requiring local authorities to publish their standards of performance in delivering services in the light of a direction issued by the Accounts Commission.

Timeshare

26. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the imposition of business rates on timeshare dwellings.

Mr. Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 31 March 1993 at col. *153*.

In the period from 27 March, we have received representations concerning the regulations from a further 49 Members of Parliament and 228 other individuals.

Forestry

27. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Government's review of the future of forestry policy in the United Kingdom.

Sir Hector Monro: The review which my right hon. Friend announced on 30 March 1993 is progressing well, although it is still at an early stage in its task. As part of that review the Forestry Commission has issued a consultation paper seeking views on the effectiveness of the current incentives for forestry investment.

28. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received about the Government's forestry review.

36. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding his review of the options for the ownership and management of Forestry Commission woodlands.

Sir Hector Monro: Over 500 letters have been received offering comment on the work of the review which my right hon. Friend established on 30 March. Comment has come from all quarters, including hon. Members, organisations with interests in forestry, timber production, the environment and the recreational uses of forests.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider extending the review group on the Forestry Commission to include a representative from a conservationist group; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The Forestry Review group already includes representatives from the Department of the Environment, the Welsh Office and the Scottish Office which are the Government Departments with responsibility for nature conservation. In addition, the chairman and secretariat are provided by the Scottish Office Environment Department.

The review group is working to a remit which requires it to make proposals for changes which would improve the effectiveness of the delivery of the Government's forestry policy objectives, having regard to the Government's other economic and environmental policies. Concern for nature conservation is an integral component of existing forestry policy.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what groups have been called on by the forestry review group to give external advice and assistance; and if he will put copies of their submissions in the Library.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 24 June 1993]:* The Forestry Commission has asked Canopy Consultants to carry out an environmental survey of a sample of private woodlands which have received grant aid during the last 15 years. This survey will inform the review of the effectiveness of current incentives for forestry investment which is part of the work of the forestry review group. No other groups have been asked for external advice or assistance.

There are no plans to publish the Canopy Consultants report in advance of the review group making its report to Ministers.

Local Government

29. **Mr. Kynoch:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the new single-tier local authorities in Scotland to be up and running.

Mr. Stewart: Subject to the necessary legislation being in place, it is intended that elections to the new authorities

should be held in spring 1995, with the new councils assuming responsibility from existing authorities on 1 April 1996.

Status Definitions

30. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the European Community to discuss objective 1 and objective 5b status definitions of areas in Scotland; and if he will make a statement on progress.

Mr. Stewart: Negotiations on revised regulations for the EC structural funds made excellent progress on 3 July, thanks to the considerable efforts of United Kingdom negotiators and in particular my right hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Department of Trade and Industry.

I am very pleased that, subject to final agreement in the Council later this month, the whole of the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area will now be granted objective 1 status. This demonstrates the advantage for Scotland of relying on the considerable weight which the United Kingdom as a whole can bring to bear in EC negotiations.

The process of designating objective 5b areas in Scotland will begin as soon as the regulations have been adopted. It is as yet too early to say what areas might qualify.

Fishing Industry

31. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further representations he has received from west coast fishermen about fishing quotas and days at sea.

Sir Hector Monro: I receive regular representations from west coast fishermen and their representative organisations on these and other issues.

Engineering Industry

32. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on employment, export and manufacturing order figures for the engineering sector in Scotland for the most recent quarter for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The most recent census of employment, carried out in September 1991, identified a total of 104,900 employees in the engineering sector in Scotland. Official figures on exports and manufacturing orders are not disaggregated on a regional or national basis.

There are encouraging signs of an increase in confidence in the Scottish engineering sector, and many companies have reported an increase in total orders as well as export sales.

Water Fluoridation

33. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for the fluoridation of public water supplies.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend regrets that Strathclyde Regional Council has decided not to proceed with fluoridation, despite the potential benefits to dental health and the strong support for fluoridation expressed by the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden among others. The Department stands ready to consider providing assistance to the capital costs involved when and as decisions to fluoridate water supplies are taken locally.

Renewables Order

34. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 21 April, *Official Report*, column 113, when he now expects to publish the Scottish renewables order; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: I have nothing to add to the answer given to the hon. Member on 21 April 1993 at column. 113.

Prosecutions

35. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the criteria used by the Lord Advocate in deciding whether a prosecution is in the public interest.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is not possible to list the criteria for deciding whether the public interest requires a prosecution in a particular case. The prosecutor considers whether there is sufficient reliable evidence and whether, having regard to all the relevant factors, the circumstances make a prosecution appropriate.

National Health Service Trusts

37. **Dr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospitals have been granted trust status.

Mr. Stewart: Seventeen NHS trusts are now operational in Scotland.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all appointments made as chairmen, members, chairmen designate and members designate of all NHS trusts and trusts designate as at 30 June.

Mr. Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) on 22 June 1993 at columns *145-56*. No further appointments were made up to 30 June 1993.

Licensing Hours

38. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to introduce legislation to change the licensing hours in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Liquor licensing hours in Scotland were amended by Part III of the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1990 following a consultative review of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976; no further changes are proposed at present.

River Clyde

39. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about funding for the dredging of the River Clyde.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It remains the Government's policy that port authorities, including Clyde Port Ltd, should manage their businesses on a commercial basis and that the costs of dredging should be met by charges to the users of ports, or by other parties who benefit from the dredging.

Episiotomies

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the frequency of episiotomies in maternity units in all health board areas since 1983.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not held centrally.

Wheelchairs (Children)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list per health board and trust board area the average waiting time for physically handicapped children to be *(a)* measured for and *(b)* supplied with wheelchairs adapted to their needs.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is not available.

The five artificial limb and appliance centres responsible for the supply and maintenance of wheelchairs in Scotland have been asked by my noble Friend the Minister of State to collect this information in future in respect of all new wheelchair patients.

Speech Therapists

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list per health board and trust board area the number of full-time *(a)* occupational and *(b)* speech therapists employed in paediatric services.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is not held centrally.

Special Educational Needs

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by regional council areas the length of time taken by education departments to open a record of need for children with *(a)* physical and *(b)* special learning needs; and what is the average time for completion of such records.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not collected centrally. However, a research report (Children with Special Educational Needs: Thomson et al: August 1989) showed that in Scotland just over half of all Records of Needs are completed in under six months and nearly three-quarters within eight months.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the existing school rolls in Scotland has been identified as involving children with special educational needs over each of the past five years; and if he will give a breakdown per regional education department.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the percentage of education authority school pupils for whom a record of needs was opened and in force in terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, as amended, is shown in the table.

Percentage of pupils in education authority schools and departments with a record of needs as at September 1988-92[1]

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Scotland	1·0	1·0	1·1	1·2	1·3
Borders	1·3	1·1	1·2	1·4	1·7
Central	1·2	1·1	1·2	1·3	1·5
Dumfries and Galloway	1·0	1·0	1·3	1·2	1·4
Fife	0·8	0·8	0·8	0·8	0·9
Grampian	1·1	1·1	1·2	1·2	1·3
Highland	1·5	1·4	1·5	1·6	1·7
Lothian	0·6	0·6	0·6	0·6	0·7
Strathclyde	1·1	1·1	1·2	1·4	1·5
Tayside	0·7	0·5	0·7	0·7	0·9
Orkney	0·4	0·6	0·5	0·7	0·7
Shetland	0·6	0·5	0·7	0·7	0·7
Western Isles	0·6	0·6	0·7	0·6	0·8

[1] Excluding nursery schools and departments.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the existing school rolls in Scotland have had records of needs *(a)* opened and *(b)* completed in each of the past five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total number and percentage of children attending education authority schools (excluding nursery) in Scotland with records of needs at September in the last five years is:

Year	*Number of pupils with record of needs*	*Percentage of school roll*
1988	7,628	1·0
1989	7,236	1·0
1990	7,998	1·1
1991	8,669	1·2
1992	9,660	1·3

Information on how many of these records were opened within any particular year is not collected, but a recent research report (Children with Special Educational Needs: Policy and Provision: Thomson et al: August 1989) showed that 950 records were opened in 1988, which equalled the average for the two preceding years.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment has been made of the number of children with speech and language difficulties in Scotland; and how many of these attend residential schools *(a)* in Scotland and *(b)* furth of Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In 1991, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,949 children with records of needs had language and communication difficulties, though these would not necessarily be a child's sole or main learning difficulty. Sixty seven pupils attended residential special schools in Scotland. The number of those attending residential schools furth of Scotland is not held centrally.

Council House Sales

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will publish details of the regional breakdown for the successful applications for the local authority mortgage-to-rent scheme;

(2) how many applications have been received in Scotland for the local authority mortgage-to-rent scheme; how many of these applications have been successful; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities are able to operate mortgage-to-rent schemes on a voluntary basis. The information requested is not held centrally.

Mortgages

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact of the recent announcement relating to negative equity on housing mortgages in Scotland; if he will publish details of this assessment; and how many mortgagors in Scotland have taken advantage of the regulation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The problem of negative equity is less pronounced in Scotland than in other regions of the United Kingdom, affecting only an estimated 1 per cent. of recent home buyers. It is open to anyone in that position to discuss their situation with their mortgage lender.

Swimming

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether his Department, in conjunction with the Scottish Consultative Committee for the Curriculum will conduct a survey into existing provisions for the tuition of swimming and water awareness in Scottish primary schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 23 June 1993]:* I have no plans to carry out such a survey. The responsibility for provision of swimming tuition and water awareness in Scottish primary schools rests with local authorities. The Government published national guidelines in 1992 on expressive arts for five to 14-year-olds for use by schools. This sets out guidance on the provision of physical education including swimming and water safety. Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools monitors the provision of education in primary schools.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funding support his Department has given in each of the last three financial years for the promotion of swimming and water safety education in Scotland.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 23 June 1993]:* Responsibility for swimming and water safety generally rests with Scottish local authorities in respect of swimming and water facilities which they operate. Safety at private sector swimming and water facilities rests with the operators in terms of their duties under the Health and Safety at Work, &c. Act 1974. Responsibility for water safety education in schools rests with the education authorities and headteachers. The Scottish Office Education Department issued in June 1992 programme guidelines on expressive arts for five to 14-year-olds which includes recognition of the importance of swimming and water safety education.

Health Boards

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what have been the salary and wage costs for each health board for each financial year from 1988-89, in respect of *(a)* general and senior managers, *(b)* administration and clerical staff, *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff, *(d)* medical staff, *(e)* ancillary staff and *(f)* all other staff; and what has been the total cost of each category to the NHS.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is given in the following tables. Details have been taken from health boards' annual accounts. General and senior managers costs are not held separately but are included within the administration and clerical staff category. Figures for 1992-93 are not yet available.

1988-89 (£000)

	Administration and Clerical	*Nursing and Midwifery*	*Medical*	*Ancillary*	*Other*	*Total*
Argyll and Clyde	9,430	54,966	11,997	10,954	10,656	98,003
Ayrshire and Arran	6,667	39,423	9,357	8,657	9,360	73,464
Borders	1,911	13,459	2,594	2,417	2,707	23,088
Dumfries and Galloway	2,897	21,722	4,248	4,410	4,333	37,610
Fife	5,747	39,744	8,094	7,727	8,241	69,553
Forth Valley	5,133	39,433	7,115	7,250	7,882	66,813
Grampian	11,263	68,392	17,523	13,750	14,316	125,244
Greater Glasgow	27,357	174,308	55,024	38,742	48,508	343,939
Highland	4,345	29,741	7,044	5,072	6,435	52,637
Lanarkshire	8,205	61,555	14,933	13,887	13,208	111,788
Lothian	18,674	111,384	35,056	22,827	29,938	217,879
Orkney	266	2,555	302	445	337	3,905
Shetland	362	2,903	347	499	680	4,791
Tayside	11,031	67,829	17,642	16,927	15,969	129,398
Western Isles	556	3,992	676	809	961	6,994
Total	113,844	731,406	191,952	154,373	173,531	1,365,106

Note: "Other" includes dental staff, professions allied to medicine, other technicians, tradesmen and engineers, pharmacists, opticians and chaplains.

1989-90 (£000)

	Administration and Clerical	*Nursing and Midwifery*	*Medical*	*Ancillary*	*Other*	*Total*
Argyll and Clyde	10,589	58,427	12,942	11,140	11,583	104,651
Ayrshire and Arran	7,655	42,854	10,186	8,924	10,157	79,776
Borders	2,217	14,664	2,986	2,444	2,978	25,289
Dumfries and Galloway	3,275	23,266	4,491	4,385	4,487	39,904
Fife	6,674	42,636	8,922	7,150	8,942	74,324
Forth Valley	5,905	41,912	7,795	7,290	8,527	71,429
Grampian	12,837	73,941	19,521	12,279	15,884	134,462
Greater Glasgow	31,142	185,296	59,792	31,946	51,533	359,709
Highland	5,005	31,746	7,797	5,073	7,047	56,668

	Administration and Clerical	Nursing and Midwifery	Medical	Ancillary	Other	Total
Lanarkshire	9,325	65,524	16,150	13,609	14,489	119,097
Lothian	21,668	116,645	37,983	20,067	32,441	228,804
Orkney	298	2,765	328	457	389	4,237
Shetland	471	3,018	405	559	731	5,184
Tayside	12,311	72,057	19,008	16,956	17,228	137,560
Western Isles	483	4,170	671	787	1,040	7,351
Total	130,055	778,921	208,977	143,066	187,426	1,448,445

Note: "Other" includes dental staff, professions allied to medicine, other tradesmen and engineers, pharmacists, opticians and chaplains.

1990-91 (£000's)

	Administration and Clerical	Nursing and Midwifery	Medical	Ancillary	Other	Total
Argyll and Clyde	12,064	62,540	13,931	10,845	12,732	112,112
Ayrshire and Arran	8,849	46,665	11,442	9,306	11,208	87,470
Borders	2,576	15,522	3,201	2,600	3,196	27,095
Dumfries and Galloway	3,919	25,098	5,324	4,550	4,948	43,839
Fife	8,047	46,572	9,719	7,173	10,273	81,784
Forth Valley	7,016	45,457	8,438	7,549	9,320	77,780
Grampian	14,963	79,033	21,825	11,642	17,103	144,566
Greater Glasgow	36,734	194,991	64,174	27,922	54,851	378,672
Highland	6,086	34,467	8,524	5,198	7,990	62,265
Lanarkshire	11,246	71,325	17,324	12,933	15,913	128,741
Lothian	24,765	123,594	41,180	16,780	35,068	241,387
Orkney	402	3,052	382	496	444	4,776
Shetland	653	3,286	411	616	810	5,776
Tayside	14,421	77,900	20,265	17,697	19,115	149,398
Western Isles	805	4,591	818	795	1,212	8,221
Total	152,546	834,093	226,958	136,102	204,183	1,553,882

Note: "Other" includes dental staff, professions allied to medicine, other technicians, tradesmen and engineers, pharmacists, opticians and chaplains.

1991-92 (£000)

	Administration and Clerical	Nursing and Midwifery	Medical	Ancillary	Other	Total
Argyll and Clyde	14,178	69,888	15,663	11,283	14,522	123,534
Ayrshire and Arran	10,118	50,042	13,395	10,098	13,315	96,968
Borders	2,105	16,971	3,577	2,135	3,150	27,938
Dumfries and Galloway	4,277	27,745	5,474	4,732	4,616	46,844
Fife	9,508	50,734	11,729	7,784	11,386	91,141
Forth Valley	8,381	50,044	9,536	8,026	10,575	86,562
Grampian	17,061	87,057	25,528	12,364	18,293	160,303
Greater Glasgow	41,749	207,025	71,012	28,501	59,172	407,459
Highland	7,263	38,328	9,695	5,660	9,375	70,321
Lanarkshire	13,350	78,837	19,518	10,849	17,172	139,726
Lothian	28,451	135,489	45,439	16,317	39,176	264,872
Orkney	480	3,563	425	545	506	5,519
Shetland	770	3,650	545	709	886	6,560
Tayside	17,108	85,761	24,333	16,678	21,378	165,258
Western Isles	919	5,192	929	866	1,465	9,371
Total	175,718	910,326	256,798	136,547	224,987	1,704,376

Note: "Other" includes dental staff, professions allied to medicine, other technicians, tradesmen and engineers, pharmacists, opticians and chaplains.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all health board members and the names or organisation of those who nominated them.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* All non-executive members of health boards are listed below with the names of nominating bodies if any. A number of members were appointed after applying personally or after consultation with the health board concerned.

	Nominating organisation if any
Argyll and Clyde Health Board	
Mrs. E. S. Lander	CBI
Mrs. J. C. Le Roux	Cancer Research Committee
Mr. C. H. Parker, OBE	CBI
Mr. M. D. Jones	Renfrewshire Enterprise Ltd.
Dr. J. Moffat	Royal College of Psychiatrists
Mrs. S. Nelson	—
Ayrshire and Arran Health Board	
Dr. K. G. Fegan	—
Mr. J. H. Greene	—
Miss M. W. Grosset	—
Miss K. A. Paterson	—

	Nominating organisation if any
Mrs. E. Reid	—
Mr. W. Young	—
Borders Health Board	
Miss M. C. M. Marshall	Scottish Association for Mental Health
Mr. J. P. Metcalfe	—
Rev. A. G. Bennett	—
Dr. A. G. P. Paton	BMA
Lady F. E. Sanderson	Borders Local Health Council
Mr. H. S. U. Steven	—
Dumfries and Galloway Health Board	
Mr. H. S. McFadzean	—
Mrs. J. D. Tulloch	Western Joint Ophthalmic Committee
Dr. A. P. D. Wilkinson	BMA
Mrs. V. M. I. Jardine-Paterson	—
Dr. J. R. C. Stubbs	BMA
Mrs. M. J. Thomson	—
Fife Health Board	
Dr. A. G. A. Alexander	—
Mr. F. J. R. Craig	—
Mr. G. M. Thomson	—
Mrs. S. L. Aitken	—
Mrs. C. Stenhouse	—
Mrs. M. Steedman, OBE	—
Forth Valley Health Board	
Mr. E. T. M. Bell-Scott	—
Dr. G. B. Hastings	Strathclyde University
Mrs. K. A. Smith	WRVS
Mr. K. Harding	—
Mr. P. A. Joynson	Scottish Branch, British Red Cross Society
Mr. C. S. R. Stroyan	—
Grampian Health Board	
Mrs. J. G. A. Wisely, JP	Women into Public Life Campaign
Mrs. C. I. Ferguson	—
Professor D. Ogston	University of Aberdeen
Mr. J. K. O. Arbuthnott	—
Mr. G. McLellan	—
Mrs. E. M. L. Park	—
Greater Glasgow Health Board	
Mr. P. W. Holst	BMA; Western Joint Ophthalmic Committee
Mr. W. C. McCreath	—
Mr. A. Sobbie	—
Rev. R. D. M. Campbell	—
Mr. H. L. I. Runciman, CBE	—
Mrs. Joan S. Mackenzie	—
Professor R. M. Mackie	University of Glasgow
Highland Health Board	
Mr. J. G. Ligertwood	—
Mrs. A. MacPherson	Ross and Cromarty Council of Voluntary Service
Mrs. C. Thomson	Ross and Cromarty Local Health Council
Dr. J. D. MacDonald	BMA
Mr. D. J. Mackay	CBI
Mr. C. Neilson, JP	Lochaber District Council; Lochaber Local Health Council
Lanarkshire Health Board	
Dr. W. R. Criggie	—
Mrs. A. S. Hinshalwood	—
Mr. J. P. Robison, JP	Strathclyde Regional Council
Mrs. M. Melvin	Lanarkshire Local Health Council
Mr. D. A. Millar	—
Mr. J. Thomson, MBE	Voluntary Association for Mental Welfare
Lothian Health Board	
Mr. J. A. Campbell	—
Mr. R. Findlay	—
Councillor Mrs. M. B. M. Knox	—
Professor R. C. B. Aitken	University of Edinburgh
Mrs. G. Barton	Lothian Regional Council; Edinburgh District Council
Mr. G. S. Millar	Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain
Orkney Health Board	
Mr. J. Flett	—
Mr. E. M. Gibson, MBE	—
Mr. J. Rendall	Voluntary Services, Orkney
Captain M. Gunn	CBI
Mrs. E. Kerr	Orkney Local Health Council
Dr. J. S. Walker	BMA
Shetland Health Board	
Mrs. M. U. Colligan	Shetland Islands Council
Squadron Leader B. P. Gregson	—
Mr. R. L. Johnson	—
Mrs. T. A. Leslie	—
Dr. M. D. Hunter	BMA
Mr. J. Telford	—
Tayside Health Board	
Rev. K. Campbell	—
Mr. D. W. M. Davidson, JP	Area Pharmaceutical Committee
Mrs. V. Joiner	Dundee and Tayside Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Mr. H. C. Nicoll	—
Professor R. E. Olver	University of Dundee
Mr. I. Sandison	—
Western Isles Health Board	
Mrs. C. R. MacAskill	—
Mr. J. A. Harrison	—
Dr. S. M. Bryden	—
Mr. A. W. Hay	CBI
Mrs. F. T. M. MacDonald	Scottish Trades Union Congress
Mr. M. Maclennan	—

NHS Managers

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the average cost of employing each managerial staff member in the NHS for each financial year since 1988-89.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 30 June 1993]:* The information requested is not available centrally. From data for the earnings of around one third of managerial staff in Scotland, an approximate figure may be calculated for the average cost of employing a manager for each year since 1989-90 and this is shown in the table:

Estimated cost of employing a manager in the NHS in Scotland.

Year[1]	Average cost[2] (£000)
[3]1989-90	23·1
1990-91	25·6
1991-92	27·9
1992-93	28·0

[1] Information is not available for 1988-89.
[2] The cost includes all salary costs plus employers' contributions for superannuation and national insurance. The averages are based on general managers, senior managers and administrative and clerical grades 7-10 (grade 18 and above in 1989-90).
[3] 1989-90 data are estimated using the midpoint salary scales.

Home Improvement Grants

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial controls operate in connection with the payment to local authorities and the payment to claimants of home improvement grants in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 July 1993]:* Local authorities finance the payment of improvement and repairs grants from their annual non-housing revenue account capital allocations, the amounts of which are subject to the consent of the Secretary of State.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on housing improvement grants in Scotland including the total amount paid in the last five financial years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 July 1993]:* House improvement grants play an important part in maintaining the condition of the stock generally. Local authorities' expenditure on improvement grants is as follows:

Year	*Amount £ million*
1987-88	52·6
1988-89	59·9
1989-90	60·9
1990-91	51·7
1991-92	63·2

Expenditure on repairs, conversion and standard amenity grants have not been included in the figures given above. Expenditure on these grants in 1991-92 was £50·2 million.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Nurses' Pay

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the average gross weekly earnings and make-up of pay by type of pay or allowances for each of the clinical grades for nursing and midwifery staff in 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is provided in the tables.

Average gross weekly earnings for clinical nursing grades (full-time) in Northern Ireland

Clinical grade	*Gross pay £*	*Basic pay £*	*Allowances £*
1991-92			
Scale A	165·82	139·85	25·97
Scale B	179·30	158·45	20·85
Scale C	225·50	190·61	34·89
Scale D	235·97	200·78	35·19
Scale E	283·90	241·49	42·41
Scale F	329·66	284·24	45·42
Scale G	350·80	320·42	30·38
Scale H	380·62	353·46	27·16
Scale I	415·72	395·24	20·48
1992-93			
Scale A	179·12	151·01	28·11
Scale B	205·07	176·55	28·52
Scale C	242·84	205·49	37·35
Scale D	258·43	219·45	38·98
Scale E	303·88	258·20	45·68
Scale F	349·66	306·84	42·82
Scale G	380·61	348·46	32·15
Scale H	409·15	383·41	25·74
Scale I	446·17	428·20	17·97

Nursing Staff

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will give details of the numbers of unqualified national health service nursing staff joining the NHS in 1990, 1991 and 1992 who were *(a)* joining directly after completing full-time education, *(b)* aged under 21 years, *(c)* joining from other NHS units, *(d)* joining from other care sector employment, *(e)* joining from other employment, *(f)* joining from non-activity in the labour market and *(g)* joining from unemployment;

(2) if he will give details of the numbers of qualified nursing or midwifery staff joining the NHS in 1990, 1991 and 1992 who were *(a)* newly qualifying student nurses with employed status, *(b)* newly qualifying Project 2000 students, *(c)* registered nurses entering the NHS after a period of non-employment, *(d)* joined NHS units directly after being employed by another NHS unit and *(e)* joined NHS units directly after being employed in other nursing, such as general practitioner nursing, nursing homes, independent hospitals etc;

(3) if he will give details of the numbers of qualified, unqualified and learner nursing staff who joined the national health service in 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Ancram: The information sought is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the distribution of average gross weekly earnings per person for each of the national health service clinical nursing and midwifery grades, listing the percentages of each grade earning under £140, £150, £160, £170, £180, £190, £200, £210, £220, £230, £240, £250, £275, £300 and those earning £300 and over in 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is provided in the tables.

Percentage distribution of average gross weekly earnings for clinical nursing and midwifery grades in Northern Ireland 1991-92.

Clinical Grade	*Scale A Per cent.*	*Scale B Per cent.*	*Scale C Per cent.*	*Scale D Per cent.*	*Scale E Per cent.*	*Scale F Per cent.*	*Scale G Per cent.*	*Scale H Per cent.*	*Scale I Per cent.*
<140	11·9	05·1	02·3	10·8	01·5	01·8	00·6	01·1	00·0
<150	08·1	01·7	00·3	00·9	00·1	00·0	00·1	00·5	00·0
<160	15·5	12·8	00·3	00·6	00·1	00·0	00·2	00·0	00·0
<170	12·7	20·5	00·6	01·6	00·2	00·3	00·8	00·0	00·0
<180	18·9	14·5	01·5	01·7	00·1	00·0	01·1	00·0	00·0

Clinical Grade	Scale A Per cent.	Scale B Per cent.	Scale C Per cent.	Scale D Per cent.	Scale E Per cent.	Scale F Per cent.	Scale G Per cent.	Scale H Per cent.	Scale I Per cent.
<190	15·9	11·9	02·2	01·8	00·3	00·0	00·2	01·1	00·6
<200	06·5	10·2	05·0	02·1	00·3	00·3	00·2	01·1	00·6
<210	05·1	09·4	09·4	04·6	00·6	00·0	00·1	00·0	00·6
<220	03·1	03·4	11·6	12·8	00·5	00·3	00·0	00·0	00·0
<230	00·7	03·4	19·9	27·1	00·9	00·0	00·2	00·0	00·0
<240	00·6	01·7	21·0	31·0	01·8	00·9	00·3	00·0	00·0
<250	00·2	02·5	16·0	29·9	02·7	02·4	00·1	00·0	00·0
<275	00·1	00·8	11·4	47·1	21·1	02·1	00·7	00·0	00·6
<300	00·0	00·8	03·3	17·3	40·9	08·2	02·2	00·0	00·0
300+	00·1	00·8	00·6	9·4	27·9	83·5	92·6	95·9	97·2

[1] Totals may not add up due to rounding

Percentage distribution of average gross weekly earnings for clinical nursing and midwifery grades in Northern Ireland 1992-93.

Clinical Grade	Scale A Per cent.	Scale B Per cent.	Scale C Per cent.	Scale D Per cent.	Scale E Per cent.	Scale F Per cent.	Scale G Per cent.	Scale H Per cent.	Scale I Per cent.
<140	05·5	02·2	01·8	07·2	01·4	01·2	00·3	01·4	00·0
<150	03·1	00·5	00·1	00·5	00·1	00·0	00·1	00·0	00·0
<160	08·9	00·0	00·3	00·2	00·1	00·0	00·0	00·0	00·0
<170	15·7	07·4	00·3	00·5	00·3	00·6	00·0	00·0	00·0
<180	13·2	06·2	00·1	00·4	00·1	00·0	00·2	00·0	00·0
<190	17·2	17·7	00·5	00·8	00·1	00·0	00·0	00·0	00·0
<200	16·2	06·8	01·3	01·5	00·3	00·0	00·1	00·0	00·0
<210	08·1	10·8	02·7	02·3	00·3	00·0	00·1	00·0	00·0
<220	04·9	17·1	05·8	02·3	00·3	00·0	00·0	00·0	00·0
<230	03·7	12·5	09·7	05·6	00·3	00·3	00·1	00·0	00·0
<240	01·8	06·8	13·2	16·2	00·8	00·0	00·0	00·0	00·0
<250	00·6	05·1	21·4	28·4	00·8	00·0	00·0	00·4	00·0
<275	00·4	05·1	31·7	71·5	06·7	02·7	00·8	00·0	00·0
<300	00·0	00·5	08·5	36·0	22·6	04·6	00·4	00·9	00·0
300+	00·0	00·5	01·7	25·5	65·0	90·4	97·4	97·1	100·0

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the number of NHS nursing and midwifery staff by pay grades within the groups of senior nursing and midwifery staff, educational staff, clinical nursing and midwifery staff, learners, and other staff, and to list the number of Project 2000 nursing students, in 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992 and the percentage change between each year.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	1990	1991	Percentage Change	1992	Percentage Change
Senior nursing staff	78	66	−15·38	67	+0·01
Educational staff	298	300	+0·67	295	−1·67
Scale A	3,084	3,256	+5·58	3,177	−2·43
Scale B	318	463	+45·60	609	+31·53
Scale C	1,354	1,222	−9·75	1,137	−6·95
Scale D	4,034	4,415	+9·44	4,536	+2·74
Scale E	6,030	5,898	−2·19	5,711	−3·17
Scale F	453	446	−1·54	467	+4·70
Scale G	2,295	2,218	−3·35	2,117	−4·55
Scale H	184	224	+21·74	243	+8·48
Scale I	185	166	−10·27	156	−6·02
Student nursing	2,121	1,362	−35·78	631	−53·67
Project 2000 Student nurses	188	861	+358·00	1,441	67·40

Notes: Information for 1989 is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.
Project 2000 nurses scheme started in September 1990.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will give details of the total number and whole-time equivalent number of health care assistants or health care support workers employed wholly or primarily in nursing roles by the national health service in 1990, 1991 and 1992;

(2) if he will give details of the total number and whole-time equivalent numbers of health care assistants or health care support workers employed by the national health service in 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Ancram: There are no health care assistants or health care support workers employed in the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the whole-time equivalent numbers of *(a)* agency and *(b)* bank nursing and midwifery staff employed in the national health service for each year from 1987 to 1992.

Mr. Ancram: There are no agency nurses employed in the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland.

The numbers of bank nurses (whole-time equivalent) are:

	Number
1987	[1]—
1988	[1]—
1989	[1]—
1990	40·38
1991	47·40
1992	42·46

[1] Information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the numbers of qualified national health service nurses and midwives, unqualified NHS nursing staff, and nursing learners, and represent these as a percentage of the total NHS nursing and midwifery staff, for the years 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	1989		*1990*		*1991*		*1992*	
	WTE	*Percentage of total*	*WTE*	*Percentage of total*	*WTE*	*Percentage of total*	*WTE*	*Percentage of total*
Total nursing midwifery	18,096·12	100·0	17,996·93	100·0	17,526·67	100·0	16,554·05	100·0
Trained nursing	12,507·94	69·1	12,471·98	69·3	12,506·44	71·3	12,343·90	74·6
Student nursing	2,733·03	15·1	[1]2,578·24	14·3	[2]1,766·30	10·1	[3]942·40	5·7
Other nursing	2,855·15	15·8	2,946·71	16·4	3,253·93	18·6	3,267·75	19·7

Notes:
WTE = whole-time equivalents.
[1] Excludes 188 Project 2000 student nurses.
[2] Excludes 861 Project 2000 student nurses.
[3] Excludes 1,441 Project 2000 student nurses.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the numbers of entrants to initial pre-registration nursing education by course of study and by the academic qualifications possessed by entrants in 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Ancram: Details are as follows:

Number of pre-registered students by parts of register

Year[2]	*Part of register*[1]												
	1	*1/degree*	*3*	*5*	*7*	*8*	*1/8*	*10*	*11*	*12/degree*	*12*	*13*	*14*	*15*
1989	1,959	77	411	88	41	60	95	162	35	—	—	—	—	—
1990	1,937	811	415	101	—	31	126	153	23	—	—	—	—	—
1991	1,694	85	353	65	—	24	110	149	31	27	214	34	17	16
1992	1,221	38	262	62	—	15	94	139	30	59	627	122	58	45

[1] Register is the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting Register.
[2] At 31 March.
The information sought on academic qualifications is not held in a form that can be separately identifiable, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the numbers of whole-time equivalent national health service nursing and midwifery staff employed on each grade and pay point of the clinical grades, educational grades and senior nursing and midwifery pay spine in 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Ancram: Details of the number of whole-time equivalent nursing and midwifery staff are as follows:

	1991	*1992*
Senior nursing staff	74·11	65·00
Scale A	2,737·79	2,899·24
Scale B	226·68	342·47
Scale C	1,124·27	995·37
Scale D	3,448·58	3,798·34
Scale E	4,884·96	4,733·83
Scale F	430·92	419·23
Scale G	2,221·14	2,142·14
Scale H	183·40	223·40
Scale I	184·64	165·67
Educational grades	284·73	288·80

Note: Information for 1990 and details of nurses on pay points is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

National Health Service Staff

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the numbers of health service directly-employed staff by main staff group for each year from 1987 to 1992 and give the changes between each year and over the whole period in numbers and percentages.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

HPSS work force by staff group (whole-time equivalents)

Main Staff Groups	1988 Compared with 1987				1989 Compared with 1988			1990 Compared with 1989		
	1987	1988	Numbers	Per cent.	1989	Numbers	Per cent.	1990	Numbers	Per cent.
Medical	2,007·66	2,036·91	+20·25	+1·46	2,073·52	+36·51	+1·8	1,997·57	95·95	−4·63
Trained Nursing	12,293·16	12,581·10	+287·94	+2·34	12,507·94	−73·16	−0·58	12,471·98	−35·96	−0·29
Student Nursing	2,924·00	2,841·90	−82·10	−2·81	2,733·03	−108·87	−3·83	[1]1,678·24	−154·79	−5·66
Other Nursing	2,747·84	2,776·61	+28·77	+1·05	2,855·15	+78·54	+2·83	2,946·71	+91·56	+3·21
Paramedical	2,365·76	2,440·54	+74·78	+3·16	2,484·12	+43·58	+1·79	2,564·08	+69·96	+2·82
Admin and Clerical	5,787·98	5,944·29	+156·31	+2·70	6,257·90	+313·61	+5·28	6,748·95	+491·05	+7·85
Domestic and Allied	8,927·95	8,510·79	−417·16	−4·67	7,905·80	−604·99	−7·11	7,127·49	−778·31	−9·84
Tradesmen	951·61	927·00	−24·61	−2·59	913·00	−14·00	−1·51	878·00	−35·00	−3·83
Other Grades	611·73	596·97	−14·76	−2·41	556·78	−40·19	−6·73	526·78	−30·00	−5·39
Social Services	4,380·29	4,463·17	+82·88	+1·89	4,552·56	+89·39	+2·00	4,624·16	+71·60	+1·57
Dental	361·24	355·71	−5·53	−1·53	344·80	−10·91	−3·07	339·84	−4·96	−1·44
Pharmacy	235·09	237·60	+2·51	+1·07	247·70	+10·10	−4·25	250·39	+2·96	+1·09
Ambulance	579·25	575·75	−3·50	−0·60	567·84	−7·91	−1·37	588·43	+20·59	+3·63
Home Helps	2,965·81	2,758·82	−206·99	−6·98	2,703·14	−55·68	−2·02	2,373·48	−329·66	−12·20
Total	47,139·37	47,047·16	−92·21	−0·20	46,703·28	−343·88	−0·73	45,986·10	−717·18	−1·51

[1]Excludes 188 Project 2000 Student Nurses

HPSS work force by staff group (whole-time equivalents)

Main Staff Groups	1991 Compared with 1990			1992 Compared with 1991			1992 Compared with 1987	
	1991	Numbers	Per cent.	1992	Numbers	Per cent.	Numbers	Per cent.
Medical	2,027·22	+49·65	+2·51	1,943·82	−8·34	−4·11	+63·84	−3·18
Trained Nursing	12,506·44	+34·46	+0·28	12,343·90	−162·54	−1·30	+50·74	+0·41
Student Nursing	[1]1,786·30	−811·94	−31·49	[2]942·40	−823·9	46·65	−1,998·60	−67·77
Other Nursing	3,253·93	+307·22	+10·43	3,267·75	+13·82	+0·43	+519·91	+18·92
Paramedical	2,679·21	+125·13	+4·9	2,746·00	+66·79	+2·49	+380·24	+16·07
Admin and Clerical	7,379·17	+630·22	+9·34	7,632·45	+253·28	+3·43	+1,844·67	+31·87
Domestic and Allied	6,215·58	−911·91	−12·79	5,678·67	−536·91	−8·64	−3,249·28	−36·39
Tradesmen	839·00	−39·00	−4·44	801·00	−38·00	−4·53	−150·61	−15·83
Other Grades	476·85	−49·93	−9·48	480·15	+3·30	+0·69	−131·58	−21·51
Social Services	4,628·71	+4·55	+0·10	4,596·99	−31·72	−0·69	+216·70	+4·95
Dental	325·50	−14·34	−4·22	321·02	−4·48	−1·38	−40·22	−11·13
Pharmacy	255·11	+4·72	+1·89	253·88	−1·23	−0·48	+18·79	+7·99
Ambulance	579·75	−8·68	−1·48	673·24	+93·39	+16·13	+93·99	+16·23
Home Helps	2,268·62	−104·86	−4·42	2,085·85	−182·77	−8·06	−879·96	−29·67
Total	45,201·40	−784·70	−1·71	43,767·12	−1,434·28	−3·17	−3,372·25	−7·15

[1]Excludes 861 Project 2000 Student Nurses.
[2]Excludes 1,441 Project 200 Student Nurses.

Rural Housing Association

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many potential sites for rural housing developments in the eastern part of Northern Ireland have been identified by the Omagh-based Rural Housing Association; and if he will publish details.

Mr. Atkins: Rural Housing Association has identified four such sites at Glenarm, Armoy, Annalong and Strangford. The scheme at Glenarm for five units of general family housing is currently programmed to go on site in 1994-95. None of the other projects is yet in the association's three-year programme.

Criminal Injuries (Compensation)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what plans he has to establish a Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to determine compensation for people in Northern Ireland injured by terrorism;

(2) what plans he has to reduce recourse to the courts in cases of compensation for criminal injuries suffered by *(a)* civilians or *(b)* serving military personnel;

(3) if he will make it his policy to maintain the entitlement of serving military personnel injured by terrorist action in Northern Ireland to pursue in court within the normal rules for eligibility for legal aid claims against the Government for compensation.

Sir John Wheeler: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary proposes to issue a White Paper shortly outlining proposals for a new tariff-based compensation scheme in Great Britain. I will study the White Paper carefully before considering whether there are lessons to be learnt for Northern Ireland. If changes are, in consequence, proposed to the current Northern Ireland criminal injuries compensation scheme, I will then consult widely with all interested parties.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claims for compensation as a result of injuries caused to *(a)* civilians and *(b)* serving military personnel by terrorist action in Northern Ireland were settled (i) by judicial decision and (ii) out of court in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Sir John Wheeler: I am advised by the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Compensation Agency that the information requested is as follows:

	Settled by court (c)	Settled out of court
1992-93		
Civilians (a)	88	1,502
Military personnel (b)	3	153

Notes:
(a) Includes members of the RUC and RUC(R).
(b) Comprises Army and UDR/RIR (full and part-time).
(c) Settled by county courts and the High Court.

Local Enterprise Development Unit

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money has been written off in bad debt by LEDU since it was created.

Mr. Atkins: Since its creation in 1971 up to 31 March 1993, LEDU has written off a total of £6,241,640 in bad debt.

Fair Employment

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prosecutions have been brought under the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989; and if he will list the employers who have been prosecuted.

Mr. Atkins: At 2 July 1993, 53 prosecutions had been brought by the Fair Employment Commission under the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1989.

The list of employers who have been prosecuted is as follows:

Adamsez NI Ltd.
Aircraft Furnishing Ltd.
Allingham Transport
Anglo Beef Processors Ltd.
ATS Northern Ireland Ltd.
Audio Times Ltd.
Baird Joseph
Barret Electrical Contracts Ltd.
Business and Scientific Services Ltd.
Carna Transport (Ireland) Ltd.
Carr Charles
Circuits and Systems Design Ltd.
Connor Freight
Cootes (Concrete Products) Ltd.
Dennison Storage Ltd.
Devine B.
Dromore Properties Ltd.
Dunellen Ltd.
Fortfield Motors (Carrickfergus) Ltd.
Gordon Norman
Greenan Inns Ltd.
Hamilton Alex M. and Co. Ltd.
Hogg R. and Sons Ltd.
Hughes Joseph
Industrial Estates Management
Kernan (Compost) Ltd.
Knock Na Moe Hotel Ltd.
Laser Electrical Ltd.
Limavady Autopoint
Logan's Coach and Minibus
Loughside Garage Ltd.
Lovell and Christmas
McAnerney Sean
McLaughlin William and Sons Ltd.
McParland and Gordon Ltd.
Motorway Tyres and Accessories Ltd.
Moyola Glazing
Newington Cavehill Community Services
Otis Elevator plc
Quinn AA (Builders) Ltd.
Roulston and McLaughlin NI Ltd.
Sands and Toner (Newry) Ltd.
Square One Fashions Ltd.
Starplan Furniture
Tensator (NI) Ltd.
Tohani R. R. and Sons
Tracey Kitchens Ltd.
Turkington Raymond Decorations Ltd.
Turven Construction Ltd.
Universal Cleaning Supplies Ltd.
Wilson Liam
Wilson Robert
Wilsons of Rathkenny Ltd.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money has been written off by the IDB and its predecessors in bad debt since 1974.

Mr. Atkins: From 1982-83, when IDB was set up, to 1991-92 a total of £518·1 million has been written off in accordance with government accounting procedures. A substantial portion of this sum, including £414·9 million in respect of Harland and Wolff plc, relates to the voluntary waiver of claims as opposed to bad debts. It is not possible to provide precise, disaggregated figures for these two elements. In addition, in 1989-90, before responsibility for the company was transferred to IDB, the Department of Economic Development wrote off a waiver of £390 million in connection with the privatisation of Short Brothers plc. For the period prior to 1982-83 information in respect of IDB's predecessors is either not available in the form requested or cannot be sufficiently disaggregated to provide comparable figures.

Fair Employment

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those employers who have been debarred from public service contracts or from receiving Government grants under the provisions of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.

Mr. Atkins: Only one company, Dunellen Ltd., has been subject to disqualification under the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989. This disqualification was lifted after the company complied with its obligations under the Act.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration he has given to keeping figures for youth training participation in the London borough of Newham separately.

Miss Widdecombe: Training and enterprise councils (TECs) are required to provide information at four-weekly intervals of the number of young people in youth training. We have no plans to require information to be provided at a more local level.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment within what time it is guaranteed to find a youth training placement for each person who wants one.

Miss Widdecombe: Training and enterprise councils (TECs) are contractually required to offer entry into youth training (YT) for young people in the guarantee groups within certain specified periods of time.

For young people leaving school and registering for YT for the first time this summer, this will mean a start in training within the period up to the first working day in January (that is, no later than when their parents' entitlement to the extended child benefit runs out).

For those who have already been in YT or a job, the entitlement is the offer of a start in training within eight weeks of registering for YT with the Careers Service (that is, within the period for which they may be eligible to claim YT bridging allowance).

Full details of the entitlements of those covered by the YT guarantees are contained in clauses B7-15 of annex B to the TEC operating agreement 1993, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will increase the youth training allowances.

Miss Widdecombe: There are no set allowances for youth training. The Government provide a minimum allowance which I believe is sufficient to meet the normal requirements of trainees living in the parental home.

However, employers are the main beneficiaries of the Government's investment in training and are strongly encouraged to supplement trainee incomes.

In addition, trainees who live independently may apply for income support if they consider their income is insufficient to meet their needs.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people are seeking youth training for the second time.

Miss Widdecombe: Information on the total number of young people seeking youth training (YT) for the second time is not available. However, the latest information (June) on the number of 16 and 17-year-olds covered by the YT guarantee in England showed that 37 per cent. of those waiting for eight weeks or more had already had YT on one or more occasion.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many 16 and 17-year-olds in Nottinghamshire are without a job, or a place on a training scheme and are not in full-time education.

Miss Widdecombe: In April 1993 there were 358 unemployed claimants aged 16 and 17 years in the Nottinghamshire county.

Changes to the benefit regulations in September 1988 coincided with the extension of a guaranteed youth training scheme (YTS), now youth training (YT), place to all those aged under 18 not in full-time education or employment, which meant that those who declined an offer of a YTS place were no longer entitled to benefit. However, there are still a small number of under 18-year-olds entitled to benefit due to special circumstances, such as severe hardship or by virtue of their being orphans.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of young people leave youth training to enter full-time employment.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest figures show that 47 per cent. of all young people in Great Britain were in full-time employment six months after leaving youth training.

Quangos (Appointments)

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the former Members of this House who have been appointed since 1988 by his Department to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations; and if he will list in each case the title of the post, the salary, the duration of the appointment and the part which the former hon. member represented.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The following two appointments have been made:

Christopher Chope—Health and Safety Commissioner. Annual fee of £1,060 plus an attendance allowance of £105 for each fortnightly meeting attended. Appointment for three years from 1 April 1993. Former Conservative MP.

William S. Hilton—Employer Member to the Board of the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). (Also a member of the CITB Administration Committee.) Eligible for allowances for loss of remunerative time. Appointment for the period November 1984 to April 1990, (re-appointed in July 1988). Former Labour MP.

It is not possible on the grounds of disproportionate cost to include details of any appointments to the Committees for the Employment of People with Disabilities, the Industrial Tribunals, and the Employment Appeal Tribunal, with a total of over 2,250 appointees.

Job Clubs

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the expenditure of job clubs nationally, regionally and by area for 1992-93; and what is the budget for job clubs nationally, regionally and by area for 1993-94.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. M. Fogden to Mr. Ron Leighton, dated 7 July 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to him about the level of expenditure of Jobclubs nationally, regionally and by area for 1992-93; and the budget for Jobclubs nationally, regionally and by area for 1993-94. This is something which falls within the responsibilities he has delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The Jobclub programme is delivered by both external providers as well as internally by Jobcentre staff. This means I am unable to provide you with the total actual expenditure on Jobclubs for 1992-93 because we do not monitor internal expenditure by function. Most internal jobclubs are situated within a jobcentre and any expenditure will be set against the office cost of staffing, post and telecommunications etc. However, I am able to provide you with details of the total budget allocated. The tables attached provide this information together with details of the Jobclub budget for 1993-94.

As decided by the Administrative Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Job club budgets area information region by region

Area	*Budget allocation £ million* 1992-93	1993-94
Northern Region		
Cleveland	0·622	0·586
County Durham	0·405	0·534
South Tyne	0·918	1·116
North Tyne	0·679	0·840
Regional Office	0·019	0·018
Total	2·643	3·094
Yorkshire and Humberside Region		
Humberside	0·613	0·960
Sheffield and Rotherham	0·695	0·846
Leeds and North Yorkshire	0·622	0·824
Bradford	0·657	0·899
Wakefield	0·441	0·724
Regional Office	0·040	0·581
Total	3·068	4·834
East Midlands and Eastern region		
Norfolk and Suffolk	0·710	0·721
Nottinghamshire	0·851	1·192
Derbyshire	0·849	0·875
Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire	0·915	0·939
Leicestershire and Lincolnshire	1·057	1·113
Regional office	0·071	0·552
Total	4·453	5·392
London and South East region		
Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, North Buckinhamshire	0·860	1·475
Essex	0·805	1·873
Berkshire, Oxfordshire, South Buckinghamshire	0·676	1·233
Central London	0·859	0·967
North East London	0·766	1·012
East London	0·795	1·049
North London	0·971	1·557
North West London	0·716	1·124
Hampshire, Isle of Wight	0·992	1·358
Sussex and Surrey	0·963	1·832
Kent	1·112	2·163
West London	0·750	1·301
South East London	0·748	0·962
South London	0·826	1·430
South West London	0·931	1·396
Regional office	0·044	0·285
Total	12·814	21·017
South West Region		
Cornwall and Plymouth	0·631	0·981
Somerset and Dorset	0·544	0·907
Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	0·608	0·882
Devon	0·596	0·753
Avon	0·780	1·295
Regional office	0·026	0·034
Total	3·185	4·852
Office for Wales		
North Wales	0·460	0·471
South East Wales	0·665	0·754
Mid/South Wales	0·674	0·722
South West Wales	0·644	0·693
Office for Wales	0·013	0·013
Total	2·456	2·653
West Midlands Region		
Birmingham and Solihull	1·165	1·375
Coventry and Warwicks	0·747	0·935
Dudley and Sandwell	0·502	0·747
Wolverhampton and Walsall	0·549	0·850
Staffs	0·618	0·809
Marches	0·864	1·053
Regional Office	0·012	0·104
Total	4·457	5·873
North West Region		
Cheshire	0·817	0·989
Cumbria	0·264	0·430
Lancashire	0·798	1·088
Liverpool and Wirral	0·840	0·848
Manchester Central	0·793	0·913
Manchester East	0·621	0·758
Manchester West	0·751	1·006
Merseyside Outer	0·764	1·131
Regional Office	0·032	0·030
Total	5·680	7·113
Office for Scotland		
Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Inverclyde and Argyll	0·454	0·593
Glasgow North and Dunbarton	0·638	0·773
Glasgow South and Renfrew	0·591	0·815
Highlands Islands and Grampian	0·432	0·401
Lothian and Borders	0·440	0·751
Lanarkshire and Central	0·780	0·769
Tayside and Fife	0·458	0·568
Office for Scotland	0·011	Nil
TOTAL	3·804	4·670

Job club budgets national and regional totals

£ million

	Budget allocation 1992-93	1993-94
Regions		
Northern	2·643	3·094
Yorkshire and Humberside	3·068	4·834
East Midlands and Eastern	4·453	5·392
London and South Eastern	12·814	21·017
South West	3·185	4·852
Office for Wales	2·456	2·653
West Midlands	4·457	5·873
North West	5·680	7·113
Office for Scotland	3·804	4·670
National Total	42·560	59·498

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the actual throughflow of clients through job clubs nationally, regionally and by area for 1992-93; what is the targeted throughflow for 1993-94; what was the actual job entry rate for job clubs nationally, regionally and by area for 1992-93; and what is the targeted job entry rate for 1993-94.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. M. Fogden to Mr. Ron Leighton, dated 7 July 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write direct to you to respond to your Parliamentary Question to him about the performance of jobclubs in 1992-93 and the targets for 1993-94. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The information you asked for is given in the attached tables. They show the actual throughflow, ie numbers leaving jobclub, in 1992-93. The figures for 1993-94 are the planned number of entrants, ie numbers joining the programme, as throughflow information is not available. Although there are differences in the definitions, the numerical differences will in practice be small and year on year comparisons can be made.

The jobclub programme is being expanded in 1993-94 and 295,000 places are available of which 273,344 have so far been allocated. The remaining allocation of places is currently in the planning stage. This is because the results of evaluation exercises linked to specialist and supportive jobclub provision are being considered before further expansion can be finalised.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Job club performance information

	Throughflow 1992-93 actual	*Entrants 1993-94 target*	*Job entry rate 1992-93 actual (per cent.)*	*Job entry rate 1993-94 actual (per cent.)*
Northern	14,003	18,246	40	44
Yorkshire & Humberside	18,477	23,930	47	50
East Midlands and Eastern	19,426	25,425	48	50
London and South East	63,769	79,359	41	45
South West	15,301	21,004	48	46
Office for Wales	12,084	14,970	53	52
West Midlands	21,198	28,879	44	48
North West	31,530	35,235	44	46
Office for Scotland	20,891	26,296	49	50
National	216,679	273,344	45	47

Job club performance information

Area	*Through flow 1992-93 actual*	*Entrants 1993-94 target*	*Job entry (per cent.) 1992-93 actual*	*Job entry (per cent.) 1993-94 target*
Northern Region				
Cleveland	2,578	3,524	37	44
County Durham	2,782	3,347	39	44
South Tyne	4,466	6,060	44	44
North Tyne	4,177	5,315	39	44
Total	14,003	18,246	40	44
Yorkshire and Humberside Region				
Humberside	3,649	5,010	50	50
Sheffield and Rotherham	4,180	4,741	42	50
Leeds and North Yorkshire	3,380	4,719	50	50
Bradford	4,132	5,010	47	50
Wakefield	3,136	4,450	48	50
Total	18,477	23,930	47	50
East Midlands and Eastern Region				
Norfolk and Suffolk	3,062	3,260	40	50
Nottinghamshire	3,750	7,351	46	50
Derbyshire	4,050	4,675	47	50
Cambridgeshire and Northants	3,727	4,304	54	50
Leicestershire and Lincolnshire	4,837	5,835	51	50
Total	19,426	25,425	48	50
South West Region				
Cornwall and Plymouth	2,853	3,760	46	47
Somerset and Devon	2,761	4,022	41	46
Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	3,028	4,378	44	46
Devon	3,529	3,865	53	47
Avon	3,130	4,979	52	46
Total	15,301	21,004	48	46
London and South East Region				
Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, North Buckinghamshire	4,117	5,466	41	45
Essex	3,856	5,580	42	45
Berkshire, Oxfordshire, South Buckinghamshire	3,652	5,210	44	45
Central London	4,595	4,311	40	45
North East London	3,747	4,370	49	45
East London	3,483	4,460	38	45
North London	4,984	5,937	35	45
North West London	4,911	5,040	36	45
Hampshire, Isle of Wight	5,777	6,692	40	45
Sussex and Surrey	4,368	7,254	41	45
Kent	5,183	6,278	41	45
West London	3,387	4,548	50	45
South East London	3,362	4,104	39	45
South London	3,066	4,550	40	45

Area	Through flow 1992-93 actual	Entrants 1993-94 target	Job entry (per cent.) 1992-93 actual	1993-94 target
South West London	5,281	5,559	39	45
Total	63,769	79,359	41	45
Office for Wales				
North Wales	2,278	3,075	53	54
South East Wales	3,484	4,395	61	55
Mid/South Wales	3,022	3,685	42	46
South West Wales	3,300	3,815	53	55
Total	12,084	14,970	53	52
West Midlands Region				
Birmingham and Solihull	5,139	6,807	39	45
Coventry and Warwicks	3,416	4,397	47	47
Dudley and Sandwell	2,744	3,982	47	50
Wolverhampton and Walsall	2,444	4,179	50	55
Staffs.	3,487	4,517	40	47
Marches	3,968	4,997	48	48
Total	21,198	28,879	44	48
North West Region				
Cheshire	4,574	4,743	46	45
Cumbria	1,885	2,078	39	42
Lancashire	5,092	5,209	46	48
Liverpool and Wirral	3,940	4,453	47	48
Manchester Central	3,427	4,538	38	42
Manchester East	3,833	4,147	45	45
Manchester West	4,020	4,560	40	45
Merseyside Outer	4,759	5,507	47	46
Total	31,530	35,235	44	46
Office for Scotland				
Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Inverclyde and Argyll	2,412	3,339	45	50
Glasgow North and Dunbarton	3,624	5,006	54	50
Glasgow South and Renfrew	2,768	3,980	54	50
Highlands, Islands and Grampian	2,013	2,231	48	50
Lothian and Borders	2,810	3,556	46	50
Lanarkshire and Central	4,243	4,439	44	50
Tayside and Fife	3,021	3,745	53	50
Total	20,891	26,296	49	50

Manufacturing Sector

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed in the manufacturing sector in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992 in *(a)* the north-west region, *(b)* Lancashire and *(c)* Burnley travel-to-work area.

Miss Widdecombe: The available information is as follows:

Employees in employment in manufacturing industries

(Thousands)

	North West	Lancashire	Burnley travel-to-work area
June 1979	971	n/a	n/a
September 1981[1]	800	183	18
June 1983	694	n/a	n/a
September 1984[1]	671	154	14
September 1987[1]	663	161	17
September 1991[1]	576	144	14
December 1992	525	n/a	n/a

n/a = not available
[1] Census of employment information

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the budget for each TEC for 1993-94.

Miss Widdecombe: The Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate regional offices are currently finalising contracts with training and enterprise councils (TECs) for 1993-94 budgets and the information is not yet available.

We have decided that TEC level information should only be released publicly six months after the beginning of the contracting year. The information must remain commercially confidential while TECs are negotiating with their providers. The information requested on TEC budgets for 1993-94 will therefore be publicly available on 1 October 1993.

Social Chapter

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on what data, in regard to the effects on United Kingdom employment and wages, Her Majesty's Government made a decision to exempt the United Kingdom from the social chapter.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The proposed social chapter would have given the Community greatly increased scope to legislate in the areas of employment and social policy and to introduce such legislation through qualified majority voting. It is already clear that inappropriate Community legislation of this kind can greatly increase the costs and burdens on business with an inevitable cost in lost jobs. To have accepted greater Community powers in this area would have been irreconcilable with the need to maintain the competitiveness of British business and the jobs of British employees.

Nursery Places

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the initiative of the CBI in trying to increase workplace nursery places.

Miss Widdecombe: We welcome the Employers for Childcare forum, which proposes a national child care strategy based on partnership between parents, employers and Government. The forum clearly has a valuable contribution to make to the child care debate and we are pleased that major and prestigious companies have recognised child care as an important business issue. The Government is putting £45 million into an initiative to create some 50,000 new child care places for school aged children over the next three years. Employers will have a key role to play in this initiative. We also encourage all employers to adopt family-friendly employment policies such as flexible working and help with child care. In 1990 we introduced tax relief on workplace nurseries to stimulate this type of child care.

Unemployment, Burnley

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been unemployed in *(a)* the Burnley borough council area and *(b)* the Burnley travel-to-work area for more than one year in each of the last three years.

Miss Widdecombe: Claimant unemployment data by duration is available quarterly for the months of January, April, July and October and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Life Insurance Industry

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the number of people in the United Kingdom life insurance industry who are *(a)* employed and *(b)* self-employed.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is available only for the whole of the insurance industry (excluding compulsory social security). Latest estimates from the Labour Force Survey, for the United Kingdom, show that there were 277,000 employees and 10,000 self-employed people in this industry in spring 1992.

Employment Advice

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much was spent by the Benefits Agency in each region and in the district covering Stockport in each year since 1989-90 on contracts with organisations to provide job shops, job review workshops and advice for the unemployed on applying for employment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. M. Fogden to Ms Ann Coffey, dated 7 July 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to him about contracted out programme expenditure. This responsibility rests with the Employment Service and not the Benefits Agency. It is something which the Secretary of State has delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Employment Service (ES).

There are a range of jobsearch and advisory programmes which are run on behalf of the ES by organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors. In the attached tables I have set out details of the programme expenditure for the main Employment Service programmes delivered by external providers for the period April 1989-March 1993. These are Restart Courses, Jobclubs, job search seminars and Job Review Workshops.

The figures given include fares to participants. This is because people who attend programmes are re-imbursed the cost of travelling from their homes to the seminars, workshops or courses. The providers then recover this money from the Employment Service.

A regional breakdown of figures is available for the last two years only. Table 1 therefore gives the total national expenditure on contracts for these programmes between 1989 and 1991. Tables 2 and 3 list the spend by region for 1991-92 and 1992-93. Table 4 lists the expenditure from April 1989 for the Manchester East Employment Service area, which includes Stockport. It has not been possible to separate out Jobclub and job search seminar payments.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Table 1
Expenditure on programme contracts
National totals 1989-90 and 1990-91

£000's

	1989-90	1990-91
Restart courses	6,093	6,204
Jobclubs	16,455	19,215
Job search seminar	Nil	Nil
Job Review Workshops	Nil	Nil

Notes:
Expenditure by region is not available.
Job search seminars and Job Review Workshops commenced August 1991.
All figures are inclusive of VAT and fares.

Table 2
Expenditure on programme contracts
1991-92 regional totals

£000's

Region	Restart courses	Jobclubs and Job search seminars	Job review workshop
Northern	936	2,036	44
Yorkshire and Humberside	947	2,305	72
East Midlands and Eastern	873	2,941	69
London and South East	2,051	9,538	543
South West	793	2,225	119
Office for Wales	560	1,456	68
West Midlands	1,615	3,487	62
North West	1,877	4,387	90
Office for Scotland	1,277	3,140	80
Total	10,929	31,515	1,147

Note:
All figures are inclusive of VAT and fares.

Table 3

Expenditure on programme contracts 1992-93 regional totals

Region	*Restart courses* £ *thousands*	*Jobclubs and job search seminars* £ *thousands*	*Job review workshop* £ *thousands*
Northern	725	2,494	109
Yorkshire and Humberside	746	3,193	299
East Midlands and Eastern	838	4,091	264
London and South East	2,683	14,307	1,633
South West	667	3,479	374
Office for Wales	576	2,060	133
West Midlands	1,537	4,456	231
North West	1,508	5,908	352
Office for Scotland	824	3,647	266
TOTAL	10,104	43,635	3,661

Note:
All figures are inclusive of VAT and fares.

Table 4

Expenditure on programme contracts Manchester East employment service area

	1989-90	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Restart courses	81,208	135,936	206,741	221,823
Jobclubs and job search seminars	263,733	384,388	563,245	692,805
Job review workshops	Nil	Nil	18,662	58,163

Notes:
Manchester East area covers the three metropolitan boroughs of Oldham, Rochdale and Stockport.
Job search seminars and Job Review Workshops commenced August 1991.
All figures are inclusive of VAT and fares.

Defence Diversification

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will make a statement about the assistance being provided through his Department to help defence-related industries in the Chelmsford parliamentary constituency to retrain staff in non-defence-related fields;

(2) if he will make a statement about the assistance being provided by his Department to help redundant defence-related workers in the Chelmsford parliamentary constituency find alternative employment in *(a)* defence-related and *(b)* non-defence-related industries.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* I fully understand my hon. Friend's concerns about the needs of those affected by changes in the defence industries. Through the training and enterprise councils and the Employment Service, the Department funds a broad range of programmes to help these people.

The Government will participate fully in the new European Community KONVER initiative, designed to assist areas affected by the decline in the defence industry. Some £5 million has been allocated to the United Kingdom under the European social fund to assist through training and re-training. This assistance will be available throughout the United Kingdom without geographical restriction.

The precise allocation of these new funds is yet to be decided, but they will be directed towards those parts of the country where the need is greatest. Details of how the scheme will operate in the United Kingdom will be made available by the end of July.

DEFENCE

Dockyards

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those dockyard facilities in the United Kingdom owned and operated by his Department, indicating the type of work undertaken and the numbers of people directly employed.

Mr. Aitken: My Department's only such facility is the Fleet Maintenance and Repair Organisation at Portsmouth, which undertakes ship repair, maintenance and enhancement work. It employs 2,100 civilians and 550 naval personnel.

Residential Property

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what average purchase price has been obtained for surplus Ministry housing, for one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom accommodation within the Plymouth city council area and each of the six Cornish districts, for the six-month period October 1992 to March 1993; and what were the comparable figures for the previous six months.

Mr. Hanley: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many residential properties in the London borough of Lewisham are owned by his Department; and if he will publish a list of such residential properties which are currently empty, giving the type of accommodation available, the length of time each property has been vacant and the intended future use.

Mr. Hanley: The Ministry of Defence currently owns 18 residential properties, all flats, situated in two locations in the London borough of Lewisham. Five dwellings are currently vacant. These properties have been vacant for three months awaiting new service occupants who are expected to arrive by September.

The answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton) to the hon. Member on 15 July 1992 at column *615* did not include six properties that had been incorrectly attributed to the neighbouring borough of Greenwich.

Satellite Centre, Spain

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the progress being made by the Western European Union satellite centre at Torrejon, Spain; and what additional efforts he is making to further this project.

Mr. Hanley: Good progress is being made in the development of the WEU satellite centre at Torrejon. The centre has been established for a three year experimental period, and its formal inauguration, attended by my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom

and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton), took place in April this year. The United Kingdom contribution to the cost of the experimental phase is some £4,600,000 over three years. In addition, the United Kingdom is playing a full part in the activities of the centre. The contract for the provision of technical equipment was awarded to a United Kingdom-led consortium and the staff of the centre currently includes a number of United Kingdom personnel.

Desert Storm Syndrome

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will seek information from *(a)* the United States authorities and *(b)* other sources on Desert Storm syndrome and on the effect on service men of the use of uranium-depleted shells.

Mr. Hanley: My Department is liaising with the United States authorities and is already in receipt of United States information which indicates that depleted uranium has not caused the unexplained symptoms associated with the so called Desert Storm syndrome. As with any other possible threat to the health of service personnel, my Department continues to monitor the full range of information on the alleged syndrome from all available sources.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received any correspondence from hon. Members on behalf of constituents who allege they are suffering from unexplained illnesses that they put down to their service with the armed forces in the Gulf during Operation Granby.

Mr. Hanley: I am only aware of one such letter, which the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) raised as a point of order yesterday at column 185. This letter merely provided the name of a constituent and listed some of the health problems he was experiencing. There was no mention of his address or other identifying information or details of his military service or corroborating medical evidence. I have therefore written to the hon. Member for Hemsworth advising that his constituent consult his GP and that if the GP wished to refer the case to the MOD as being one where there were unexplained symptoms which could be attributable to service in the Gulf I would be more than happy to ensure that the matter was fully investigated. This advice applies to all hon. and right hon. Members who may have constituents in similar situations.

Maralinga Nuclear Test Site

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, columns *276-77*, if he has now heard from the Australian Government in regard to the proposals made by Her Majesty's Government as to additional financial compensation for the clean-up of the Maralinga nuclear test site.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 30 June at columns *548-49*.

F3 Tornados

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral statement of 17 June, *Official Report*, column 1082, whether legal proceedings have now been instituted against Airwork in respect of the collateral damage to F3 Tornados; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: No. My Department intends to claim against Airwork for the cost of rectifying the damage for which they are responsible and other consequential costs. It would be inappropriate in present circumstances for me to say anything about potential proceedings—whether legal or arbitral—between the Secretary of State and Airwork Ltd.

Rosyth Dockyard

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the names of the nuclear submarines and surface ships which have been refitted at the Rosyth dockyard in the last 10 years; and if he will give details of the man weeks taken to complete the refit work on each vessel.

Mr. Aitken: I will write to the hon. Member.

Tigerfish Torpedo

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what difficulties have arisen with respect to the development of the depth automatic test equipment required for the Tigerfish torpedo; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The development of replacement automatic test equipment for the Tigerfish torpedo has presented a significant challenge, partly due to the difficulty of integrating the old technology of the torpedo and the associated test specification with the current technology of modern test equipment. There have been some programme delays and the Ministry of Defence is currently working with the contractor to bring the equipment into service as quickly as possible.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 8 July 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Murder Cases

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will ensure that, in murder cases where hon. Members have raised the conviction with members of the Government, transcripts or notes of the trial are retained longer than the five year norm provided that the hon. Member is still seeking a review of the case, regardless of whether it has gone to appeal.

Mr. John M. Taylor: If an hon. Member seeks a review of a murder case, he, or others, may purchase any transcript required within the five-year period. On request, the Department will supply details of the contractor responsible for keeping the particular record.

Applications for leave to appeal are required to be lodged within 28 days and reasons to justify any extension of time are required. If there has been an application for leave to appeal, transcript relevant to the grounds of appeal will have been obtained and will be retained indefinitely in appeals against a murder conviction. The Royal Commission on criminal justice made no recommendation to extend the five-year period for the keeping of a verbatim record and I see no case to do so.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what arrangements are made for the storage of transcripts or notes of the trials in murder cases which have gone to appeal.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The verbatim record is kept for five years after it was taken, regardless of whether there is an appeal. Transcripts are not automatically produced for cost reasons, but may be purchased if required within the five-year period.

If there is an appeal against a murder conviction, any transcripts purchased by the Court of Appeal and the documents provided by the Crown court to the Court of Appeal are retained indefinitely by arrangement with the Public Record Office.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy, in circumstances in which the Home Office has requested from an hon. Member representing the interests of a convicted murderer a statement concerning that case, to provide the hon. Member on request with a transcript of the relevant portions of the trial including the summings up by counsel for the defence, the prosecution and the trial judge.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Verbatim records of murder trials are retained for five years. If a transcript is required by an hon. Member, the Home Office, or another organisation or person, it must be purchased within the five-year period. The contractor responsible for keeping the records will be required to meet any such request. It would not be appropriate for my Department to meet the costs of such transcription.

A verbatim record of the evidence and a trial judge's summing up is always taken, but prosecution and defence closing speeches are not matters of evidence or law which a jury are required to have regard to. A record of these may not be available as there is no requirement to record them.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the rank of the officer or officers of the City of London police who on or about 1 April 1992 prepared letters purporting to have been written, respectively by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) and Mr. D. W. Freeman in connection with a case under investigation by the Serious Fraud Office; what disciplinary proceedings have been taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: These are matters for the Commissioner of Police for the City of London.

Police (Assaults)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers in each police force in the United Kingdom have had to retire from their jobs as a result of injuries caused by assault in each year since 1979.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is not held centrally for police forces in England and Wales. I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland that this is also the case for Scotland. If individual forces were able to provide the information requested, it could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

I understand from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that his Department holds information about retirements from the Royal Ulster Constabulary from which the information requested could be extracted in respect of former RUC police officers. If my hon. Friend writes to him, he will provide the information.

Police (Civilian Staff)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he expects the recommendation in his White Paper that civilian staff employed for police purposes should be employed by the chief constable to work in practice.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is too early to say how the detailed arrangements for the employment of civilian staff in the police service will be managed. Civilian staff have an increasingly important part to play in the provision of a good quality police service. It therefore seems appropriate, and in the interests of all those working in the police service, that the civilian staff should be directly employed by the chief constable.

Sunday Trading

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish his plans to reform Sunday trading law in England and Wales.

Mr. Howard: We intend to lay before Parliament next week and publish on 13 July a draft Sunday trading Bill together with a covering text describing the options for reform.

Family Reunification

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what ways United Kingdom legislation will have to be changed to implement the resolution on family reunification adopted by the Ministers responsible for immigration at their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 and 2 June; and what cost implications this will have.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There will be no need to amend primary legislation to implement the resolution on family reunification.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the international conventions and fundamental provisions in national legislation which the Ministers responsible for immigration indicated would be taken into account in their resolution on family reunification at their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 and 2 June; and which of these obligations are relevant to the implementation of this resolution in United Kingdom law.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of all the international conventions which the United Kingdom has ratified or the provisions in domestic legislation which might be relevant. However, the following are likely to be applicable:

1. International Conventions
   (a) The United Nations Convention on Human Rights;
   (b) The European Convention on Human Rights;
   (c) The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
   (d) The European Convention on the Adoption of Children;
   (e) The United Nations Convention on Refugees.
2. Domestic legislation
   (a) The Immigration Act, 1971;
   (b) The Marriage Act, 1949;
   (c) The Children Act, 1989;
   (d) The Adoption Act, 1976, together with the equivalent Act and Order for Scotland and Northern Ireland;
   (e) The Family Law Reform Act, 1987.

Dogs (Tail-Docking)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures will be taken against those veterinary surgeons who continue to dock the tails of dogs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is a matter for the royal college to determine what controls to impose over veterinary surgeons.

Drinking and Driving

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate for each year since 1967 the number of times a week people drive motor vehicles after consuming more than the legal limit for alcohol for drivers and the number of related deaths each year.

Mr. Maclean: Such estimates are not available. However, the average weekly number of screening breath tests in England and Wales for the years 1968 to 1992 and the number of fatalities per year involving illegal alcohol levels are as follows:

	Average number of screening breath tests per week	*Annual number of fatalities in accidents involving illegal alcohol levels*[1]
1968	980	—
1969	1,130	—
1970	1,400	—
1971	1,860	—
1972	2,310	—
1973	2,540	—
1974	2,380	—
1975	2,580	—
1976	2,580	—
1977	2,520	—
1978	2,730	—
1979	3,150	1,790
1980	3,460	1,570
1981	3,400	1,540
1982	3,980	1,670
1983	4,630	1,200
1984	4,000	1,280
1985	4,810	1,130
1986	5,830	1,060
1987	7,690	980
1988	8,520	840
1989	10,400	870
1990	11,480	800
1991	10,810	700
1992	10,210	—

[1] *Source:* Department of Transport. Figures for years prior to 1979 not available. Figures for 1992 not yet available.

Treason

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review United Kingdom legislation on treason.

Mr. Maclean: The Government have no such plans.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the former Members of this House who have been appointed since 1988 by his Department to quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations; and if he will list in each case the title of the post, the salary, the duration of the appointment, and the party which the former hon. Member represented.

Mr. Howard: The following former Members have been appointed to Home Office non-departmental public bodies:

David Bellotti
Trustee of the Community Development Foundation
Expenses only
Appointed January 1992 for 3 years
Liberal Democrat

Right hon. Lord Carlisle of Bucklow, QC
Chairman of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
Salary £31,350
Appointed 1 March 1989 until 31 March 1995
Conservative

John Cartwright
Member of the Police Complaints Authority
Salary £38,020

Appointed for 3 years from October 1992
SDP

Sheila Faith
Member of the Parole Board
Fee Paid: £139 per attendance
Appointed 1 June 1991 for 3 years
Conservative

Ben Ford
Member of the Firearms Consultative Committee
Expenses only
Appointed 1989 for 2 years
Labour

Lord Kimball
Chairman of the Firearms Consultative Committee
Expenses only
Appointed for 5 years from 1989
Conservative

Anna McCurley
Member of the Horserace Betting Levy Board
Salary £11,640
Appointed 1988 for 3 years extended until 1994
Conservative

Michael Meadowcroft
Trustee of the Community Development Foundation
Expenses only
Appointed 1986, extended until 1994
Liberal

Norman Miscampbell, QC
Member of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
Fee £246 per day
Appointed 22 March 1993 until 31 March 1995
Conservative

Lord Wyatt of Weeford
Chairman of the Horserace Totalisator Board
Salary £90,918
Appointed 1976; reappointed 1993 for 2 years
Labour

Information in respect of the parole local review committees is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information in respect of the Fire Services Examination Board is not available.

Prison Security Guards

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current standard hourly rate for prison security guards.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the prison service. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Jon Owen Jones, dated July 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent question about the current standard hourly rate for prison security guards.

Subsequent to the introduction of Fresh Start in 1987 prison officers receive an annual salary paid monthly. They are conditioned to an average week of 39 hours net, any additional hours worked are compensated for by time off in lieu as they are a non overtime grade.

Prison Officers have a seven point pay scale with a 10 and 15 year increment. The hourly rate ranges from £7·42 at the minimum to £9·25 at the 15 year point. These salaries are part of the annual pay negotiations between the Treasury and the Prison Officers Association and will be uplifted from 1 April 1993. Any increase will be within the Government pay restraints and be limited to between 0 to 1·5 per cent. increase.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the former Members of this House who have been appointed by his Department to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations; and if he will list in each case the title of the post, the salary, the duration of the appointment, and the party which the former hon. Member represented.

Mr. David Davis: No former Members of this House have been appointed by my right hon. Friend to the non-departmental public bodies for which he has had responsibility since the creation of his Department in April 1992.

TRANSPORT

Airports

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are being taken to improve the services offered by major United Kingdom international airports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Government believe that increasing the scope for airport operators to respond to commercial pressures offers the best route for improving the services offered at all airports. This underlies the Government's policy of encouraging increased private sector involvement in the ownership and management of local authority-owned airports.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passengers used *(a)* Gatwick airport and *(b)* Heathrow airport in each year since 1979.

Mr. Norris: The numbers of passengers at *(a)* Gatwick airport and *(b)* Heathrow airport are shown in the table.

Terminal passengers at Heathrow and Gatwick 1979-92

Year	Gatwick (000)	Heathrow (000)
1979	8,965	27,979
1980	9,703	27,484
1981	10,725	26,411
1982	11,155	26,406
1983	12,471	26,767
1984	13,953	29,164
1985	14,885	31,310
1986	16,309	31,310
1987	19,381	34,743
1988	20,744	37,510
1989	21,149	39,587
1990	21,043	42,635
1991	18,690	40,245
1992	19,842	44,964

Private Aircraft

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people flying in private aeroplanes have been killed in aviation accidents in United Kingdom air space in each year since 1987.

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority's safety data analysis unit advises me that the number of people flying

in private aeroplanes that have been killed in aviation accidents in United Kingdom airspace since 1987 are as follows:

Year	Number of Fatal Accidents	Fatalities	
		Passengers	Crew
1987	24	23	24
1988	10	6	9
1989	19	4	19
1990	19	13	19
1991	17	4	18
1992	16	10	14

Trust Ports

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total receipts from the privatisation of trust ports to date.

Mr. Norris: The total receipts to the Exchequer from the five ports privatised last year under the Ports Act 1991 was £169 million.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the timetable for privatisation of the next wave of trust ports.

Mr. Norris: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 12 March, *Official Report*, column 769. The power that the Secretary of State has under the Ports Act 1991, to require the larger trust ports, with a turnover above a specified threshold, to privatise themselves, will become available after 24 July 1993. The Secretary of State expects to make an announcement as soon as he has completed his consideration on the way in which he should use his power of compulsion.

All trust ports can use the Act at any time to take action to privatise themselves. Five have already done so, we hope more will follow.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those trust ports with whom he has discussed privatisation.

Mr. Norris: The Secretary of State has not yet decided which trust ports he will formally consult, under the terms of the Ports Act 1991, in respect of his power to require privatisation.

Piracy

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* merchant ships and *(b)* British-owned merchant ships have been victims of piracy or other attacks in the last five years.

Mr. Norris: Shipowners, flag states and coastal states are encouraged to report incidents of piracy and armed robbery against vessels to the International Maritime Organisation. When we are advised of incidents involving British ships we report them to IMO. However, there is no requirement in international law to report attacks and masters and shipowners can be reluctant to do so. As a result, records are incomplete.

Full information in the form requested is not available. The table, however, gives an indication of trends during the past five years on incidents of piracy affecting tankers.

Year	All flags	UK flags
1988	5	0
1989	3	0
1990	3	0
1991	36	2
1992	22	0

The Government are concerned about the under reporting of attacks. We have produced comprehensive advice in "Merchant Shipping Notice M1517" urging mariners to report any attack or attempted attack to the flag and coastal states concerned.

South China Sea

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will hold talks with the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers about providing armed escorts for all British or commonwealth vessels passing through the South China sea.

Mr. Norris: We are willing to consider any representations from NUMAST and other shipping interests. We treat the problems in the South China sea very seriously indeed and hope that the matter can be solved through multilateral and bilateral co-operation. At the present time, we do not believe there is a need for armed escorts.

A1, Northumbria

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport at how many points between Morpeth and the Scottish border the A1 is currently reduced to one-way operation by temporary traffic lights; how many of these interruptions result from works which will result in improvement to dual carriageway status; and which of these interruptions will continue through the Scottish and English bank holiday weekends.

Mr. Key: The A1 is currently reduced to one-way operation by temporary traffic signals at the following five locations:

Bockenfield, south of Felton;
Browneside, north of Alnwich;
Detchant, north of Belford;
Scremerston, south of Berwick; and
Marshall Meadows, north of Berwick.

Of these, the works at Browneside and Marshall Meadows will result in improvement to dual carriageway status.

Traffic signals will continue to operate at Bockenfield, Browneside and Detchant for the Scottish bank holiday weekend. Arrangements have been made to remove all traffic signals for the English bank holiday weekend.

Central Line

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what proposals he is considering in respect of an alternative public transport service between Epping and Ongar should London Transport close this part of the Central line; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the current situation in respect of the Central line service between Epping and Ongar.

Mr. Freeman: On 5 May 1993, London Underground Ltd. published notice of its intention to seek closure of the

Central line between Epping and Ongar. Due to the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in the closure proceedings, it would not be appropriate for me to make any comments on the subject at this stage.

Buses, Dorset

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passenger miles were travelled by bus in Dorset in each year since 1988-89.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 7 July 1993]:* The Department does not collect information on passenger mileage from operators. National estimates are imputed from the passenger journey information collected in a survey and national estimates of average journey cost. The survey samples are selected to be representative at the national level and could not be used to produce county information.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Severe Hardship Payments

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the administration costs of the severe hardship payments.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 7 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking what are the administration costs of the severe hardship payments.

For the financial year 1992-93 the administration costs of the Severe Hardship Claims Unit in Glasgow were £676,714.

Associated administration costs arise within the Benefits Agency District Offices. Those costs cannot be separately identified for the year 1992-93. However they are estimated at £1·5 million.

I hope that you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Fraud, Blackpool

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about social security fraud in Blackpool.

Mr. Hague: The administration of benefit fraud is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Harold Elletson, dated 7 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security requesting him to make a statement about social security fraud in Blackpool.

The investigation of potentially fraudulent claims was reorganised in January 1991 when Fraud Sectors were formed.

The Blackpool Sector covers an area on the Fylde coast North to Fleetwood/Knott End, South to Lytham St. Annes and East to the outskirts of Preston.

There are currently a total of 13·5 full time members of staff devoted to the investigation of suspect claims although three of these posts are clerical support rather than investigators.

In the year ending 31 March 1993 Blackpool sector conducted 2,158 investigations. Of this total, 914 cases resulted in a weekly benefit saving and a further 304 cases produced an instrument of payment saving. In addition, an overpayment was detected in a further 304 cases. The total gross savings exceeded £2·5 million. Seven people were prosecuted in the same period and all were found guilty.

In addition to the Sector fraud staff who have carried out the activities as detailed above, there has been an input from a mobile team who are based at Area level and who can be called on to assist Sector staff at times of staff shortage, high intake of work or to conduct pro-active investigations into larger scale fraudulent activities.

In the past three months the Mobile Team has conducted a number of investigations, two of which were particularly successful.

In the first exercise over 1,600 visits were made to check the addresses of people claiming benefits. It was confirmed that 267 people were not living at the quoted address. The full results of the savings are not yet known as the exercise is not yet completed but they are anticipated to be considerable.

The second exercise involved the arrest by the Police of six people in connection with instrument of payment abuse. Over 100 people were interviewed by members of the Mobile Team and instrument of payment savings of £50,000 were recorded.

I should stress that the vast majority of the Benefit Agency's customers are genuine and will never have any contact with any of our Investigators. The investigators exist to ensure that the honest customer's benefit goes to that customer.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Child Benefit

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost of child benefit in each year since 1979 with the figures adjusted for inflation.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Child benefit expenditure

	Cash (£ million)	*1992-93 prices (£ million)*
[1]1978-79	2,296	6,479
1979-80	2,787	6,762
1980-81	2,944	6,036
1981-82	3,372	6,305
1982-83	3,660	6,389
1983-84	3,988	6,653
1984-85	4,276	6,793
1985-86	4,468	6,727
1986-87	4,513	6,579
1987-88	4,598	6,357
1988-89	4,515	5,821
1989-90	4,537	5,489
1990-91	4,591	5,133
1991-92	5,189	5,423
1992-93	5,767	5,767

[1]Figures include cost of Child Tax Allowance.

Income Statistics

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide statistics similar to table A3, page 63, of the "Households Below Average Income

Statistical Analysis" 1979, 1990-91, to include the top 40 per cent., 30 per cent., 20 per cent. and 10 per cent. of income distribution for 1979, 1988-89 and 1990-91, for income before housing costs and income after housing costs.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables.

Share of total income (per cent.) (including self-employed)

	1979	1988-89	1990-91
Income before housing costs			
Top 40 per cent.	58	63	64
Top 30 per cent.	47	52	53
Top 20 per cent.	35	40	41
Top 10 per cent.	21	25	26
Income after housing costs			
Top 40 per cent.	58	64	65
Top 30 per cent.	48	53	55
Top 20 per cent.	35	41	43
Top 10 per cent.	21	26	27

Note:
The figures in the tables are based on equivalised income for household size and composition.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide similar statistics to table A1, page 60, of "Households Below Average Income" 1979, 1990-91, to include decile 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 including the self-employed, before housing costs and after housing costs, and excluding self-employed before housing costs and after housing costs.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables.

Percentage change 1979 to 1990-91 in real income by decile group.

	Decile Group Median				
Including self-employed	*Decile 6*	*Decile 7*	*Decile 8*	*Decile 9*	*Decile 10*
Income before housing costs	27	31	36	43	58
Income after housing costs	28	33	38	45	62

	Decile Group Median				
Excluding self-employed	*Decile 6*	*Decile 7*	*Decile 8*	*Decile 9*	*Decile 10*
Income before housing costs	27	30	36	43	56
Income after housing costs	28	33	38	44	61

Note:
Figures relate to the United Kingdom and are based on income equivalised for the household size and composition.

Disability Living Allowance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will respond to the report by the Social Security Select Committee's third report on the delivery of disability living allowance and disability working allowance.

Mr. Scott: The Government's response—Cm 2282—is published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Crisis Loans

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest available information for the district covering Stockport and nationally on the number and applications for crisis loans dealt with by social fund officers because of re-alignment of unemployment benefit.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Ms Ann Coffey, dated 7 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking what is the latest available information for the district covering Stockport and nationally on the number of applications for crisis loans dealt with by Social Fund Officers because of re-alignment of unemployment benefit.

I am unable to give the information you requested because the statistical information kept does not identify the individual benefits involved in such applications. I can, however, provide details of the number of crisis loans awarded to applicants whose benefit is paid in arrears. For the period 1 April 1993 to 30 May 1993 (latest available data) the figure for the Stockport District is 323. The national figure for the same period is 39,350.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Burma

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what deputations his Department has recently received from Burma; what trade matters were discussed; and what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards trade with Burma.

Mr. Needham: My Department has received no deputations from Burma recently. The Government's policy is to provide no specific encouragement to British firms to trade or invest in Burma in view of the current political and economic situation there. The United Kingdom does not sell arms to Burma and our aid programme, like that of other donors, has been suspended since 1988. British business visitors to Rangoon can of

course look to our embassy there for advice and support. Firms seek advice on trading with Burma are always made aware of the Government's policy.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department since 1988 to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, any salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is responsible for a total of more than 800 public appointments. Of these:

(a) James Roe (spouse of Marion Roe, Conservative MP for Broxbourne) has been appointed as a reserve member of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission at a salary of £8,490 per annum for the period 1 February 1993 to 31 January 1996.

(b) Viscount Chelmsford has been appointed as a member of the Simpler Trade Procedures Board for the period 1 November 1992 to 31 October 1995. The post is unpaid.

(c) Lady Jane Forbes (spouse of Lord Forbes, KBE) was re-appointed as a member of the Post Office Users Council for Scotland for the period 1 October 1991 to 30 September 1995 and as a member of the Scottish Advisory Committee on Telecommunications for the period 1 October 1991 to 30 September 1993. Both appointments are unpaid.

We do not collect information on the political affiliations of those appointed or details of those who have been party candidates for Parliament.

Beer

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the effects of the Beer Orders on the brewing industry and consumers.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: There have been considerable changes in the brewing industry since the implementation of the orders. However, it is difficult to separate the effects of the orders from other developments within the industry, some of which are part of long term trends beginning before the Monopolies and Mergers Commission review.

We believe that it is too soon to make an assessment of the impact of the orders. The overriding need now is for a period of stability for both brewers and tenants/lessees. The Agriculture Select Committee's report on the effects of the Beer Orders on the brewing industry and consumers supported this view.

Telecommunications Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) of 30 June, *Official Report*, columns *511-12*, what were the voting figures for each decision taken at the European Community's Telecommunications Council held on 16 June; and if he will make it his policy to include in future statements on Council meetings information on whether formal votes were taken and which member states voted in favour, against or abstained on particular measures.

Mr. McLoughlin: No formal votes were taken at the European Community's Telecommunications Council held on 16 June. I regret that this was not made clear in my answer of 30 June, in accordance with the undertaking given to the hon. Member that statements to the House following meetings of the Council of Ministers will either include details of the record of the vote whenever a formal vote is taken, or report that no formal votes were taken.

Civil Nuclear Sites

Mr. Wallace: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the civil nuclear sites in the United Kingdom, together with the expiry dates of their current operational site licences.

Mr. Eggar: The table shows the civil nuclear sites in the United Kingdom, all of which are licensed by the Health and Safety Executive under the provisions of the Nuclear Installations Act 1965, as amended.

A nuclear site licence is issued without limit of time, but may at any time be revoked by the Health and Safety Executive or surrendered by the licensee with the executive's agreement. The licensee continues to be responsible for the site, and subject to direction by the Health and Safety Executive, until in the opinion of the executive there has ceased to be any danger from ionising radiations from anything on the site, or until a new nuclear site licence is issued to some other person.

List of nuclear licensed sites

Site	*Operator*
Berkeley Power Station Berkeley Gloucestershire GL13 9PA	Nuclear Electric plc
Bradwell Power Station Bradwell-on-Sea Southminster Essex CM10 7HP	Nuclear Electric plc
Dungeness Power Station Romney Marsh Kent TN29 9PP	Nuclear Electric plc
Hartlepool Power Station Tees Road Hartlepool Cleveland TS25 2BZ	Nuclear Electric plc
Heysham Power Station Heysham Morecambe Lancashire LA3 2XQ	Nuclear Electric plc
Hinkley Point Power Station Nr. Bridgwater Somerset TA5 1ND	Nuclear Electric plc
Oldbury Power Station Oldbury-on-Severn Avon BR12 1RQ	Nuclear Electric plc
Sizewell Power Station Leiston Suffolk IP16 4UE	Nuclear Electric plc
Trawsfynydd Power Station Trawsfynydd Blaenau Ffestiniog Gwynedd LL41 4DJ	Nuclear Electric plc
Wylfa Power Station Camaes Bay Gwynedd LL67 0DH	Nuclear Electric plc

Site	Operator
Capenhurst Works Capenhurst Chester CH1 6ER	British Nuclear Fuels plc
Capenhurst Works Capenhurst Chester CH1 6ER	Urenco (Capenhurst) Ltd.
Drigg Storage Site Drigg Cumbria	British Nuclear Fuels plc
Sellafield Works Seascale Cumbria CA20 1PG	British Nuclear Fuels plc
Springfields Works Salwick Nr. Preston Lancashire PR4 0XJ	British Nuclear Fuels plc
Amersham International White Lion Road Amersham Buckinghamshire HP7 9LL	Amersham International plc
Radiation Sources (Harwell) Isotope Production Unit Didcot Oxon OX11 0RA	Amersham International plc
Forrest Farm Whitchurch Cardiff CF4 7J2	Amersham International plc
AEA Technology Harwell Laboratory Didcot Oxfordshire OX11 0RA	United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
AEA Technology Winfrith Technology Centre Dorchester Dorset DT2 8DH	United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
AEA Technology Springfields Works Salwick Nr. Preston Lancashire	United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
AEA Technology Windscale Cumbria	United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
TRIGA Reactor Billingham Cleveland ST23 2JB	ICI Chemicals and Polymers Ltd.
Rolls-Royce Raynesway PO Box 31 Derbyshire DE2 8BJ	Rolls-Royce
Manchester University Research Reactor Risley Warrington Cheshire WA3 6AT	Manchester University
University of London Reactor Imperial College Field Station Silwood Park Ascot Berkshire SL5 7PY	Imperial College
Barrow Shipyard PO Box 6 Barrow in Furness Lancashire LA14 1AF	Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd.
Devonport Royal Dockyard Devonport Plymouth PL1 4SR	Devonport Management Ltd.
2. SCOTLAND	
Hunterston Power Station West Kilbride Ayrshire KA23 9QT	Scottish Nuclear Ltd.
Torness Power Station Dunbar East Lothian EH42 1QZ	Scottish Nuclear Ltd.
Chapelcross Works Annan Dumfries and Galloway DG12 6RF	British Nuclear Fuels plc
Scottish Universities Research Reactor East Kilbride Nr. Glasgow G75 0QU	University of Glasgow
Rosyth Royal Dockyard Rosyth Fife KY11 2YD	Babcock Thorn Ltd.
AEA Technology Dounreay Thurso Caithness KW14 7TZ	United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

THORP

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the residues specification issued to overseas customers for THORP, to which reference is made at page six of the report of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee appended to the chairman of that Committee's reply of 10 October 1992 to the letter of 11 March 1992 from the Secretary of State.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for the companies concerned.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade to whom each of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department is responsible: whether the public bodies or their members in each case are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 6 July 1993]:* All the executive NDPBs sponsored by the Department are accountable to DTI Ministers for their use of public funds and we are accountable to Parliament. The specific answers to the questions are:

(a) No.
(b) No.
(c) Yes, where the body receives grant or grant-in-aid.
(d) No.
(e) Yes, where appropriate.
(f) The citizens charter applies to all NDPBs which provide a public service.
The chairmen and members of the boards are expected to declare an interest where relevant.

Science Base Funding

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to increase the science base funding for industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: I have been asked to reply.

As explained in the White Paper on science, engineering and technology, "Realising our Potential", the Government intend that decisions on priorities for support of the science and engineering base should be much more clearly related to meeting the country's needs and enhancing its wealth creating capacity. To this end: it is establishing a technology foresight capability; it is creating two new research councils to cover biotechnology and biological sciences, and engineering and physical sciences; it has provided all research councils with a mission statement which recognises the importance of research undertaken to meet the needs of users; and it is taking measures to improve the links between the councils and cognate Government Departments. Moreover, the LINK scheme will continue to be an important vehicle for the research councils collaboration with industry, and the Office of Science and Technology will now take lead responsibility for the scheme, with the LINK steering group reporting jointly to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the President of the Board of Trade.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Burma

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the involvement of United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, the World Health Organisation, the UNDCP and the Food and Agriculture Organisation in Burma.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Nations Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs is involved in talks with the Burmese authorities about the return of the Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh. The involvement of UN agencies in Burma is as follows.

UNDP: Since the 1992 Governing Council, all UNDP assistance in Burma has been targeted specifically at grassroots level. Projects are approved on a case-by-case basis by the UNDP Administrator, and funding is only being released on a strictly limited basis.

UNICEF: The programme in Burma concentrates on mother and child health care, basic education and access to safe drinking water.

WHO: The programme has been reduced since July 1992 in response to UNDP's directive to limit activities. It now concentrates on nursing training and AIDS.

UNDCP: A number of projects both in Burma and in the border areas of neighbouring states are funded to encourage the reduction of drug trafficking, and of demand, supply and abuse of drugs. Specific activities include the replacement of opium based economic activity by income substitution programmes, and demand reduction through community based education and training.

FAO: Activities in Burma are largely rural based agricultural projects, including research and training. Many are UNDP funded and fall within the restrictions placed on the UNDP programme.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what accountability there is for United Nations activity and that of related organisations for their work in Burma; and if he will place reports on this subject by such organisations in the Library.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Nations and related organisations operating in Burma are accountable, through their headquarters management, to their governing bodies. Members of these bodies, including the United Kingdom, monitor closely the activities of these organisations.

There are no relevant reports which could be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what checks there have been to ensure that international aid to Burma has not been used for military purposes.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no evidence that international aid is being diverted for military purposes. The mandates of the United Nations, its funds and programmes and the specialised agencies in the economic and social fields preclude any assistance for military purposes. In the case of Burma, the work of the United Nations system is being scrutinised with special care to ensure that none of its assistance is diverted to military uses. The international financial institutions do not grant loans for military purposes, and carry out the normal financial and audit checks on the use of their funds.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the amounts remitted as a result of *(a)* hardship, *(b)* equity and *(c)* miscellaneous and the amounts written off as a result of *(d)* insolvency, *(e)* composition settlements and *(f)* taxpayer gone abroad or untraceable, for each of capital gains tax, schedule D tax, corporation tax, pay-as-you-earn and national insurance for each year since 1979 as cash figures and as a percentage of each tax collected.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is shown in the tables.

The amounts of corporation tax remitted or written off as irrecoverable for the reasons outlined are as follows:

Amounts £ thousands

Year	Hardship remitted	Percentage of total CT paid	Equity remitted	Percentage of total CT paid	Miscellaneous remitted	Percentage of total CT paid	Insolvency remitted	Percentage of total CT paid	Composition settlements remitted	Percentage of total CT paid	Taxpayer gone abroad/away remitted	Percentage of total CT paid
1979	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981	0	0·00	435	0·01	237	0·01	19,781	0·68	0	0·00	235	0·01
1982	0	0·00	249	0·01	200	0·01	33,061	0·86	7	0·00	879	0·02
1983	0	0·00	274	0·01	268	0·01	39,395	0·97	30	0·00	945	0·02
1984	0	0·00	145	0·00	352	0·01	57,553	1·22	1	0·00	0	0·00
1985	0	0·00	225	0·00	236	0·00	74,802	1·26	6	0·00	73	0·00
1986	0	0·00	374	0·00	995	0·01	88·962	1·09	71	0·00	963	0·01
1987	5	0·00	498	0·01	817	0·01	91,441	0·91	15	0·00	54	0·00
1988	0	0·00	349	0·00	2,360	0·02	222,725	1·90	2	0·00	161	0·00
1989	0	0·00	478	0·00	1,011	0·01	149,791	1·04	6	0·00	82	0·00
1990	0	0·00	389	0·00	1,981	0·01	182,249	1·15	35	0·00	71	0·00
1991	0	0·00	455	0·00	2,065	0·01	317,864	2·07	529	0·00	16	0·00
1992	0	0·00	307	0·00	2,450	0·02	539,126	4·61	300	0·00	50	0·00

The amounts of capital gains tax remitted or written off as irrecoverable for the reasons outlined are as follows:

Amounts £ thousands

Year	Hardship remitted	Percentage of total CGT paid	Equity remitted	Percentage of total CGT paid	Miscellaneous remitted	Percentage of total CGT paid	Insolvency remitted	Percentage of total CGT paid	Composition settlements remitted	Percentage of total CGT paid	Taxpayer gone abroad/away remitted	Percentage of total CGT paid
1979	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981	20	0·00	83	0·02	337	0·07	950	0·21	97	0·02	1,247	0·27
1982	61	0·01	69	0·01	346	0·06	2,160	0·35	414	0·07	1,818	0·29
1983	39	0·01	74	0·01	494	0·08	2,459	0·39	8	0·00	3,422	0·54
1984	34	0·00	34	0·00	519	0·07	2,075	0·29	9	0·00	3,327	0·47
1985	8	0·00	181	0·02	822	0·10	1,702	0·21	18	0·00	4,831	0·60
1986	19	0·00	68	0·01	722	0·07	1,869	0·19	21	0·00	7,365	0·73
1987	38	0·00	169	0·02	1,386	0·12	2,714	0·24	16	0·00	4,497	0·40
1988	30	0·00	58	0·00	1,778	0·11	5,510	0·35	61	0·00	5,244	0·33
1989	32	0·00	114	0·00	1,698	0·07	3,948	0·17	166	0·01	4,898	0·21
1990	5	0·00	70	0·00	2,308	0·12	3,821	0·21	132	0·01	5,740	0·31
1991	34	0·00	149	0·01	3,980	0·21	13,929	0·75	116	0·01	11,513	0·62
1992	36	0·00	119	0·01	7,322	0·62	37,195	3·16	84	0·01	13,080	1·10

The amounts of Schedule D tax remitted or written off as irrecoverable for the reasons outlined are as follows:

Amounts £ thousands

Year	Hardship remitted	Percentage of total Schedule D paid	Equity remitted	Percentage of total Schedule D paid	Miscellaneous remitted	Percentage of total Schedule D paid	Insolvency remitted	Percentage of total Schedule D paid	Composition settlements remitted	Percentage of total Schedule D paid	Taxpayer gone abroad/away remitted	Percentage of total Schedule D paid
1979	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981	1,575	0·03	1,804	0·03	6,447	0·12	10,618	0·19	211	0·00	22,924	0·42
1982	1,868	0·03	2,008	0·03	8,052	0·13	16,029	0·26	110	0·00	26,791	0·43
1983	2,331	0·04	1,827	0·03	10,146	0·16	18,676	0·29	30	0·00	38,083	0·59
1984	1,943	0·03	1,960	0·03	13,418	0·20	30,010	0·44	87	0·00	46,160	0·67
1985	1,374	0·02	2,375	0·03	11,454	0·15	35,567	0·47	26	0·00	40,974	0·54
1986	1,681	0·02	2,853	0·03	16,589	0·18	51,325	0·54	3	0·00	53,686	0·57
1987	1,851	0·03	3,183	0·05	21,253	0·30	55,260	0·79	79	0·00	54,028	0·77
1988	1,933	0·02	4,370	0·05	58,292	0·73	109,841	1·37	142	0·00	79,753	1·00
1989	1,468	0·02	4,560	0·05	60,755	0·65	101,482	1·09	212	0·00	75,160	0·80
1990	1,606	0·02	5,302	0·05	52,834	0·50	98,746	0·93	474	0·00	98,740	0·93
1991	2,896	0·02	6,294	0·05	94,986	0·81	166,935	1·42	423	0·00	117,025	1·00
1992	4,605	0·04	6,395	0·05	179,892	1·39	361,372	2·80	303	0·00	156,484	1·21

The amounts of PAYE remitted or written off as irrecoverable for the reasons outlined are as follows:

Amounts £ thousands

Year	Hardship remitted	Percentage of total PAYE paid	Equity remitted	Percentage of total PAYE paid	Miscellaneous remitted	Percentage of total PAYE paid	Insolvency remitted	Percentage of total PAYE paid	Composition settlements remitted	Percentage of total PAYE paid	Taxpayer gone abroad/away remitted	Percentage of total PAYE paid
1979	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981	5	0·00	0	0·00	343	0·00	10,885	0·05	0	0·00	208	0·00

Year	Hardship remitted	Percentage of total PAYE paid	Equity remitted	Percentage of total PAYE paid	Miscellaneous remitted	Percentage of total PAYE paid	Insolvency remitted	Percentage of total PAYE paid	Composition settlements remitted	Percentage of total PAYE paid	Taxpayer gone abroad/away remitted	Percentage of total PAYE paid
1982	3	0·00	2	0·00	487	0·00	14,495	0·06	53	0·00	245	0·00
1983	1	0·00	5	0·00	508	0·00	21,637	0·08	20	0·00	457	0·00
1984	3	0·00	4	0·00	652	0·00	32,180	0·11	0	0·00	487	0·00
1985	0	0·00	50	0·00	907	0·00	45,222	0·14	9	0·00	511	0·00
1986	1	0·00	13	0·00	1,124	0·00	59,164	0·17	21	0·00	594	0·00
1987	1	0·00	7	0·00	1,367	0·00	90,439	0·24	13	0·00	739	0·00
1988	0	0·00	24	0·00	2,979	0·01	126,434	0·32	56	0·00	1,201	0·00
1989	0	0·00	69	0·00	2,715	0·01	118,962	0·28	77	0·00	1,083	0·00
1990	11	0·00	64	0·00	2,955	0·01	102,775	0·21	52	0·00	1,302	0·00
1991	0	0·00	95	0·00	4,973	0·01	128,570	0·25	109	0·00	1,511	0·00
1992	2	0·00	49	0·00	10,167	0·02	368,325	0·69	67	0·00	2,566	0·00

The amounts of NIC classes 1-1A remitted or written off as irrecoverable for the reasons outlined are as follows:

Amounts £ thousands

Year	Hardship remitted	Percentage of total NIC paid	Equity remitted	Percentage of total NIC paid	Miscellaneous remitted	Percentage of total NIC paid	Insolvency remitted	Percentage of total NIC paid	Composition settlements remitted	Percentage of total NIC paid	Taxpayer gone abroad/away remitted	Percentage of total NIC paid
1979	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981	3	0·00	1	0·00	227	0·00	752	0·00	0	0·00	175	0·00
1982	3	0·00	2	0·00	410	0·00	623	0·00	6	0·00	217	0·00
1983	1	0·00	2	0·00	441	0·00	668	0·00	18	0·00	425	0·00
1984	4	0·00	5	0·00	599	0·00	892	0·00	0	0·00	472	0·00
1985	1	0·00	27	0·00	781	0·00	864	0·00	6	0·00	534	0·00
1986	1	0·00	11	0·00	1,033	0·00	2,623	0·01	28	0·00	681	0·00
1987	1	0·00	6	0·00	1,662	0·01	6,114	0·03	11	0·00	720	0·00
1988	0	0·00	15	0·00	2,942	0·01	11,914	0·04	55	0·00	968	0·00
1989	0	0·00	58	0·00	2,829	0·01	11,048	0·04	109	0·00	1,083	0·00
1990	0	0·00	30	0·00	2,971	0·01	13,284	0·04	54	0·00	971	0·00
1991	0	0·00	348	0·00	4,258	0·01	15,847	0·05	184	0·00	1,007	0·00
1992	0	0·00	40	0·00	7,205	0·02	23,821	0·07	59	0·00	1,445	0·00

Life Insurance Companies

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about expenses disclosure as it applies to direct sales forces and tied agents of life insurance companies.

Mr. Nelson: My right hon. Friend has received a number of such representations in the context of the consultation exercise on the Office of Fair Trading report on the marketing and sale of investment-linked insurance products.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will establish an advisory group of British manufacturers to make recommendations as to how best to modify the taxation system so as to encourage British manufacturing industry.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Treasury Ministers meet regularly with key individuals and representative bodies in manufacturing industry, and will continue to do so in the period leading up to the Budget in November. Ministers also consider each year a large number of detailed written representations for changes to the tax system as it affects industry. I am not convinced that a further advisory group is needed to supplement these existing channels of communication.

Uncollected Tax

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount currently owed in uncollected tax by individuals against whom the Inland Revenue is taking legal proceedings or has proceedings outstanding; and if he will disaggregate that estimate into the amount owed by *(a)* those currently residing in the United Kingdom and *(b)* those currently residing abroad in (i) other EC countries, (ii) OECD countries other than the EC and (iii) all other countries.

Mr. Dorrell: The information required is not available in the form requested.

Taxes Act 1988

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the yield to the Exchequer for 1993-94, if subsections (4) to (9) of section 65 of the Taxes Act 1988 were repealed.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that the information to answer this question is not available.

Tax Residents

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the additional revenue to the Exchequer for 1993-94, if, in determining whether an individual is tax resident in the United Kingdom, a day spent in the United Kingdom is deemed to include any day in which the person spends more than three hours of that day in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that the information to answer this question is not available.

Available Accommodation Rule

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of taxpayers who will cease to be liable for United Kingdom tax in 1994-95 following the abolition of the available accommodation rule.

Mr. Dorrell: Several hundred.

Tax Returns

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what circumstances he requires *(a)* non-domiciled and *(b)* non-resident people working in the United Kingdom to complete tax returns.

Mr. Dorrell: An individual would be required to complete a tax return in circumstances where there is a liability to United Kingdom tax.

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer from how many people who are non-domiciled and resident or ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom the Inland Revenue collected tax returns for the latest year available.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that the information to answer this question is not available.

Chargeable Gains

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the yield to the Exchequer for 1993-94 if section 62(1) of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 did not apply to assets which qualified either for business property relief within section 104 of the Inheritance Tax Act 1984 or for agricultural property relief within section 116 of the Inheritance Tax Act 1984 at the time of the person's death.

Mr. Dorrell: Assuming that the normal business reliefs against capital gains tax such as holdover relief and retirement relief would be made available on death, the estimated yield from introducing a capital gains charge on death in respect of assets which qualify for business property or agricultural property relief under the inheritance tax provisions in 1993-94 is negligible.

Worldwide Income

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the yield in 1992-93 or the latest year available of taxing non-domiciled resident of ordinarily resident people on worldwide income and capital gains.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that the information to answer this question is not available.

Securities and Investments Board

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on the number of public interest members of the Securities and Investments Board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 7 July 1993]:* The Chairman of SIB mentioned in his review that he wished to rebalance the composition of the SIB board. My right hon. and learned Friend has accepted these proposals.

ENVIRONMENT

Home Improvements

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what details he has as to the number of each type of grant given for home improvement in each of the last 10 years; and if he will give the cash total of each grant, in each case on a constant value cash basis.

Sir George Young: The values of payments and the numbers of dwellings involved for each type of grant for home improvement over the period 1982 to 1992 are shown in the tables.

Tables 1 and 2 cover, respectively, numbers of dwellings on which grants were paid to private owners and tenants under the Housing Act 1985 for the whole period, and numbers of grants paid under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 for 1990 onwards.

Tables 3 and 4 give the respective total values of grants paid, and tables 5 and 6 show them expressed on a constant value basis at 1982 prices.

Table 1
Grants paid to private owners and tenants under Housing Act 1985[1,2]

England				Number of dwellings
	Conversion and improvement	*Intermediate and special*	*Repairs*	*All*
1982	54,732	20,600	28,696	104,028
1983	79,529	27,236	113,061	219,826
1984	83,958	29,003	116,146	229,107
1985	52,989	29,012	54,411	136,412
1986	46,994	24,629	41,705	113,328
1987	49,383	19,661	39,864	108,908
1988	48,213	17,107	39,983	105,303
1989	48,711	14,027	35,479	98,217
1990	51,031	12,688	25,361	89,080
1991	15,477	4,233	6,510	26,220
1992	2,460	646	745	3,851

[1] The system of grants to private owners and tenants under the Housing Act 1985 ended at the end of June 1990. Although no more grants were approved after that date, payments will continue for grants approved earlier.

[2] Includes grants paid to housing associations under private owner legislation and grants to tenants in both private and public sectors.

Table 2
Grants paid to private owners and tenants under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989[1]

England			Number of Grants
	1990	*1991*	*1992*
Renovation Grants			
Mandatory	259	14,986	29,588
Discretionary	255	3,206	5,157
Disabled Facilities Grants			
Mandatory	360	10,790	16,261
Discretionary	13	180	287
HMO[2] Grants			
Mandatory	5	361	757
Discretionary	—	22	58

	1990	1991	1992
Common Parts Grants			
Mandatory	4	51	122
Discretionary	—	17	27
Minor Works Assistance[3]			
Mandatory	6,667	29,042	28,969
All			
Mandatory	628	26,188	46,728
Discretionary	6,935	32,467	34,498

[1] The new system of grants under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 came into operation from July 1990 in England and Wales, apart from Minor Works Assistance (April 1990).
[2] HMO stands for Houses in Multiple Occupation.
[3] Grants for Minor Works Assistance are discretionary.

Table 3
Grants paid to private owners and tenants under Housing Act 1985[1,2]

England — *£ thousands*

	Conversion and improvement	Intermediate and special	Repairs	All
1982	185,867	42,108	54,184	282,159
1983	318,712	65,453	271,325	655,490
1984	413,840	83,619	341,924	839,383
1985	271,996	86,751	166,352	525,099
1986	208,771	72,368	113,783	394,921
1987	199,977	54,482	107,554	362,013
1988	190,908	46,658	109,508	347,074
1989	188,092	39,683	100,881	328,656
1990	202,655	34,628	74,545	311,828
1991	91,083	14,701	21,004	126,788
1992	15,700	2,529	2,473	20,702

[1] The system of grants to private owners and tenants under the Housing Act 1985 ended at the end of June 1990. Although no more grants were approved after that date, payments will continue for grants approved earlier.
[2] Includes grants paid to housing associations under private owner legislation and grants to tenants in both private and public sectors.

Table 4
Grants paid to private owners and tenants under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989[1]

England — *£ thousands*

	1990	1991	1992
Renovation Grants			
Mandatory	1,144	124,766	289,562
Discretionary	309	12,536	20,829
Disabled Facilities Grants			
Mandatory	656	31,911	58,342
Discretionary	37	624	1,182
HMO[2] *Grants*			
Mandatory	29	2,093	5,805
Discretionary	—	123	598
Common Parts Grants			
Mandatory	16	390	694
Discretionary	—	121	151
Minor Works Assistance[3]			
Discretionary	3,541	17,115	18,422
All			
Mandatory	1,845	159,160	354,403
Discretionary	3,887	30,519	41,182

[1]The new systen of grants under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 came into operation from July 1990 in England and Wales, apart from Minor Works Assistance (April 1990).
[2]HMO stands for Houses in Multiple Occupation.
[3]Grants for Minor Works Assistance are discretionary.

Table 5
Value of grants paid under Housing Act 1985, at constant 1982 prices[1,2,3]

England — *£ thousands*

	Conversion and improvement	Intermediate and special	Repairs	All
1982	185,867	42,108	54,184	282,159
1983	304,870	62,610	259,541	627,022
1984	376,976	76,170	311,466	764,613
1985	233,645	74,519	142,896	451,060
1986	173,437	60,120	94,526	328,082
1987	159,499	43,454	85,784	288,736
1988	145,124	35,468	83,245	263,838
1989	132,653	27,987	71,147	231,786
1990	130,593	22,315	48,038	200,945
1991	55,450	8,950	12,787	77,187
1992	9,212	1,484	1,451	12,147

[1] The system of grants to private owners and tenants under the Housing Act 1985 ended at the end of June 1990. Although no more grants were approved after that date, payments will continue for grants approved earlier.
[2] Includes grants paid to housing associations under private owner legislation and grants to tenants in both private and public sectors.
[3] Value of grants paid converted to constant prices using the Retail Prices Index.

Table 6
Value of grants paid under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, at constant 1982 prices[1,2]

England — *£ thousands*

	1990	1991	1992
Renovation Grants			
Mandatory	737	75,956	169,900
Discretionary	199	7,632	12,221
Disabled Facilities Grants			
Mandatory	423	19,427	34,232
Discretionary	24	380	694
HMO[3] *Grants*			
Mandatory	19	1,274	3,406
Discretionary	—	75	351
Common Parts Grants			
Mandatory	10	237	407
Discretionary	—	74	89
Minor Works Assistance[4]			
Discretionary	2,282	10,419	10,809
All			
Mandatory	1,189	96,895	207,945
Discretionary	2,505	18,580	24,163

[1] The new system of grants under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 came into operation from July 1990 in England and Wales, apart from Minor Works Assistance (April 1990).
[2] Value of grants paid converted to constant prices using the Retail Prices Index.
[3] HMO stands for Houses in Multiple Occupation.
[4] Grants for Minor Works Assistance are discretionary.

Urban Policy

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to recognise the requirement for long-term planning of urban regeneration.

Mr. Baldry: The Government will continue to encourage and sustain long-term investment to improve the quality of life in our city areas, both through existing programmes and new initiatives. Urban development corporations will continue to attract private investment, which has so far totalled £12 billion. City challenge will continue to promote lasting regeneration and encourage partnership between central and local government, the private sector and local people. The Urban Regeneration Agency will draw together the present programmes of city grant, derelict land grant and English Estates to create a new unified approach to the regeneration of land in and around urban areas. All urban areas will benefit from substantial main programme spending.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when the index of urban deprivation will now be published;

(2) if he will list each of his orginal and revised estimates of the date of the publication of the index of urban deprivation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have made no formal estimates of the date of publication of the results of our analysis of 1991 census data. The precise timing will depend on the outcome of continuing consultation with the local authority associations and other bodies, and on the finalisation of indicators.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the former Members of this House who have been appointed since 1988 by his Department to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations; and if he will list in each case the title of the post, the salary, the duration of the appointment and the party which the former hon. Member represented.

Mr. Gummer: Such information is not available centrally.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department since 1988 to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, any salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Gummer: The following members of the House of Lords are currently serving on the boards of executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department. The other information requested is not available.

Name of body	*Postholder*	*Position*	*Annual salary (£)*	*First appointed to board*	*Present appointment*	
					From	*To*
Commission for the New Towns	Lord Finsberg	Deputy Chairman	9,790	1 September 1992	1 September 1992	31 August 1996
	Lord Bellwin	Member	6,310	1 April 1985	1 April 1993	31 March 1995
Countryside Commission	Earl of Swinton	Member	5,050	1 July 1987	1 July 1990	30 June 1993
English Nature	Earl of Cranbrook	Chairman	35,150	5 November 1990	5 November 1990	31 March 1994
	Earl Peel	Member	6,310	5 November 1990	1 April 1993	31 March 1996
Joint Nature Conservation Committee	Lord Selborne	Chairman	23,435	4 September 1991	4 September 1991	31 March 1994
National Rivers Authority	Lord Crickhowell	Chairman	52,945	10 July 1989	10 July 1989	30 June 1994
	Lord Gregson	Member	8,090	1 July 1991	1 November 1992	31 October 1995
Rural Development Commission	Lord Shuttleworth	Chairman	31,360	1 May 1990	1 May 1990	30 April 1994
Urban Development Corporation Leeds	Baroness Lockwood	Member	5,030	30 June 1988	30 June 1991	29 June 1994
Urban Development Corporation London Docklands	Lord Cocks	Deputy Chairman	23,175	1 November 1988	2 March 1992	1 March 1995
Urban Development Corporation Teesside	Lord Dormand	Deputy Chairman	8,590	22 June 1987	22 June 1991	21 June 1993
	Baroness Eccles	Member	5,030	22 June 1987	22 June 1991	21 June 1993

Sellafield (Radioactive Discharges)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the views of the Government of the Republic of Ireland on the pollution inspectorate's recommendations on the new authorisations for radioactive discharges from the Sellafield site in Cumbria.

Mr. Yeo: The views expressed by all respondents, including the Irish Government, were taken into account by the chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the radiological inspectorates of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in their report on the public consultation on their proposed draft authorisations for British Nuclear Fuels' Sellafield site. The inspectorates' report has been carefully considered by my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. They intend to carry out a further round of public consultation which will include the Irish Government.

Property Services Agency

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the value of the land and buildings in the ownership of the Property Services Agency.

Mr. Curry: The value of freehold land and buildings on the PSA Services' departmental estate is estimated as £4 million.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the relative effectiveness of *(a)* dry storage of spent AGR fuel as waste in a store such as that proposed for Torness by Scottish Nuclear or *(b)* reprocessing of the spent fuel as low as reasonably advisable in implementing the principle on minimising exposure to radiation.

Mr. Yeo: Dry storage of spent nuclear fuel is not to be regarded as an alternative to reprocessing but rather as a measure which enables the owners of the spent fuel to defer any decision on whether to reprocess the fuel or to dispose of it directly. Unless a decision has been taken to dispose of it directly, the spent fuel in store is not to be regarded as a waste but as a resource from which uranium and plutonium can be extracted by reprocessing. It is for the owners of the spent fuel to determine whether they wish to implement dry storage and, if so, to satisfy the planning and regulatory authorities that their proposals are acceptable.

Environment Council

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council on 28 and 29 June.

Mr. Gummer: I and my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside represented the United Kingdom at the Environment Council in Luxembourg on 28 and 29 June. The Council discussed a lengthy agenda and achieved positive results.

The Council adopted a common position, by qualified majority—QMV—on a directive on the control of volatile organic compound—VOC—emissions resulting from the storage of petrol and its distribution from terminals to service stations—the so-called "stage I" directive. This will control VOC emissions which contribute to the formation of ozone at ground level. Ozone is the main constituent of photochemical smog and a damaging pollutant. The directive will introduce a closed system of petrol distribution under which petrol vapours are recovered and regenerated into a petroleum product instead of being vented into the air as at present. The agreed text meets the Government's concerns, including the need to protect small service stations in rural areas; to allow the continued use of existing vapour recovery units; and to allow the continued use of measuring dipsticks for existing road tankers.

The Council agreed unanimously a directive on hazardous waste incineration which sets combusion conditions and emission limits for incineration plant and other plants using hazardous waste as a fuel. The directive is an important contribution to securing incineration as an environmentally acceptable waste disposal route. The Government secured a number of important changes to the text which are intended to achieve a proper balance of costs and benefits. These relate in particular to the scope of the directive, emissions limits and the discharge of waste water. The directive will come into force for new plant two years after its publication in the Official Journal of the Communities and for existing plant three and a half years thereafter.

The Council discussed two measures on vehicle emissions. Ministers agreed by QMV the text of a directive, amending directive 70/220/EEC, which will set new exhaust emission standards for light commercial vehicles below 3·5 tonnes maximum weight. The new directive will require the same catalyst technology introduced for cars in 1992 to be applied to light duty vans and trucks, and will result in a significant reduction in traffic pollution from these vehicles. The standards will come into effect in October for the approval of new types and will apply to all models sold from 1 October 1994. In the text, the Council also agreed that additional provisions should be applied in a further stage for introduction in 1996-97. Ministers also made substantial progress towards agreement on a further directive on standards for passenger car emissions. This would introduce new limits for implementation in 1996-97, and provide for further measures to be considered for the year 2000.

The Council agreed unanimously that the Community and its member states intend to ratify the biodiversity convention by the end of the year. The decision to do so is dependent on achieving essential safeguards concerning the financial provisions of the convention and will be kept under review

The Council discussed proposed minor revisions to the annexes to the wild birds directive, but was unable to reach agreement. The issue has been referred back to the Committee of Permanent Representatives—COREPER—for further discussion, with a view to early adoption in the future.

The Commission presented to the Council new proposals for the implementation in the Community of the Montreal protocol on ozone depleting substances with references to HCFCs and methyl bromide, and for Community ratification of the relevant amendments to the Montreal protocol. The Government welcomed the Commission's presentation, but will wish to consider the proposals in detail, especially as regards methyl bromide. In discussion, however, we were able to support the proposed cap on HCFC supply at 2·5 per cent. and a phase-out by 2015.

The Council held a full discussion of the problems caused by the German packaging ordinance for the paper and plastics recycling industries in other member states, based on an oral report by the Commission. The majority of member states agreed that early action was necessary on a Community-wide basis. They welcomed the intention of the incoming Belgian presidency to give high priority to the proposed packaging and packaging waste directive. The Commission will be bringing forward a revised draft to take account of amendments proposed by the European Parliament.

Among other matters, the Council formally adopted the regulation establishing a voluntary Community scheme on eco-management and audit; noted the good progress which had been made on the Commission's proposal for a revision of controls on the wildlife trade—the CITES regulation—and invited COREPER to take the discussion forward; adopted conclusions on follow-up to UNCED and to the conference of European Ministers for the Environment held in Lucerne in April; heard a report from the presidency on progress over the last six months on a number of proposals relating to climate change; adopted conclusions welcoming follow-up action in accordance with the Commission's communication on a "Common Policy on Safe Seas"; heard a report from the Commission on its preparations for a possible Community strategy on coastal zones; and welcomed a presentation by

the Commission of new internal measures that it has introduced to improve the integration of environmental concerns into other Community policies.

The Commissioner announced that the Commission had adopted criteria for the award of Community eco-labels for the first two product groups under the Community scheme—washing machines and dishwashers—and that the scheme was now in operation.

Church Urban Fund

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Church Commissioners and the Church of England about the use of urban deprivation index to assess the appropriate level of grants from the church urban fund.

Mr. Baldry: Officials from the Department of the Environment met Church of England officials on 6 May and there have been subsequent contacts and correspondence. The Church of England has made helpful comments on our contractors' proposals for assessing urban conditions.

THORP

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list his statutory responsibilities and functions under the Radioactive Substances Acts in respect of considering justification for operating a thermal oxide reprocessing plant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Under section 12A of the Radioactive Substances Act 1960, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has power to direct the chief inspector to refuse an application for an authorisation to dispose of radioactive waste, or to direct him to grant such an authorisation subject to limitations or conditions, if any, as my right hon. Friend may specify in the direction. Under section 12B my right hon. Friend has power to require the chief inspector to refer an application to him so that he may determine it.

The Act does not refer to the matters which my right hon. Friend is to take into account in considering whether, and if so how, to exercise these powers.

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the period of consultation over the justification for operating THORP will formally begin; when it will end; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will go out to consultation when they have the further information and material referred to in the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) on 28 June, *Official Report*, column *392*. The consultation period is expected to last two months.

Water Disconnections

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many domestic water disconnections took place in Severn-Trent during the last 12 months and in each of the previous five years.

Mr. Yeo: The information requested is given in the table, and relates to Severn Trent Water's supply area, and that of the former Severn Trent water authority. Information on disconnections prior to privatisation includes total disconnections, domestic and non-domestic.

	Number
1987-88	[1]932
1988-89	[1]1,101
1989-90	985
1990-91	286
1991-92	1,284
1992-93	1,215

[1] Domestic and non-domestic.

Sellafield (Radioactive Discharges)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his report will be published into the incident which involved the discharge of elevated levels of radioactivity from Sellafield on 12 February.

Mr. Yeo: The report is published today by Her Majesty's Stationery Office. I have placed a copy of the report in the Library of the House.

The report concludes, in particular, that the discharge occurred because a ventilation system from a cell area was unfiltered. Steps have been taken to guard against a recurrence. The radiation dose to the most exposed member of the public from the incident would not have exceeded one thousandth of the average radiation dose to such a person from natural radiation in a year in the United Kingdom. There was no contravention of the Sellafield nuclear site licence conditions or of the current authorised discharge limits for aerial discharges in connection with the incident.

The regulating authorities are to audit Sellafield's facilities on the site to ensure that the possibility of a recurrence of similar incidents is minimised.

EDUCATION

Grant-maintained Schools

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *513*, how many grant-maintained schools folders have now been produced for the distribution of booklets; and what was the cost of *(a)* the production and *(b)* the distribution.

Mr. Robin Squire: A total of 210,000 folders have been produced to date, at a cost of £51,181, excluding the cost of the booklets they normally contain. The cost of distributing these folders forms part of a general charge to the Department and cannot be disaggregated.

Young People

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total number of *(a)* 18-year-olds, *(b)* 17-year-olds and *(c)* 16-year-olds in January (i) 1991, (ii) 1992 and (iii) 1993; and if he will list for each year the number in full-time education in (1) school including maintained, independent and special schools and (2) further education, excluding those on youth training schemes in colleges.

Mr. Boswell: The numbers of 18, 17 and 16-year-olds in England and the numbers in full-time education are shown in the table.

	(Academic years, thousands) 1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Population aged			
18	678·3	636·7	604·9
17	634·5	602·2	579·4
16	599·0	577·3	554·8
Pupils in full-time education in school (excluding sixth form colleges)[1] *aged*			
18	14·8	15·9	16·5
17	130·1	135·3	138·7
16	185·6	195·3	195·6
Students in full-time further education (including sixth form colleges but excluding those on youth training schemes in colleges)[1] *aged*			
18	67·2	77·8	89·2
17	136·2	152·9	174·2
16	161·7	180·7	193·1

[1] The figures for 1992-93 are provisional estimates based on partially processed returns from schools and colleges.

Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement about the new general national vocational qualifications.

Mr. Patten: I have today announced that the three levels of GNVQ should in future be known by names rather than numbers:

"Advanced" for Level 3,
"Intermediate" for Level 2, and
"Foundation" for Level 1.

"Advanced" GNVQs—or "vocational A Levels" will help pupils, students, parents, teachers, higher education and employers to understand that these GNVQs require a level of achievement equivalent to two GCE A-Levels.

Bradford City Technology College

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what total financial assistance has been given to Bradford city technology college, to date, by *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* the public sector; how much will be given to the college by each sector in each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the names of all persons, companies or other organisations in the private sector who, to date, have given financial assistance to Bradford city technology college to support its capital or revenue expenditure; and if he will list the names of all persons, companies or other organisations in the private sector who have indicated their intention to offer financial assistance to the college over the next three years.

Mr. Forth: The initial capital cost of establishing Bradford city technology college totalled £9·16 million of which the Department for Education contributed £7·33 million and sponsors £1·83 million. The major sponsors were: Dixons Group plc, Mr. H. Wong and Kodak plc.

The directors of the college are committed under the terms of their funding agreement with the Secretary of State to provide a minimum of 20 per cent. of any further capital expenditure. Revenue expenditure of CTCs is met from recurrent grant provided by the Secretary of State. As with other schools, individuals and organisations make voluntary contributions from time to time; these are matters for the directors of the college concerned.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Baltimar Zephyr

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) of 16 June, *Official Report*, columns *644-45*, what information he has on whether the Indonesian Government have tried any crew members of the Baltimar Zephyr for mutiny.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are not aware that any crew members of the Baltimar Zephyr have been tried for mutiny.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent of mobilisation of Bosnian-Croat citizens in Bosnia-Herzegovina on 30 June; what action he plans in the event of fighting by these forces; if he will bring forward plans to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions against the Republic of Croatia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are aware of reports that all three parties in the conflict in Bosnia are taking further steps to mobilise their citizens. We are pressing all parties to stop fighting and to support the peace process. We are also pressing the Croatian Government to co-operate fully in this. Croatia was put on notice by the 8 June meeting of EC Foreign Ministers that restrictive measures would be initiated against it if the situation so required.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times representatives of Her Majesty's Government have met President Franjo Tudjman of Croatia since January 1991; and what was the purpose of each meeting.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Representatives of Her Majesty's Government have met President Tudjman and his staff on numerous occasions since January 1991, most recently on 30 May when Her Majesty's ambassador in Zagreb met the President. The main purpose of our representations on this and previous occasions has been to press President Tudjman to co-operate fully with the efforts of the international community to achieve lasting and equitable settlements to the conflict in Bosnia, based on the principles established by the London conference, and to urge restraint in trying to restore Croatian sovereignty in the Serb-occupied Krajinas.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times representatives of Her Majesty's Government have met President Izetbegovic of Bosnia-Herzegovina since January 1991; and what was the purpose of each meeting.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Representatives of Her Majesty's Government have met President Izetbegovic and his staff

on numerous occasions since January 1991, most recently on 14 June 1993 when he visited London for talks with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The main issues raised by President Izetbegovic were the arms embargo on the former Yugoslavia and the fighting in central Bosnia. My right hon. Friend set out British policies and encouraged President Izetbegovic to engage in negotiations to achieve a lasting and equitable settlement to the conflict in Bosnia, based on the principles of the London conference.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) of 14, April, *Official Report*, column *581*, what assessment he has made of the relation between that answer, his answer to that hon. Member in the *Official Report*, column 580 and information contained in United Nations Security Council note verbale, dated 16 March 1993, Ref. S/24900/Add. 27; on what basis the assumption was made that aircraft crossing the borders of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into Bosnia-Herzegovina were flown by Bosnian Serbs; and what subsequent information he has received about the incident.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information referred to in the written answer given on 14 April to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber by my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs is contained in note verbale S/24900/Add. 30 of 26 March from the United Nations Secretary-General to the president of the Security Council. The aircraft observed at Gladovici on 13 March were seen to withdraw towards the Bosnian/Serbian border following the incident, but have not been definitively attributed to any party.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to urge the Security Council to defer decisions on actions in the former Yugoslavia until reliable evidence is available on which to make decisions.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In taking decisions on the former Yugoslavia, as on other areas of the world where there is a need to maintain international peace and security, Security Council members take account of the views of the United Nations Secretary-General as set out in his reports, as wel as their own knowledge and assessment of a situation.

Piracy

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will make representations to the Government of Indonesia for them to undertake to set up a full investigation of all acts of piracy and murder in Indonesian waters.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Her Majesty's embassy in Jakarta has on a number of occasions raised with the Indonesians the issue of attacks at sea. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised the subject during his visit there in April.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will hold talks with the Association of South-East Asian Nations about the establishment of multilateral agreements by their member states towards the prevention of piracy in the region.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are no current plans for talks on piracy with ASEAN. The International Maritime organisation is the best forum in which to address this issue. The IMO has recently produced a report covering piracy in south-east Asia.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will hold talks with ASEAN about providing intelligence data relating to piracy and safety to merchant vessels travelling on the seas of that region.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The International Maritime Organisation is responsible for collating and disseminating information relating to attacks on shipping in the ASEAN region and elsewhere.

Iran

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made, directly to the Government of Iran, or at the United Nations, concerning violation of women's human rights in Iran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are concerned about all human rights abuses in Iran, including those against women. We regularly underline our concerns to the Iranians, both bilaterally and with our EC partners. The latest report of the United Nations Secretary-General's special representative on human rights in Iran includes information about the situation of women in Iran. We and our EC partners co-sponsored the resolution adopted by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on 10 March reflecting the special representative's concerns.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Government of Iran have sought to impose restrictions on the dress of female United Kingdom diplomatic personnel in Iran; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Islamic dress code has to be observed in public by all women in Iran, including female foreign diplomats.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received in respect of Iranian attacks upon People's Mojahedin bases in Iraq; what his response has been; if he regards such attacks as being in contravention of Security Council resolution 598; what action Her Majesty's Government are taking on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received a number of representations about the air raids carried out by Iran on 25 May inside Iraq. The possible contravention of UN Security Council resolution 598 is a matter for the Security Council which is permanently seized of this issue. We have expressed our serious concern at these air raids to the Iranian authorities.

Cyprus

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on extradition arrangements between the United Kingdom and Cyprus.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Until 1990, extradition between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Cyprus was possible under the Commonwealth scheme for the rendition of fugitive offenders. Since 1990, extradition arrangements with the Republic of Cyprus are under the Extradition Act 1989 and the European convention on extradition.

Murders (Holidaymakers)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom citizens have been murdered on overseas holidays in each year since 1985; and if he will list the countries the murders occurred in.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The number of United Kingdom citizens murdered abroad since 1985, and reported to the FCO, is as follows:

	Numbers
1985	18
1986	26
1987	45
1988	55
1989	39
1990	50
1991	49
1992	51
1993	[1]27

[1] First six months.

Murders took place in 75 countries, as shown in the list.

FCO records do not distinguish between holiday-makers, business people and residents abroad.

Afghanistan
Antigua
Argentina
Australia
Bahamas
Belgium
Belize
Bermuda
Bolivia
Brazil
British Virgin Islands
Canada
Canary Islands
Caymen Islands
Colombia
Cyprus
Czechoslovakia
Denmark
Djibouti
Dominican Republic
Egypt
El Salvador
France
Gambia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guyana
Honduras
India
Indonesia
Iraq
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Jerusalem
Kenya
Lebanon
Liberia
Malawi
Malta
Mexico
Morocco
Mozambique
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nigeria
Pakistan
Papua New Guinea
Peru
Philippines
Portugal
Saudi Arabia
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
St. Lucia
St. Maarten (Netherland Antilles)
Sudan
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Tanzania
Thailand
Turkey
Tunisia
Togo
USA
Uganda
Venezuela
Yugoslavia (Belgrade)
Zaire
Zimbabwe

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, further to his statement of 28 June, *Official Report*, column 657, what independent evidence he sought about the competence as saboteurs of the alleged conspirators against ex-President Bush before coming to his conclusion that the United States response was justified and proportionate.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United States have made it clear that they had evidence of Iraqi intelligence involvement in the attempt on the life of ex-President Bush in Kuwait. The United States briefed the Security Council about the evidence on 27 June.

Belize

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to discuss future Central American and Caribbean issues with the new Prime Minister of Belize; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no such plans, but Her Majesty's high commissioner in Belmopan, who is in regular touch with the Belize authorities on a wide range of issues, called on the new Prime Minister shortly after the recent election.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Irish Language

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) which experts in Irish-medium education advised the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education on the appropriateness of the courses in subject application, education and professional studies in the BEd degree at St. Mary's college, Belfast and in the PGCE course at Queen's university, Belfast to the needs of teachers of Irish in Irish-medium primary and secondary schools in Northern Ireland and of his Department;

(2) what action his Department intends to take in relation to the training of teachers of the Irish language;

(3) if the written advice of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education is available to the public;

(4) what criteria were adopted by the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education in determining the appropriateness of courses in subject application, education and professional studies in the BEd degree at St. Mary's college, Belfast and in the PGCE course at the Queen's university of Belfast to the needs of teachers of Irish in Irish-medium primary and secondary schools in Northern Ireland;

(5) who are the experts in (i) the teaching of Irish and (ii) modern language teaching methodology who advised the Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education on the appropriateness of the course in Celtic for the BEd degree

at St. Mary's college, Belfast to the needs of student teachers of Irish in Northern Ireland and of his Department;

(6) what criteria were adopted by the Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education in determining whether the Celtic course in the BEd degree at St. Mary's college, Belfast is suitable for the needs of student teachers of Irish in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: As a precondition of approval by the Department of Education, courses of initial teacher training—ITT—in Northern Ireland are considered by the Council for the Accreditation of the Teacher Education —CATE—and required to meet certain defined Government criteria. The form and nature of these criteria are currently set out in the Department's circular 1989/40 "Initial Teacher Training Approval of Courses" which replaced circular 1985/20. Bachelor of education courses at St. Mary's college of education and post-graduate certificate of education courses at St. Mary's and Queen's university, with a main subject option of Celtic which student teachers of Irish undertake, were considered against Government criteria set out in circular 1985/20 and were approved as suitable courses of teacher training in December 1989. To help CATE in its work, all ITT institutions in Northern Ireland were visited and reported on by the Department's inspectorate. Circulars 1985/20 and 1989/40 are in the public domain, but the advice given by CATE to the Department in respect of courses at individual institutions is confidential. A review of ITT in Northern Ireland is currently under way. Developments emanating from this review are likely to affect the mode and content of all ITT courses; include an increase in school-based initial teacher training and a clearer definition of the competences which successful teachers would be expected to have as they progress through initial teacher training, induction and the more advanced stages of their careers. After a period of consultation, any changes resulting from the review will be announced later this year.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the nature and scope of research into the teaching of Irish carried out by the staff of St. Mary's college and of the department and school of education of the Queen's university of Belfast since 1980.

Mr. Ancram: The emphasis in recent years has not been on research into the teaching of modern languages, including Irish, but on the provision of professional support and production of learning materials for use in the classroom. St. Mary's college of education, in conjunction with my Department and the education and library boards, has been actively involved in this area. One notable result has been the production of a graded reading scheme for children learning to read through the medium of Irish.

At Queen's university, research into the teaching of Irish has been part of on-going research into the teaching of modern languages.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many times inspectors from his Department have furnished him and his predecessors with reports on the teaching of Irish in higher education in the past 20 years; and what arrangements exist to make these reports available to the public.

Mr. Ancram: There has been one substantive report on the teaching of Irish in St. Mary's college of education, which formed part of a general inspection of the college in 1987.

This report was not a published document. It was supplied in confidence to the college authorities and to the Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Structural Funds

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the consultative draft of the "Northern Ireland Structural Funds Plan 1994 to 1999" was issued for consultation; and when he will make it available to right hon. and hon. Members elected for Northern Ireland constituencies.

Sir John Wheeler: The Department of Finance and Personnel circulated a consultation draft of the key sections of the "Northern Ireland Structural Funds Plan 1994 to 1999" to local interest groups on 25 June 1993. The closing date for the receipt of comments is 31 August. The interest generated in the draft plan has been much greater than anticipated with over 700 copies issued so far. Copies have already been issued to the Northern Ireland MEPs and main political party leaders, but I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's interest in the draft plan and would, of course, be pleased to send a copy to any of the Members elected for Northern Ireland constituencies if they request it.

Water Main, Ballygowan

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he first received a complaint about a burst water main opposite 21-23 Saintfield road, Ballygowan; on what date the water main was repaired; why the water service was unable to repair the mains earlier; what is the estimated total loss of water in gallons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Department of the Environment was notified on 21 June 1993 about a leaking hydrant opposite 21-23 Saintfield road, Ballygowan, and the repair was carried out on 1 July. During the period from 21 June to 1 July there were six burst mains, 25 burst service pipes and 16 leaking valves in the area requiring urgent repair as they were causing loss of water pressure and supply to consumers; the leaking hydrant was causing neither. It was not seen as a hazard to vehicular or pedestrian traffic and the other repairs were given priority. The estimated loss of water was 72,000 gallons.

Homeless Young People

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what help is given to those young people from Northern Ireland who find themselves homeless in Britain and wish to return to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has a statutory duty to respond to those persons who are homeless in Northern Ireland. Young people who are homeless in Britain do not come within its responsibility until they arrive in Northern Ireland.

Road Safety, Ballygowan

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received about road safety on the main Belfast road, Ballygowan in the vicinity of the bus stop near Ballygowan Pharmacy, 15 The Square, Ballygowan; what consideration he has given to the provision of a pedestrian crossing at this location across the main Belfast road to unit 6; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: In the past six years, two requests have been received for the provision of a pedestrian crossing at this location. A survey will be carried out in September to determine whether a pedestrian crossing is needed.

Young Migrants

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what financial support is given to housing associations in Northern Ireland who wish to work specifically in advice and support to young people wishing to migrate to other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins: None. In 1989-90, however, the Department of Health and Social Services grant aided the production of a leaflet "Second Thoughts—A Closer Look at Emigrating to London" which was jointly produced by a number of organisations, including one registered housing association. A copy of the leaflet will be placed in the Library.

A further grant has been made available to produce an updated version of the leaflet, which is expected to be available in the autumn.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what lists are held by the IDB of architects, quantity surveyors, mechanical and electrical contractors and structural engineers for engagement in design teams for capital projects or invitations to tender; and how such lists are compiled and reviewed.

Mr. Atkins: The IDB holds separate lists of architects; quantity surveyors; mechanical and electrical engineers; and civil and structural engineers. These lists are compiled on the basis of practice information supplied by applicant firms. The lists are not reviewed as it is the responsibility of applicant firms to update the practice information supplied to the IDB.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a list of IDB construction contracts for the last four years indicating the total value of each contract, the names of firms in the respective design teams, the names of contractor firms and the names of those invited to tender.

Mr. Atkins: The information requested is being compiled and will be placed in the Library in due course.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement regarding the IDB's use of consultants in capital projects indicating whether they are appointed by rota, by free bid, by client preference or IDB preferences.

Mr. Atkins: The IDB assesses and selects professional practices for appointment as design consultants in capital projects. The assessment is based on the practice information submitted to it by firms seeking inclusion in IDB's select lists. Selection for particular projects is based on professional expertise, past performance, and the availability of resources to cope with the scale of design work within the project timescale. Account is taken also of any views stated by the IDB client company for whom the project is being built. There is no rota system, but the IDB does seek to spread work among consultants. Whenever possible, preference is given to local professional practices capable of undertaking the work.

From 1 July 1993, the procurement of professional services will be governed by EC legislation as contained in the Public Services Contracts Regulations 1993.

Emergency Provisions Act

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the exercise of the powers contained in section 57 of and schedule 5 to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: During 1992, I received 24 applications from the Royal Ulster Constabulary for the appointment of persons to exercise the powers conferred by schedule 5 to the 1991 Act.

The following statistics indicate the extent of the use of these powers during the 1992 calendar year.

	Number
(a) number of applications for appointment	[1]24
(b) number of appointments made	[1]23
(c) number of notices to attend issued	[1]30
(d) number of interviews conducted	[1]23
(e) number of search warrants obtained	[1]0
(f) number of persons charged with Schedule 5 offences	[1]1
(g) number of persons convicted of Schedule 5 offences	[1]1
(h) number of search warrants or orders obtained	[2]0
(i) number of production orders obtained	[2]0
(j) number of explanation orders obtained	[2]0

[1]Under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) act 1991.
[2]Under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989.

I am satisfied that the powers have been used to good effect and that they are extremely useful in the continuing efforts to disrupt and curtail terrorist fund raising and to bring offenders to justice.

Bus Services

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progresss has been made towards implementation of the recommendations contained in the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report of June 1989 on the bus services in Northern Ireland provided by Ulsterbus Ltd. and Citybus Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I have today placed in the Library of the House, the third and final response to the report which has been prepared by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland in consultation with the bus companies and the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company. I am glad to confirm that good progress has been made on the implementation of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's recommendations since this matter was last reported to the House in March 1991. The response now indicates that 42 of the 58 recommendations made by the

MMC have been implemented in full and that the remaining 16 recommendations have been accepted and their implementation is continuing.

I am pleased to inform the House that research published recently by the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland has shown that there has been a significant improvement in services provided by the bus companies since the council carried out similar research in 1987. This reflects in some measure the steps taken by companies in response to the MMC recommendations and the oversight of their implementation by the Transport Holding Company and the Department. In February 1993, the companies fulfilled the commitment in the Northern Ireland citizens charter by publishing their bus passengers charter. I am confident that the companies will meet the targets it sets for standards and quality of service and that, over time, will strive to improve standards even further, achieve better value for money and, in consultation with their customers, provide greater choice and a better and more attractive service which the public are entitled to expect.

Industrial Electricity

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the transitional relief to monthly billed industrial electricity consumers in Northern Ireland, announced by him on 25 March, is in place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Yes. Transitional relief in the form of rebates on electricity bills, will be paid to about 3,800 monthly billed industrial and commercial customers. This will enable the tariff increase for those customers, which took effect from 1 April 1993, to be reduced from an average of 15 per cent. to 9 per cent. The relief will be paid out of a trust fund of £12·9 million which has been established and funded out of the dividend of £16·5 million declared by NIE in respect of the year to 31 March 1993. A subsidiary company of Northern Ireland Electricity plc will act as trustee. These arrangements have been notified to and cleared by the European Commission.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to whom each of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Northern Ireland Office is responsible; whether the public bodies or their members in each case are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 6 July 1993]:* Available information can be obtained from the following publications, copies of which are held in the Library.

(i) "Public Bodies 1992" lists the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments and includes the audit arrangements for each executive non-departmental public body.

The responsibilities of the Audit Commission or National Audit Office do not extend to the six Northern Ireland Departments, which have their own similarly appointed body—the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

(ii) The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints is responsible for undertaking the investigation of complaints against non-departmental public bodies. The Commissioner for Complaints (Northern Ireland) Act 1969 and the "Statutes Revised (2nd edition) Cumulative Supplement" list the non-departmental public bodies subject to investigation by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints.

All public servants are subject to the citizens charter and non-departmental public bodies are therefore encouraged through their sponsor Departments to adopt charter principles.

The other information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

School Drama Departments

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many school drama departments he has visited in his official capacity.

Mr. Brooke: Although invitations to school drama departments are more likely to go to Ministers in the Department for Education, I visited the Guildhall School of Music and Drama on 3 March.

Theatre in Education

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many representations he has received regarding the future of theatre in education provision.

Mr. Brooke: Since the start of the current campaign on behalf of theatre in education, I have received more than 30 such representations.

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultation he has had with *(a)* the Arts Council of Great Britain, *(b)* the regional arts boards, *(c)* the Department for Education and *(d)* local authority associations regarding the future of theatre in education provision.

Mr. Brooke: My Department has discussed theatre in education provision with the bodies listed in *(a)*, *(b)*, and *(c)*, and additionally with the Welsh arts council.

Regional Arts Boards

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which education officers working with regional arts boards he has met in his official capacity.

Mr. Brooke: I have met no regional arts board—RAB—education officers for formal discussions. During regional visits, I have met informally several RAB officers whose responsibilities include educational issues.

Tourist Accommodation

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration has been given to a pan-European standard scheme for classifying and grading tourist accommodation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: None. There is little industry support for such a proposal.

Tourism

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) how many full and part-time civil servants are employed in his Department on monitoring the activities of the British Tourist Authority; and what will be the cost of the salaries in the current financial year;

(2) how many full and part-time civil servants are employed in his Department monitoring the activities of the English tourist board; and what will be the cost of their salaries in the current financial year.

Mr. Sproat: There are 20 staff employed in my Department's tourism division, including two who work part-time. It is part of the division's role to ensure that the British Tourist Authority and the English tourist board make effective and efficient use of the money voted to them by Parliament. The division's salary budget for 1993-94 is £448,820.

HEALTH

Nurses

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were at work in the areas served by *(a)* the Trent regional health authority and *(b)* the Doncaster district health authority in the years 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Sackville: Figures for 1992 are not yet available.

Nursing and midwifery staff (excluding agency) in Trent Regional Health Authority and Doncaster District Health Authority as at 30 September 1991: whole-time equivalents

1991	*Number*
Trent Regional Health Authority	37,950
Doncaster District Health Authority	2,630

Notes:
Figures are rounded to the nearest ten whole-time equivalents.
Trusts are included in the totals.

Ophthalmology

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what were the average waiting times for in-patient and out-patient treatment for ophthalmology in each year since 1985 for each regional health authority and in England;

(2) what was the year end waiting list for *(a)* in-patient and *(b)* out-patient treatment in ophthalmology for each regional health authority and in England in each year since 1985.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information available is shown in the table. Information about waiting times for ophthalmology treatment—in-patients and day cases—is not available prior to March 1988. Figures for March 1993 are not yet finalised, but provisional figures show that no one was waiting more than two years at 31 March 1993 in any region for hospital in-patient or day case treatment. Information on the number of people waiting for out-patient appointments is not available centrally.

Numbers waiting for Ophthalmology treatment—in-patients and day cases combined by Regional Health Authority for each year end since March 1988.

Region	*Number waiting—by months waiting*			
	Total waiting	*0-11*	*12-23*	*24 plus*
March 1988				
Northern	4,480	3,884	491	105
Yorkshire	5,340	4,538	615	187
Trent	4,903	4,472	343	88
East Anglian	3,123	2,616	418	89
North West Thames	4,746	3,976	582	188
North East Thames	2,789	2,350	266	173
South East Thames	5,016	4,438	487	91
South West Thames	4,909	3,362	975	572
Wessex	5,025	4,216	609	200
Oxford	2,706	2,537	150	19
South Western	5,436	4,628	714	94
West Midlands	7,958	6,533	930	495
Mersey	3,523	3,057	396	70
North Western	8,741	6,898	1,529	314
SHAs	2,413	2,365	42	6
England	71,108	59,870	8,547	2,691
March 1989				
Northern	4,881	3,997	600	284
Yorkshire	5,936	5,021	749	166
Trent	6,207	5,547	581	79
East Anglian	3,872	2,967	756	149
North West Thames	5,620	4,637	809	174
North East Thames	3,428	2,746	358	324
South East Thames	5,211	4,559	511	141
South West Thames	5,335	3,712	1,041	582
Wessex	5,084	4,626	367	91
Oxford	2,978	2,709	231	38
South Western	6,070	5,254	710	106
West Midlands	8,829	7,251	1,188	390
Mersey	4,335	3,641	621	73
North Western	9,922	8,130	1,553	239
SHAs	2,746	2,534	170	42
England	80,454	67,331	10,245	2,878
March 1990				
Northern	5,037	4,340	576	121
Yorkshire	6,567	5,767	727	73
Trent	7,396	6,350	921	125
East Anglian	4,336	3,677	529	130
North West Thames	5,088	4,322	654	112
North East Thames	3,562	3,299	192	71
South East Thames	6,268	5,813	328	127
South West Thames	5,631	3,587	1,431	613
Wessex	5,454	5,111	305	38
Oxford	3,281	2,859	407	15
South Western	6,854	5,926	836	92
West Midlands	9,430	7,838	1,318	274
Mersey	4,695	4,412	283	0
North Western	11,953	8,869	2,493	591
SHAs	2,904	2,379	434	91
England	88,456	74,549	11,434	2,473
March 1991				
Northern	5,412	5,045	325	42
Yorkshire	7,997	6,563	1,236	198
Trent	8,207	7,011	1,183	13
East Anglian	5,323	4,278	908	137
North West Thames	5,991	4,935	887	169
North East Thames	3,900	3,694	179	27
South East Thames	6,987	6,309	609	69
South West Thames	4,360	3,629	603	128
Wessex	5,639	5,266	336	37
Oxford	4,289	3,898	367	24
South Western	8,075	7,202	792	81
West Midlands	9,495	8,338	996	161
Mersey	4,875	4,794	81	0
North Western	11,809	9,150	2,353	306

Region	Number waiting—by months waiting: Total waiting	0-11	12-23	24 plus
SHAs	2,851	2,467	239	145
England	95,210	82,579	11,094	1,537
March 1992				
Northern	6,260	5,967	293	0
Yorkshire	8,798	7,560	1,238	0
Trent	8,393	7,456	937	0
East Anglian	5,137	4,447	690	0
North West Thames	6,563	5,534	1,029	0
North East Thames	5,245	4,883	360	2
South East Thames	7,831	7,129	702	0
South West Thames	4,787	4,559	228	0
Wessex	5,712	5,623	89	0
Oxford	3,705	3,353	352	0
South Western	8,357	8,233	124	0
West Midlands	10,107	9,354	746	7
Mersey	6,380	6,380	0	0
North Western	11,104	9,747	1,357	0
SHAs	2,139	1,918	221	0
England	100,518	92,143	8,366	9

EC Health Care

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on total health care per head of population expressed in purchasing power parities in each EC country.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service will be spending £647 for every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom in 1993-94. Figures for the European Community are not available on a comparable basis.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to publish the report of the task force on myalgic encephalomyelitis.

Mr. Sackville: A task force chaired by Dr. David Tyrrell has been established involving medical and scientific experts, representation from the myalgic encephalomeylitis voluntary organisations and an observer from the Department of Health. The task force will look at the existing literature and research with a view to disseminating the information to health care professionals. It will be for the task force to advise on whether its findings should be published.

Abortions

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to issue guidance to health authorities on the appropriate provision for payment for abortions carried out in their area.

Mr. Sackville: None. It is the responsibility of individual health authorities to decide how best to provide and fund local health services.

NHS Numbers

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total estimated cost of issuing new national health service numbers.

Mr. Sackville: The costs of implementing the national health service number replacement programme are estimated at £22 million at today's prices, over the period 1992 to 1995.

Out-patients Departments

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what surveys have been taken as to the number of people who have had to wait more than 30 minutes before seeing a doctor in an out-patients department during each of the last 12 months.

Dr. Mawhinney: Performance against the patients charter, including the standard on 30 minutes waiting time in out-patient clinics, is monitored on a quarterly basis. A variety of methods can be used to obtain data, including surveys.

Every purchasing authority is in the process of producing their first annual report on their providers' performance against all aspects of the patients charter.

Information Management

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total estimated cost of the information management and technology strategy for the national health service.

Mr. Sackville: The major thrust of the information management and technology strategy for the national health service is that the implementation of computer systems is a local responsibility. Local managers take investment decisions in line with their business requirements and are expected to obtain best value for money. Comprehensive details of estimated investments are not available centrally.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total estimated budget of the information management group of the national health service management executive for the financial year 1993-94.

Mr. Sackville: The total budget for the information management group for 1993-94 is £51,408,132.

NHS Administrative Registers

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make it her policy that no other Government Department or body will have access to information stored on national health service administrative registers;

(2) what action the Government will take to ensure that information stored on national health service administrative registers will be used only for the purposes for which it is intended.

Mr. Sackville: Administrative registers are being developed in the national health service to enhance the care of patients and improve the management efficiency of the service. Any access to and use of information on the registers by other bodies will be strictly controlled for those purposes in accordance with agreements reached with the Data Protection Registrar.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total estimated cost of establishing the national health service administrative registers.

Mr. Sackville: There are five pilot projects in England to trial the establishment of local national health service

administrative registers. These sites are due to complete their work in late 1994 and the lessons learnt, including information on costs, will be the basis for decisions on national implementation.

Drugs Expenditure

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of national health service spending in each year since 1979 has been spent on drugs.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table.

Year	*Total NHS drugs bill as a percentage of total NHS expenditure Per cent.*
1979-80	10·2
1980-81	9·4
1981-82	9·6
1982-83	10·2
1983-84	10·7
1984-85	10·4
1985-86	10·5
1986-87	10·6
1987-88	10·7
1988-89	10·8
1989-90	11·2
1990-91	10·7
1991-92	10·9

Note: 1992-93 expenditure figures are not yet available.

Healthy Eating

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken to promote healthier eating habits in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The nutrition task force, set up under the "Health of the Nation" White Paper, has this week issued, for public consultation, its outline programme for co-ordinated action to address the dietary targets in the strategy. The programme covers the areas of education and information; catering; the food chain; and, the role of the national health service and health professionals. Copies of the programme will be placed in the Library.

Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Slimming Illnesses

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were admitted to hospitals in England and Wales suffering from the acute effects of anorexia and other slimming illnesses in the latest available year.

Mr. Bowis: The latest available figures for England—1989-90—show that there were 1,420 recorded finished consultant episodes with diagnoses of anorexia nervosa and a further 180 finished consultant episodes with the diagnosis of bulimia. Episodes involving the acute effects of these diseases are not separately identifiable. Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being introduced to help people suffering from anorexia and other slimming-related illnesses; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Health Authorities are responsible for meeting the needs of people with eating disorders but the Department has advised on and drawn attention to the importance of such disorders in the "Mental Illness Key Area Handbook", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Hospital Services, Liverpool

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to discuss the future of hospital services in Liverpool with the relevant community health councils; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Liverpool Central and Southern community health council and Liverpool Eastern CHC have both responded to the consultation exercise carried out by Liverpool district health authority on proposals for the future development of health services in Liverpool.

The responses have been referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State who will consider them carefully in deciding on Liverpool DHA's proposals.

Paediatric Services

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated by paediatric services, in each year since 1988 in the north western and Mersey regions, broken down by hospital.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Bruce Martin, chairman of North Western regional health authority and Sir Donald Wilson, chairman of Mersey health authority, for details.

Merseyside Hospitals

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will visit the Broadgreen, Alder Hey and Royal Liverpool University hospitals in the near future to discuss with the staff of those hospitals possible developments in the services they provide; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be meeting all the trust chairmen, in Mersey region, at Alder Hey hospital, as well as meeting district health authority and family health services authority chairmen.

Provision of services at these hospitals are a matter for the trusts concerned together with their purchasing health authorities.

Broadgreen Hospital, Liverpool

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations she has received about the future financing of Broadgreen hospital, Liverpool; and if she will carry out a review of the present arrangements.

Mr. Sackville: We have received a number of letters from the general public about the future of Broadgreen hospital over the past few months, but none specifically about future financing. I shall be meeting with local Members of Parliament to discuss the future of Broadgreen next week.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will shortly be considering the proposals of Liverpool health authority for the future development of health services in Liverpool, which affect Broadgreen, and which have been referred to her for a decision.

Dysentery

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of dysentery were reported in Nottingham during the last 12 months and in each of the previous five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Reported cases of dysentery in Nottingham 1987-1991

Year	*Number*
1987	8
1988	5
1989	148
1990	23
1991	38

Note:
The total number of reported cases in Nottingham for the last 12 months
is 110[1].
[1]Week ending 19 June 1992 to week ending 18 June 1993.

There was a national increase in notifications of dysentry in 1991 and early 1992 with a subsequent fall in notifications in the second half of 1992. In addition to its usual role of surveillance and giving advice on the control of outbreaks of the disease, the Public Health Laboratory Service has established a working group of people with expertise in this area to determine whether any additional steps should be taken.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has approved the Human Fertilisation and Embryology authority's revised code of practice.

Mr. Sackville: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's revised code of practice was approved and laid before the Houses of Parliament today. Copies of the code of practice have been placed in the Vote Office.

Nurses and Midwives

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish details of the numbers of NHS and midwifery staff by pay grades withn the groups of senior nursing and midwifery staff, educational staff, clinical nursing and midwifery staff, learners and other staff; if she will list the number of Project 2000 nursing students, in *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1990, *(c)* 1991 and *(d)* 1992; and if she will give the percentage change between each year.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 23 June 1993]:* The information for 1992 is not currently available. The information for 1989-91 will be placed in the Library.

The fall in nurse numbers is a result of the continuing transfer of senior nursing staff to the managerial grades and the growing numbers of Project 2000 trainees who are not counted in the manpower figures.

SCOTLAND

Kirkcudbright (Food Warnings)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list details of all incidents where the local population at Kirkcudbright have been advised not to drink water or eat shellfish, the time scale involved in each case and the reason given for the advice in each case, for the last five years.

Sir Hector Monro: Since 1988, Dumfries and Galloway regional council has not issued any advice to Kirkcudbright consumers not to drink water from the public supply. There are a number of private water supplies in the area; Stewartry district council monitor these routinely and from time to time have advised individual owners of poor quality private supplies to boil the water before drinking it pending improvements. Records of these cases are not held centrally.

Advising the general public not to eat shellfish is a matter for the appropriate district council's environmental health department. Stewartry district council has done this once—June 1993, Dhoon bay—following notification to the council by the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department that paralytic shellfish poison toxin levels were above the agreed safety limit. The Department does not have records of similar advice being given for any other reasons.

Waiting List Initiative

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will identify, for each health board, the amount of money that has been spent in the private sector through the waiting list initiative each year since 1990.

Mr. Stewart: The information is as follows:

£000

Health board	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Argyll and Clyde	406	54	136
Ayrshire and Arran	376	26	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	19	22
Forth Valley	50	37	33
Grampian	47	—	—
Greater Glasgow	1,742	165	—
Lothian	206	—	154

Scottish Tourist Board

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full and part-time civil servants are employed in his Department on monitoring the activities of the Scottish tourist board; and what will be the cost of their salaries in the current financial year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Four full-time staff and one with part-time tourism responsibilities. Total salary costs are £107,660.

Voluntary Organisations (Funding)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total funding to voluntary organisations in Scotland *(a)* through local authorities and *(b)* through the Scottish Office direct in the last full year for which figures are available.

Mr. Stewart: The figures for grants paid to voluntary organisations in Scotland by local authorities are not available centrally. Direct grants paid to voluntary organisations by the Scottish Office in 1992-93 totalled £25·7 million.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many designated sites of special scientific interest are in *(a)* Inverclyde district and *(b)* Renfrew district; and if he will list them.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 7 July 1993]:* The information is set out in the table. Some of these sites also lie within other districts as indicated.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Site	*Other districts containing part of site*
(a) Inverclyde District	
Dargavel Burn	Refrew
Dunrod Hill	
Erskine Langbank	Renfrew
Glen Moss	Renfrew
Shielhill Glen	
Knocknairs Hill	
(b) Renfrew District	
Barmufflock Dam	
Boylestone Quarry	
Castle Semple and Barr Lochs	
Clochodrick Stone	
Dargavel Burn	Inverclyde
Erskine Langbank	Inverclyde
Formakin	
Glen Moss	Inverclyde
Lock Libo	
Shovelboard	
Walkmill	Glasgow and Eastwood

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many of the functions of the Scottish tourist board are to be relocated from Edinburgh to Inverness by 1 April 1995; and if he will list them;

(2) what assessment he has carried out of the costs of relocating Scottish tourist board staff and functions to Inverness by 1 April 1995; how many staff will be involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 July 1993]:* I expect the Scottish tourist board to establish a substantial office presence in Inverness, representative of the range of its functions. The numbers of staff involved and precise costs can be determined only once the STB has identified which jobs are to be transferred; I expect, however, overall expenditure to be kept within existing resources.

Tourism

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the reduction in the number of area tourist boards envisaged as part of the tourism support arrangements announced on 29 June; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 July 1993]:* I am asking the Scottish tourist board to consult local interests and to make recommendations. I anticipate that this will take a period of some months. Thereafter, I shall consider its proposals carefully and make an announcement as soon as I can.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he intends to take to strengthen the composition of the Scottish tourism co-ordinating committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 July 1993]:* I am consulting members of the group and shall make an announcement as soon as I can. My aim is to ensure that the group represents the interests of the tourist industry in all its facets.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how the board level appointments envisaged as part of the tourism support arrangements announced on 29 June will be made to represent geographic spread within Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 July 1993]:* I intend to make cross-board appointments to the boards of the Scottish tourist board, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The purpose of these appointments is to ensure collaboration between the bodies rather than to represent geographic spread of membership.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to the implications of local government reorganisation for the role of local authorities in tourism support arrangements following his review of Scottish tourism; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 July 1993]:* The arrangements which I have announced will ensure that local authorities remain, both before and after local government reorganisation, major players in the development of Scotland's tourist industry.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the organisations and individuals who responded to the Scottish Office tourism review indicating which of them expressed a view on *(a)* the relocation of staff and functions from Edinburgh to Inverness and *(b)* the requirement for an annual strategic plan for Scottish tourism; what plans he has to publish a summary of the responses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 July 1993]:* Responses were received from:

	Number
Statutory agencies	8
Tourist industry representative organisations	25
Tourism businesses	195
Area Tourist Boards and representative organisations	34
Local authorities (plus COSLA)	54
Local Enterprise Companies	17
Other organisations and individuals	88

The need for a national strategy which set out clear objectives and operational arrangements for the industry was a theme which ran through many of the responses, although differing opinions were expressed as to how this might be achieved. The decision to relocate Scottish tourist board staff to Inverness was taken because the Government concluded that it was in the interests of tourism businesses in the highlands and islands that the Scottish tourist board should have representation there.

In accordance with normal practice, all responses to the review have been made available to the public. I have no plans to publish a summary.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Rehabilitation Centre, Preston

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future of the residential employment rehabilitation centre in Ingol, Preston.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mrs. Audrey Wise, dated 8 July 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to him about the future of the residential employment rehabilitation centre in Ingol, Preston. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

As you will know from previous correspondence, the decision to close the Employment Rehabilitation Centre at Ingol resulted from our plans to improve the quality and accessibility of employment assessment and rehabilitation for people with disabilities. The decision was taken only after we were satisfied that a network of agents was in place which could provide at least as good a service as that offered by Ingol.

The centre was closed on 31 December 1992. Tenders were invited and the site has now been sold subject to contract. Until the sale is concluded, you will appreciate that it would not be right for me to comment on possible future uses.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Youth Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many early leavers on youth training in each of the last five years in the London East area had completed *(a)* 10, *(b)* 20, *(c)* 30, *(d)* 40, *(e)* 50, *(f)* 60, *(g)* 70, *(h)* 80, *(i)* 90 and *(j)* 104 weeks of their course.

Miss Widdecombe: Information is not available in the exact form requested. The following table gives a breakdown of early leavers by length of stay in weeks for the London East area for the last five years.

Youth training—duration on scheme of early leavers[1] East London training and enterprise council area
April 1988 to March 1993

Percentage

Weeks	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*[2]1992-93*
0-4	14	14	17	18	16
5-8	12	15	11	11	14
9-13	11	12	10	11	11
14-26	19	21	19	22	18
27-39	13	11	14	11	12
40-47	7	6	6	5	7
48-52	4	3	3	3	3
53-65	8	8	7	7	6
66-78	5	4	4	4	5
79-91	4	3	5	4	4
92-99	3	2	3	2	3
100-104	[4]	0	[4]	[4]	[4]
105+	[4]	[4]	1	2	2
DK/NA[3]	0	0	[4]	[4]	0

Source: YT Leavers Database.

Notes:

[1] Early leavers are those whose actual completion date was earlier than anticipated at the time they started training. This group will include those starting employment and those who subsequently take up another youth training course or a full-time course elsewhere.

[2] 1992-93 figures are provisional.

[3] DK/NA stands for not known or not answered. A very small proportion of returned leavers certificates are not fully completed. In this case a very few certificates did not have sufficient information to work out the length of stay in training.

[4] Less than 0·5 per cent.

Labour Statistics

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for the last three years *(a)* the number of people in full-time employment, *(b)* the number of people in part-time employment, *(c)* the number of self-employed and *(d)* the number of people simultaneously employed and self-employed.

Miss Widdecombe: The available information from the labour force survey is given in the table.

Persons employed full/part-time and self-employed
Great Britain

(thousands)

Employment status in main job	*Spring 1990*	*Spring 1991*	*Spring 1992*	*Winter 1992/93*
Employees				
Full-time[1]	17,199	16,758	16,234	15,983
Part-time[1]	5,055	5,117	5,159	5,145
Self-employed	3,472	3,318	3,131	3,046
People with two jobs: one as self-employed and one as employee[2]	308	309	281	272

[1] The definition of full and part-time is based on respondents own assessment.

[2] Self-employed job may be either main or second job.

Source: Labour Force Survey (not seasonally adjusted).

Age Discrimination

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress has been made by his advisory group for older workers on the issue of employment discrimination; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: My advisory group is studying good practice with a view to issuing guidance to employers; I have issued a challenge to employers who discriminate on grounds of age to justify their policies; the group is seeking ways of raising public consciousness on this issue; the group has met twice and agreed a programme of work. It is actively advising me on the best ways to disseminate the message that age discrimination is harmful to the individual, to business and to the economy.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members *(b)* are members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department since 1988 to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, any salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Disallowed Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list by month for the last 12 months and by employment region in England the number of people disallowed unemployment benefit;

(2) if he will list by month for the last 12 months and by employment region in Scotland the number of people disallowed unemployment benefit;

(3) if he will list by month for the last 12 months and by employment region in Wales the number of people disallowed unemployment benefit.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 8 July 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Questions about the number of people disallowed unemployment benefit in each of the past 12 months in the employment regions in England, Scotland and Wales. This is something which falls within the responsibilities he has delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Unfortunately, the information you asked for is not available in the format you have requested. The statistics relating to adjudication officers decisions are not collated on a monthly basis but are compiled quarterly. This information, which includes an analysis of the grounds for disallowance, is published in a document, the "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions". Copies of this document are held in the Library. The latest available information is for the quarter ending 31 December 1992. The report for the quarter and year ending 31 March 1993 will be published by the end of July.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will not be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Health and Safety Executive

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many complaints he has received about telephone access to advice from the Health and Safety Executive using the single public inquiry point in Sheffield or via the HSE free leaflet line.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the six-month period from 1 January 1993 a total of 18 written complaints have been received. During this time, 55,338 telephone inquiries from members of the public were dealt with by the enquiry point. Most inquiries are addressed to the Health and Safety Executive area offices.

Part-time Workers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the proportion of female part-time workers on adult rates in Great Britain in April 1992, whose hourly earnings, exclusive of overtime, fell below *(a)* £3·95, *(b)* £5·26 and *(c)* £5·52; and what is the nearest equivalent information held in respect of part-time male workers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested can be found in the table:

Part-time employees on adult rates—pay unaffected by absence
Proportion with hourly earnings excluding overtime below the following amounts:

	April 1992 (Per cent.)		
	£3·95	*£5·26*	*£5·52*
Women	49·40	75·90	78·90
Men	49·20	70·60	72·60

Source: New Earnings Survey.

Youth Cohort Study

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the percentage of the first sweep of each cohort of the youth cohort study who were in (i) full-time education, (ii) a full-time job, (iii) on youth training or other scheme, (iv) unemployed or (v) other.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is given in the table:

Youth cohort study, sweep 1, cohort 1 to cohort 6
Activities of 16 and 17 year-olds, England and Wales

(Per cent.)

Proportion of cohort in	*Cohort*					
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*
Full-time education	37	39	42	50	58	66
Full-time job	29	22	23	24	18	13
Youth training scheme	17	28	26	22	14	11
Unemployed	15	10	8	3	7	7
Other	2	1	1	2	2	2

Notes:

1. Cohorts 1 and 2 covered pupils in state schools only;

independent schools were included from cohort 3 onwards.
2. Definition of unemployment does not follow ILO definitions as used in the Labour Force Survey. The unemployed exclude young people in full-time education.

Source: Youth Cohort Study.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the percentage of those who hold (i) GCSE/GCE O-level A-C, (ii) other GCSE/GCE and (iii) no qualifications in each sweep of each cohort of the youth cohort study who were in *(a)* full-time education, *(b)* a full-time job, *(c)* on youth training or other scheme, *(d)* unemployed or *(e)* other.

Miss Widdecombe: As the information is contained in a considerable number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member.

Youth Training

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of *(a)* 18-year-olds, *(b)* 17-year-olds and *(c)* 16-year-olds in January (i) 1991, (ii) 1992 and (iii) 1993 who were on youth training schemes.

Miss Widdecombe: Information is collected when a trainee leaves youth training. As some trainees who were on schemes in January 1992 and January 1993 will not yet have left, reliable figures are not available. In January 1991, of those on youth training schemes in Great Britain 27 per cent. were aged 16, 46 per cent. were 17 and 27 per cent. were 18 or over.

Redundancy

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the estimated total amount spent on redundancy pay since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Primary responsibility for the payment of statutory redundancy payments lies with employers. Information is not available on the number or costs of payments made by employers.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may make payment from the national insurance fund to employees whose employer is unable to pay. The redundancy fund was merged with the national insurance fund in February 1991. The cost of payments for each available year is as follows:

£ million

Year	*Cost*
1979-80	19·3
1980-81	42·0
1981-82	53·0
1982-83	72·2
1983-84	69·0
1984-85	57·1
1985-86	54·6
1986-87	50·2
1987-88	34·9
1988-89	32·4
1989-90	25·7
1990-91	67·6
1991-92	131·8

WALES

Accident and Emergency Hospital Units

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for the latest year, for each accident and emergency hospital unit in Wales, *(a)* the total number of patients admitted for treatment, *(b)* the number of patients admitted at night and *(c)* the number of nights that the unit was closed for admissions.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of patients admitted to a hospital bed as an in-patient following treatment at an accident and emergency department, the number admitted at night and the number of nights that each unit is closed for admissions is not available centrally.

The available information relates to the number of out-patient attendances at accident and emergency departments and is given in the table:

	Total out-patient attendances at accident and emergency departments 1991-92
Ysbyty Glan Clwyd	36,957
H M Stanley	2,942
Ysbyty Maelor	52,039
Flint Community	4,119
Holywell Community	9,519
Llangollen	1,927
Mold Community	18,558
Ruthin Community	2,806
Chirk Community	2,458
Colwyn Bay Community	2,624
Denbighshire Infirmary	5,818
West Wales General	21,920
Llandovery	1,548
Cardigan	4,689
Aberaeron	542
Bronglais	14,497
Tregaron	231
Prince Phillip	37,005
Nevill Hall	41,702
Blaenavon H C Unit	3,802
Monmouth	2,053
Tredegar	3,904
Blaina	1,859
Ebbw Vale	1,857
Royal Gwent	65,410
County, Griffithstown	10
Mt Pleasant, Chepstow	4,178
Pontypool	8,068
Ysbyty Gwynedd	24,530
Llandudno General	14,994
Bryn Beryl	1,835
Dolgellau and Barmouth	2,813
Ffestiniog Memorial	4,660
Stanley Sailors	6,186
Tywyn and District War Memorial	3,714
Bronygarth	2,358
Prince Charles	49,380
Aberdare	18,162
Mountain Ash	12,754
Princess of Wales	47,294
Bridgend General	676
Maesteg	1,518
Llwynypia	18,967
Treherbert	31
Caerphilly District Miners	14,625
Aberbargoed	3,130
Redwood	2,772
East Glamorgan	44,641
Withybush	27,278
Tenby	3,540

	Total out-patient attendances at accident and emergency departments 1991-92
South Pembrokeshire	6,444
Llandrindod Wells	7,577
Llanidloes	1,761
Montgomery CI	4,399
Victoria Memorial	4,161
Bro Ddyfi Community	4,280
Breconshire War Memorial	8,850
Builth Cottage	4,868
Ystradgynlais	2,962
University Hospital of Wales	394
Cardiff Royal Infirmary	90,037
Barry Community	8,127
Whitchurch	347
Singleton	30,510
Morriston	65,841
Glydach War Memorial	34
Gorseinon	317
Neath General	35,401
Total	935,120

National Health Service (Incident Reports)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information his Department collects on the volume of untoward incident reports at national health service provider units in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office does not routinely collect information of this general nature.

Economically Inactive People

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many and what percentage of *(a)* men between 16 and 65 years and *(b)* women between 16 and 60 years were recorded by the 1991 census in Wales as economically inactive;

(2) how many people, and what percentage of adults aged between 16 years and the pensionable age, were recorded by the 1991 census in Wales as economically inactive.

Mr. Redwood: The numbers and percentages of *(a)* males, *(b)* females and *(c)* adults in Wales aged between 16 years and the pensionable age recorded by the 1991 census as economically inactive are given in the table. "Economically Inactive" includes housewives, students and others who are making an important contribution to community life.

	Economically inactive	Percentage of resident population aged 16 to 59/64 per cent.
Males aged 16 to 64	164,933	18·8
Females aged 16 to 59	303,722	37·5
Persons aged 16 to 59/64	468,655	27·8

Source: Aggregated from 1991 Local Base Statistics.

Note: Information for age-groups 16 to 65 and 16 to 60 for men and women respectively are not available.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current value of the assets of the Forestry Commission in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The latest valuation of the Forestry Commission's assets in Wales, as at 31 March 1992, was £651·6 million.

Hospital Infection Control

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of directly-managed hospital units and hospital trusts in Wales indicating whether or not they have established an infection control committee and an infection control team.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Welsh Office guidance issued in 1990 required all Welsh health authorities to establish infection control committees and infection control teams for all hospitals.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the cost to the NHS of hospital-acquired infection in Wales and the number of lost bed days from such infection.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has by county of the number of cases of food poisoning for each month of 1993 to date; and what were the figures in 1992 and 1991 for the comparable period.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the table:

Notifications of food poisoning—(data are for weeks ending)

1993	January 8 January to 29 January	February 5 February to 26 February	March 5 March to 2 April	April 9 April to 30 April	May 7 May to 28 May
Clwyd	31	28	29	35	89
Dyfed	31	14	33	15	61
Gwent	20	19	38	28	32
Gwynedd	3	8	8	4	17
Mid Glamorgan	50	42	37	38	66
Powys	8	7	14	11	11
South Glamorgan	102	83	98	86	155
West Glamorgan	34	37	29	32	65
Wales	279	238	286	249	496

1992	January 10 January to 31 January	February 7 February to 28 February	March 6 March to 3 April	April 10 April to 1 May	May 8 May to 29 May
Clwyd	36	35	29	14	84
Dyfed	11	38	31	51	47
Gwent	25	28	42	42	29
Gwynedd	5	4	7	5	10
Mid Glamorgan	31	22	41	30	81
Powys	4	4	3	3	10
South Glamorgan	22	10	18	37	36
West Glamorgan	30	28	35	30	56
Wales	164	169	206	212	353

1991	January 11 January to 1 February	February 8 February to 1 March	March 8 March to 5 April	April 12 April to 3 May	May 10 May to 31 May
Clwyd	29	17	42	42	78
Dyfed	12	12	34	20	43
Gwent	6	10	5	7	5
Gwynedd	4	8	12	6	5
Mid Glamorgan	27	32	23	19	18
Powys	7	6	2	6	8
South Glamorgan	19	17	46	20	23
West Glamorgan	44	31	25	23	42
Wales	148	133	189	143	222

Notifications for 1993 are weekly figures combined to represent months. For prior years, similar groupings are presented to provide comparative data. Figures may have been corrected in the quarterly and annual updates.

Source: Registrar General's Weekly Return (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys).

Day Surgery

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance his Department issues to *(a)* general practitioner fund-holders and *(b)* health authorities on the specifications they should include in their contracts with providers of day unit surgery to reduce the special risks attendant upon day surgery.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office has not issued any guidance on this matter to commissioners of health care as, in general, service specifications for developments of this kind are for local agreement, drawing on examples of best practice and professional advice.

Optical Appliances Vouchers

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total number of optical appliances vouchers redeemed in Wales in each year since 1986; and what was the total cost of the optical appliances voucher scheme in Wales in each year since 1986.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is given in the table:

	Optical appliance vouchers redeemed[1]	Total cost of the optical appliance voucher scheme (£000)[2]
1986-87	[3]107,000	2,087
1987-88	180,380	3,341
1988-89	158,000	3,265
1989-90	152,710	3,595
1990-91	176,350	4,278
1991-92	205,260	5,597
1992-93	[4]227,170	—

[1] Number of vouchers paid for by Family Health Service Authorities during the financial year. Figures are based on a two per cent. sample.

[2] Accrued expenditure relating to payments to opticians for value of vouchers excluding replacement and repair costs under the voucher scheme.

[3] The voucher system came into operation on the 1 July 1986.

[4] Provisional.

Chemist Shops

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the number of small chemist shops or pharmacies located in each local authority area in the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of pharmacies in each of the counties in question as well as the number of pharmacies receiving essential small pharmacy scheme payments is given in the table. The information is not available at local authority area level.

Number of pharmacies

	Total[1]	Receiving essential small pharmacy scheme payments[2]
Clwyd		
1980	89	n/a
1985	83	8

	Total[1]	Receiving essential small pharmacy scheme payments[2]
1992	88	5
Gwynedd		
1980	63	n/a
1985	59	9
1992	62	4

[1] As at 31 December for 1980 and 1985 and at 31 March 1992.
[2] As at October 1985 and September 1992.
n/a Not available.

Pensioners

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of pensioners in each district authority area in Wales were in *(a)* sheltered housing and *(b)* residential care in each year since 1987.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The proportions of persons aged 65 and over living in residential care homes in each year since 1987 are shown in the table. Data at district level are not readily available. Information on the numbers living in sheltered housing is not held centrally.

Rate per 1,000 population aged 65 and over

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Clwyd	41·5	42·2	41·5	40·6	40·4	36·8
Dyfed	28·6	29·0	30·9	30·5	30·4	30·3
Gwent	19·5	21·1	19·9	18·7	18·2	16·8
Gwynedd	36·5	39·7	41·1	39·9	39·3	38·3
Mid Glamorgan	20·9	22·4	23·1	23·3	24·5	22·7
Powys	30·3	31·6	31·6	31·8	32·9	30·8
South Glamorgan	32·5	33·9	34·7	34·7	32·7	31·3
West Glamorgan	20·4	20·3	19·1	18·3	16·7	15·9
Wales	28·1	29·3	29·4	28·9	28·5	27·0

House Renovation Grants

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what statistics he has collected on the level of expenditure on house renovation grants by each Welsh district council in the present financial year; which authorities have confined themselves to grants aiding unfit houses only; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The forecast gross capital expenditure on house renovation grants in 1993-94 for each Welsh district council is given in the table. The authorities whose April forecast does not include expenditure on discretionary renovation grants are Delyn borough council, Islwyn borough council, Radnorshire district council and Lliw Valley borough council.

Local authorities' April forecast of expenditure on renovation grants 1993-94[1]

	£000
Alyn and Deeside	2,784
Colwyn	3,136
Delyn	1,817
Glyndwr	1,494
Rhuddlan	1,894
Wrexham Maelor	3,503
Carmarthen	4,486
Ceredigion	5,767
Dinefwr	2,898
Llanelli	4,796
Preseli Pembrokeshire	6,268
South Pembrokeshire	4,787
Blaenau Gwent	6,501
Islwyn	5,700
Monmouth	1,640
Newport	5,068
Torfaen	2,961
Aberconwy	2,099
Arfon	3,816
Dwyfor	2,979
Meirionnydd	1,613
Ynys Mon	5,163
Cynon Valley	6,947
Merthyr Tydfil	4,285
Ogwr	6,742
Rhondda	9,163
Rhymney	6,103
Taff Ely	3,879
Brecknock	2,389
Montgomeryshire	4,773
Radnorshire	1,997
Cardiff	23,820
Vale of Glamorgan	4,681
Port Talbot	3,796
Lliw Valley	3,728
Neath	3,974
Swansea	9,848
Total	177,295

[1] Local authorities' April forecast of expenditure. Includes discretionary and mandatory renovation grants.

GP and GDP Surgeries

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the dental surgeons practising under the national health service in each local authority area in the counties of Gwynedd and Clywd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the general practitioner surgeries located in each local authority area in the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Lists of individual general dental surgeons and general practitioner surgeries are not maintained centrally. Each family health service authority maintains local directories of dentists and doctors.

Welsh Language Projects

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the specific Welsh language projects which he has funded since 1987 under section 21 of the Education Act 1980; and what plans he has to fund further such projects.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A wide variety of activities has been funded under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 since April 1987. These activities range from long-term programmes extending over many years to the production of a single school book. While it is not possible to define these important activities as separate projects, the list sets out all the organisations which have been funded under this scheme.

County councils
Clwyd
Dyfed
Gwent
Gwynedd
Mid Glamorgan
Powys
South Glamorgan
West Glamorgan

Resource Centres
Canolfan Astudiaethau Iaith, Bangor
National Language Unit, Treforest
UC Aberystwyth—Resources Centre
Welsh Joint Education Committee
Welsh Language Education Development Committee (PDAG)

Theatre in education TIE companies
Clwyd TIE
Coracle
Crwban
Cyfri 3
Fran Wen
Gwent TIE
Iolo Morgannwg
Man a Man
Powys TIE
West Glamorgan TIE

Other organisations
Acen
Agricultural Training Board
BBC Educational Broadcasts
Cardiff Institute of Higher Education
Centre for Alternative Technology
Clwyd Language Centre
Coleg Normal Bangor
Consortium for Assessment and Testing in Schools (CATS) Cymru
Council for Education in World Citizenship (CEWC)
Cyngor y Dysgwyr (Welsh Learners Council)
David Watson (Computer Project)
Eisteddfod yr Urdd Taff Elai (Urdd Eisteddfod at Taff Ely)
Gwent College of Higher Education
Gwynedd Health Authority
Keep Wales Tidy
London Welsh School
Media Education Centre (MEC)
Microelectronics Unit (MEU) Cymru
Mid Glamorgan Fire Service
National Centre for Religious Education
National Educational Resources Information Service (NERIS)
National Language Centre, Nant Gwrtheyrn
National Museum Schools Service
National Scientific Association
North East Wales Institute
Pili Palas
Pioneers
Rhieni Dros Addysg Gymraeg (Parents for Welsh Medium Education)
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
School Broadcasting Council for Wales
School Curriculum Development Council
School Curriculum Industry Partnership
South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education
Student Bursary Scheme
Techniquest
The Welsh Collegium
Trinity College, Carmarthen
UC Aberystwyth
UC Bangor
UC Cardiff
UC London (Speech Therapy project)
UC Swansea
University of Glamorgan (formerly Polytechnic of Wales)
University of Wales Registry
University of Wales Welsh Language Teaching Centre
Urdd Gobaith Cymru
Wales Youth Work Partnership
Welsh Books Council
Welsh College of Music and Drama
West Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education
Women into Science and Engineering (WISE)
Workers Education Association
Zoological Society of Wales

A circular inviting applications for funding next year will be issued shortly.

Wales Tourist Board

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full and part-time civil servants are employed in his Department on monitoring the activities of the Wales tourist board; and what will be the cost of their salaries in the current financial year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Two staff are employed full time and four employed part-time in the Welsh Office on monitoring the activities of the Wales tourist board. Their total salary costs for these responsibilities amount to £76,767.

Young Offenders

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that there is secure accommodation for young offenders in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The provision of secure accommodation is a local authority responsibility and no authority in Wales currently provides long-term secure accommodation. In order to facilitate the appropriate development of this provision, the Welsh Office undertook a review, the report of which was published in August 1991. The main recommendation of this report, the provision of an 18-place regional secure unit, has since been taken forward by a joint Welsh Office and local authority working party comprising representatives of all the South Wales county councils except South Glamorgan which opposes the development. The working party is currently awaiting a report from the consultants who have been appointed to take forward work on the design of the unit as well as a site option appraisal. I very much hope that the consultants' reports, which is expected imminently, can be endorsed quickly by the working party so that work on the new unit, which is intended will be in place in 1995, can commence as soon as possible. We have already announced that we are prepared to make available grant of up to £4,500,000 to meet the capital cost of the new unit.

Radiographers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what level of funding he proposes for post-qualification training for radiographers; what structural changes he proposes to permit such training to take place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None. Post-qualification training is a matter for the individual employers.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

1. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals she has to strengthen the incentives for environmentally sensitive ares in the north-west.

Mr. Jack: A new environmentally sensitive area was launched in the Lake District in January this year. Covering some quarter of a million hectares, it is by far the largest ESA in England.

15. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to give the public greater access to environmentally sensitive areas in East Anglia.

Mr. Jack: Our consultation document on the implementation of the EC agri-environment package was designed to demonstrate the possibilities for greater access to ESAs in East Anglia.

18. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to promote more environmentally sensitive areas in Mid Essex.

Mr. Jack: We have looked at the possibility of introducing new environmentally sensitive areas in Essex and have issued proposals for such an area stretching from the River Stour in the north to Canvey Island in the south.

26. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress she has made in identifying and protecting environmentally sensitive areas of the Essex coastline.

Mr. Jack: We have issued proposals for a new environmentally sensitive area covering parts of the Essex coast from the River Stour in the north to Canvey Island in the south.

Genetically Modified Organisms

13. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has received about the release of genetically modified organisms into the atmosphere in connection with research undertaken on behalf of her Department.

Mr. Soames: None, but all releases of genetically modified organisms for research purposes are subject to consent under the appropriate regulations to ensure safety to human health and the environment.

Scotch Whisky

14. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will meet representatives of the Scotch whisky industry to discuss the prospects of the industry and the workers employed in it.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend will be happy to meet representatives of the industry to discuss any relevant issues.

Plant Breeders

16. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will consult British plant and seed producers about the proposed EC plant breeders rights and restrictions.

Mr. Jack: The Government continue to be in regular contact with organisations representing plant breeders, seed producers and growers on matters relating to the proposal.

Food Labelling

17. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals she has to define and police meat contents in food labelling.

Mr. Soames: The composition and labelling of meat products are already controlled in some detail in regulations made under the Food Safety Act 1990. They are enforced by local authority trading standards officers.

Lime Fertiliser

19. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food how many representations she or her predecessor has received over the last 18 months on the subject of introducing financial assistance to farmers who wish to fertilise land using lime; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: None. However, my officials have regular liaison meetings with the Agricultural Lime Producers Council, the latest of which was on 27 May 1993.

Bananas

20. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement on the future of the EC regime for banana imports.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The new harmonised arrangements for the import of bananas into the Community came into force on 1 July.

Common Agricultural Policy

21. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food what is her assessment of the effect of the expansion of the common agricultural policy on European finances.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The implications for the Community budget of enlarging the European Community depends on the individual circumstances of the countries concerned. However, all the countries for which accession negotiations are currently in progress are expected to be net contributors to the Community budget.

24. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has for the reform of common agricultural policy finances in light of proposals to increase the membership of the European Community.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Edinburgh European Council agreed the arrangements for financing the Community's expenditure, including expenditure on the CAP, until 1999. The enlargement of the Community is not expected to lead to any significant change in these arrangements.

25. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals she has for reforming the common agricultural policy finances.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Edinburgh European Council agreed the arrangements for financing Community expenditure, including expenditure on the CAP, until 1999. Under this agreement the agricultural guideline will be retained in its existing form.

Foxes

22. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research has been undertaken into the methods of controlling foxes.

Mr. Soames: The ministry is not currently undertaking any research on the control of foxes to prevent damage to agriculture.

Research on foxes has been directed at methods of control to be used should an outbreak of rabies occur in the United Kingdom. This work has concentrated on developing a method of controlling foxes by poison baits whilst minimising the risks to other wildlife and to domestic animals.

Balance of Trade

23. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action she is taking to reduce the balance of trade deficit in food and drink.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have introduced several initiatives to encourage the industry to produce and market the goods which customers want both at home and abroad.

Set-aside Land

27. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of land farmers will be able to set aside under the new schemes in the United Kingdom under the EC.

Mr. Jack: Under the arable area payments scheme, the set-aside requirement is 15 per cent. for rotational set-aside and 18 per cent. for non-rotational. The Commission is expected to bring forward further proposals allowing farmers to set aside additional land on a voluntary basis.

Food Hygiene

28. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations she has received on the subject of food hygiene.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health takes the lead on the Food Hygiene (General) Regulations 1970, as amended, and the hygiene of foodstuffs directive. This Department does, however, receive representations on food hygiene from time to time.

Most recent representations include comments from a cash and carry company about the temperature control requirements and from a large retailer about the European Community's approach to food hygiene legislation.

Dogs (Livestock Killing)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the estimated cost to farmers in England of the losses they have suffered as a result of livestock being killed by dogs for each year since 1987.

Mr. Soames: Such statistics are not collected by the Ministry. However, the National Farmers Union estimates that up to 10,000 livestock are killed or injured every year in England and Wales as a result of attacks by dogs.

DEFENCE

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much radioactive waste the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston has sent to the Atomic Energy Authority site at Dounreay; and what the waste consisted of.

Mr. Aitken: The Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston does not send waste to the Atomic Energy Authority site at Dounreay.

Iraq

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *250-51*, which countries provided Iraq with dual-use technology since 1981 which could have been used to manufacture artillery; and if he will provide details of the dual-use technology provided by the United Kingdom to Iraq since 1981.

Mr. Aitken: Details of all United Kingdom products licensed for export to Iraq for the years 1987 to 1990 were provided to the Trade and Industry Select Committee and published—Trade and Industry Select Committee, Minutes of Evidence on Exports to Iraq HC86-i, Tuesday 26 November 1991. Further information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost and effort. As to exports to Iraq from other countries I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Gentleman on 18 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *250*.

SA80 Weapon

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to review the issue of the SA80 weapon to the infantry.

Mr. Aitken: No.

RAF Support Command

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current operational role, including auxiliary roles, of each RAF station in Support Command.

Mr. Hanley: The primary and secondary roles of RAF Support Command stations are as follows:

RAF station	*Primary Role*	*Secondary Role(s)*
Boddington	Communications centre	None
Bracknell	Command and staff training	RAF Presentation team Director defence studies Regional home defence liaison
Brampton	Headquarters RAF Support Command	Royal Auxiliary Air Force Defence unit MOD Weapons standardisation team
Cardington	Cyrogenic and compressed gas supply	None
Carlisle	Equipment supply depot	None
Chilmark	Ammunition supply depot	None
Chivenor	Advanced flying training	Search and rescue unit Hawk aircraft defect investigation
Cosford	Ground training	Voluntary gliding school Birmingham University air squadron Air Cadets Wing headquarters
Cranwell	Flying and ground training	RAF College RAF College Band Headquarters University Air Squadrons Directorate of recruiting and selection
Digby	Signals unit	Aerial erector school
Finningley	Flying training	Yorkshire University Air Squadron Air experience flight
Halton	Ground training	RAF Hospital Medical training Dental training Institute of pathology and tropical medicine Voluntary gliding schools × 2
Headly Court	Medical rehabilitation	None
Henlow	Signals engineering	Headquarters RAFSC Signals Staff Officers command school Radio introduction unit MOD Civilian technical training Air Cadets regional headquarters Test equipment engineering Voluntary gliding school
Hereford	Ground training	None
Innsworth	RAF Personnel management centre	None
Lingholme	Communications centre	None

RAF station	*Primary Role*	*Secondary Role(s)*
Linton-on-Ouse	Flying training	Air Cadet regional headquarters Air Cadet Wing headquarters Voluntary gliding school
Locking	Ground training	RAF South West Band Air Cadet regional headquarters
Newton	Ground training	Headquarters Air Cadets Training development Glider examining wing Air experience flight Regional provost and security unit
North Luffenham	Ground radio engineering	Ground radio defects investigation Training development Fire service training Language training Explosive ordnance demolition training Rapier project development
Oakhangar	Communications centre	None
Quedgeley	Equipment supply depot	Air Cadet Wing Headquarters
Rudloe Manor	Communications Centre	Regional provost and security unit
St. Athan	Aerosystems maintenance and storage	Ground training Wales University Air Squadron Voluntary gliding school Air Cadet regional headquarters Royal Auxiliary Air Force Defence Force
Scampton	Flying training	Joint arms control implementation group Engineering management training Tucano defect investigation Tucano logistic support
Sealand	Electronics maintenance	MOD Civilian technical training Air Cadet regional headquarters Voluntary gliding school
Shawbury	Flying training	Air traffic control training, examination and evaluation Air experience flight
Stafford	Equipment supply depot	Tactical supply wing
Stanbridge	Joint Service Air Trooping centre	Supply computer centre
Swanton Morley	Central servicing development	Maintenance computer centre Voluntary gliding school
Swinderby	Recruit training	None
Syerston	Air Cadets gliding	None
Uxbridge	Management of dispersed units and personnel	Ceremonial (The Queen's Colour Squadron) Headquarters music services Air traffic control staffs
Valley	Flying training	Search and rescue unit and Mountain rescue team Search and rescue training Air to air missile training Signals unit
Wroughton	RAF Hospital	None

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of commanding officers of each RAF station in Support Command.

Mr. Hanley: For personal security reasons the names of those holding official appointments of air commodore rank and below are not generally released to the public domain.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the former Members of this House who have been appointed since 1988 by his Department to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations; and if he will list in each case the title of the post, the salary, the duration of the appointment and the party which the former hon. Member represented.

Mr. Hanley: Former membership of the House of Commons is not a relevant qualification for appointment and is not centrally recorded. We are aware of only one example. Sir Antony Buck QC, the then Member for Colchester, North, served on the independent board of visitors for the military corrective centre, Colchester from 1980 to 1992. At that date he stood down as a Member of Parliament and relinquished his appointment.

Appointments are reviewed every three years and Sir Antony's last reappointment was in 1989. The post was as a member of the board and was not salaried.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department since 1988 to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, any salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Hanley: There is no requirement for my Department to hold such information.

Burma

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what links his Department has with the defence forces of Burma.

Mr. Hanley: There are currently no substantive defence links between the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces of Burma.

Depleted Uranium Ammunition

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *632*, when he was informed of the concerns expressed by the three military personnel regarding fears of inhalation of depleted uranium dust.

Mr. Hanley: The exact date on which these personnel first sought medical advice is not recorded in their medical records, but it is understood to have been after their return to the United Kingdom from the Gulf on 21 January 1991. The monitoring showed no detectable depleted uranium contamination.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *632*, at which hospital or medical centre was the monitoring to which he refers conducted.

Mr. Hanley: The monitoring was carried out by the Defence Radiological Protection Service at the Institute of Naval Medicine, Gosport, on 8 February 1991.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the depleted uranium shells fired at the Ministry of Defence range at Kirkcudbright between 1982 and June 1993 were subsequently recovered.

Mr. Aitken: Two complete rounds and one fragment have been recovered.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department's memorandum on anti-armoured ammunition with depleted uranium penetrators placed in the Library of the House in March 1979 is still applicable.

Mr. Aitken: Clearly the strategic environment has changed radically since the publication of the memorandum, but the statements of the underlying principles of the programme and the means by which it is carried out remain valid.

Swan Hunter

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *642*, whether the Ministry of Defence will now be paying Swan Hunter more than the agreed successful tender for the work on the three Type 23 frigates.

Mr. Aitken: We have agreed an incentivised arrangement with the receiver under which any cost under or overrun will be shared between the receiver and my Department on a pre-determined ratio subject to an upper cost ceiling, which does exceed the original contract price. It is too soon to say whether the original contract price will be exceeded.

Peacemaking Operations

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to a system of dual contract for personnel in Her Majesty's services to enable volunteers to make a standing commitment to international peacemaking operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: We do not believe that a system of dual contract as described would improve the United Kingdom's ability to provide armed forces for international peacekeeping operations.

Royal Military Schools

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the chief executive of the Duke of York's royal military school in 1993-94.

Mr. Hanley: The following key targets have been set for the chief executive of the Duke of York's royal military school in 1993-94:

Curriculum

To achieve at least 5 GCSE passes at Grades A to C for 80 per cent. of pupils by August 1993.

To achieve 90 per cent. of A Level passes at Grades A to E by August 1993.

To achieve 35 per cent. of A Level passes at Grades A and B by August 1993.

To achieve 100 per cent. award rate for BTEC National Diploma courses by August 1993.

Pastoral

To list minimum boarding standards for all houses by April 1994.

To formulate a policy on extra-curricular activities by July 1993.

To formulate a policy on assessing, monitoring and reporting by March 1994.

Finance and Administration

To prepare a 5 year financial plan to meet per capita goal by October 1993.

To maximise efficiency in works property management.

To save £150,000 on the school's in year LTC 93 bid by March 1994.

Development

To carry out a pay and conditions review for all school staff by April 1994.

To produce and market the school prospectus effectively to the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Army and Royal Air Force by July 1993.

To complete preparations for co-education by April 1994.

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the chief executive targets of the Queen Victoria royal military school in 1993-94.

Mr. Hanley: The following key targets have been set for the chief executive of the Queen Victoria school in 1993-94:

Academic and Curriculum

To achieve at least 3 Standard Grade passes at Credit and General Levels (1-4) for 90 per cent. of S4 pupils.

To achieve at least 5 Standard Grades (1-3) for 60 per cent. of S4 pupils.

To achieve 3 Higher Passes at A-C Grades or Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) equivalents for 60 per cent. of S5/S6 pupils.

To continue the phased implementation of the National 5-14 Programme in line with Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) recommendations, with full co-ordination between Primary and Secondary Departments by 1 September 1994, including a system for parental responses on quality.

Pastoral

To monitor the effectiveness of the School Pastoral Policy and Organization Document and complete its review by 1 September 1993.

Extra Curricular Provision

To maintain and improve at least 50 extra-curricular activities, both physical and cultural, involving pupils aged 10-15 in at least 3 per week and those aged 16-18 in at least 2.

Management and Development

By June 1993, to report on the feasibility of admitting girls and fee-paying pupils, and the extent of provision required for them.

By June 1993, to develop and implement a strategy for income generation using the School's facilities, thereby achieving a level of income of 1 per cent. of the total School budget.

By April 1994 to confirm the pay and grading structures in the school and associated allowances and rents.

By April 1994 to instigate job descriptions for all teaching staff.

To implement teacher appraisal and development procedures in line with SOED guidelines and timetable including a pastoral element.

By April 1994 to have in place a report on management and financial information systems.

By April 1994 to continue and enhance efficiency measures effected in Financial Year 1993-94 in order to absorb increased costs associated with developments in the School curriculum without increasing pupil per capita costs.

Warship Refits

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral statement of 24 June, *Official Report*, columns 446-50, how he will consult those affected by his proposals for warship refitting.

Mr. Aitken: A consultation document has been issued today.

The document will be provided to representatives of those of my Department's staff who may be affected by the proposals, hon. Members with a constituency interest, the relevant local authorities, the dockyard management companies and other interested parties. Copies of the document have also been placed in the Vote Office and in the Libraries of both Houses.

Comments on the proposals are to be made to my Department by no later than 10 September.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 9 July 1993

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are Members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of Members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, any salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Davis: There are two hon. Members of this House who are also members of the non-departmental public bodies to which my right hon. Friend makes appointments. These are my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, West and Torridge (Miss Nicholson), who was appointed a member of the Medical Research Council for the period 12 August 1991 to 31 July 1995; and my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman), who was appointed a member of the Agricultural and Food Research Council for the period 1 January 1991 to 31 July 1994. Both Members receive an honorarium of £4,600 per annum.

In addition, Lord Chorley is a member of the Natural Environment Research Council. He was first appointed on 1 August 1988 and reappointed on 1 August 1991 for a further term of three years. He, too, receives an honorarium of £4,600 per annum.

Information is not available on whether any members of the non-departmental public bodies for which my right hon. Friend makes appointments have spouses either in this House or in another place. Similarly, information is not available on whether appointees have been parliamentary candidates, except where candidates were elected.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many maintenance assessments have been issued by the Child Support Agency since it came into operation;

(2) how many inquiry forms have been issued to absent parents by the Child Support Agency at the latest date for which figures are available;

(3) how many *(a)* non-income support and *(b)* income support cases have been referred to the Child Support Agency at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Mrs. Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 7 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Child Support Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many maintenance assessments have been issued by the Agency; the number of enquiry forms issued to absent parents; and how many non-income support and income support cases have been referred to the Agency.

Although information is not available at this stage relating to the number of non-income support/income support cases referred to the Agency, I can tell you that during the period 5 April to 28 May over 53,000 maintenance application forms were received. In the same period over 19,000 maintenance enquiry forms were issued, and over 700 maintenance assessments were calculated and the parents notified.

At this early stage these figures should be regarded as provisional and may be subject to amendment.

I hope you will find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Residential Care

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to extend the period for which residential allowance is paid to new care home residents who attend hospital during their period in residential care.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 10 May at column *340*.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Manufacturing Productivity

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on trends in manufacturing productivity over the past year.

Mr. Nelson: Manufacturing productivity in the three months to April was 7·8 per cent. higher than a year earlier. Apart from the three months to March, this was the highest growth rate for over six years.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Africa (Aid)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy concerning aid to Africa; what consultations he has with voluntary organisations that work in Africa prior to taking policy decisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Sub-Saharan Africa is a priority for British bilateral assistance. In 1991-92 we disbursed £334 million in grant aid, excluding Commonwealth Development Corporation investments.

We have regular contact with non-governmental organisations on a range of operational and policy issues. The establishment of the British Overseas NGOs for Development last month will promote greater co-ordination between NGOs and ODA.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Heritage Buildings

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what funds are made available by his Department to county councils for the maintenance and repair of heritage buildings owned by them.

Mr. Brooke: Such funding is provided through the grant schemes administered by English Heritage, one of the Department's sponsored bodies. During 1992-93, English Heritage made 46 offers to county councils under its main grant programmes, representing £0·5 million in total. In addition, it contributed over £7 million, in the form of town schemes and areas grants, to owners of listed buildings through partnership arrangements with local authorities.

Local Authority Guidance

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the new guidance for local authorities on historic buildings and conservation areas will be available for public comment.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I have just issued for comment a major new statement of Government policy for historic buildings and conservation areas. This is the first major re-statement of the Government's policies for conservation since March 1987. It reaffirms our determination to protect the 500,000 listed buildings and 7,500 conservation areas which are so important a part of this country's cultural heritage. It emphasises the role of the planning system in striking a balance between the interests of conservation and the need to provide for sensible development. At the same time it reflects recent changes in the legislation; major court judgments since 1987; and some recent reassessment of priorities, for instance for the listing of historic buildings.

This statement will be revised in the light of public comments and then published jointly by our two Departments as planning policy guidance note 15. As such, it will be of central importance for some years to come for a wide range of decisions affecting historic buildings and conservation areas. We hope, therefore, that everyone with an interest in conservation policy will let us have his or her comments on the draft.

At the same time we are issuing a consultation paper on the effectiveness of planning controls in protecting the character and appearance of conservation areas. The paper seeks views on the extent to which problems currently exist and on possible solutions. It invites full public discussion of a range of options, with a view to striking the right balance between protecting the heritage and minimising bureaucratic controls over businesses and private citizens, both of which are important objectives of Government policy. The decisions we take in the light of public responses to this consultation paper will be reflected in the final version of PPG 15.

I have arranged for copies of both documents to be placed in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Passive Smoking

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to protect workers in the tourism and leisure industry from the danger to their health of passive smoking.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The protection of workers from risks to health from passive smoking at work is already covered by section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, which applies to all industries.

Medical Waste Incinerators

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidelines and procedures exist or are proposed on the role and responsibilities of the Health and Safety Executive in monitoring and supervising medical waste incinerator facilities.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Health and Safety Executive's responsibilities in respect of incinerators, including those which handle medical waste, extend to enforcing the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and regulations made under the Act in respect of the health, safety and welfare of employees and the health and safety or others who may be affected by work activities to the extent that such activities are not covered by other more specific environmental legislation not enforced by HSE.

Of particular relevance are the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988, which are each supported by an approved code of practice. Both regulations require employers to assess the risk to their employees and to others who may be affected by the work activity, and carry out steps to bring into effect and maintain the level of control required by their assessments. The COSHH regulations specifically expand and clarify the duties of employers regarding hazardous substances at work to which employees and others may be exposed.

At visits to incinerators, HSE's role is to ensure that compliance with the relevant legislation is achieved by employers and workers at the workplace. The Health and Safety Commission's Health Services Advisory Committee has published guidance on the safe disposal, including incineration, of medical waste and HSE inspectors refer to this guidance during inspection and other visits to incineration facilities.

Emissions from incinerators and operating conditions are covered by environmental legislation and are the responsibility of other enforcing authorities.

TRANSPORT

Bicycles (Carriage by Rail)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the future of carriage of bicycles by rail following privatisation; and if the will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We have received a number of representations from cycling organisations and others.

We expect private sector rail operators to be more responsive to the demands of all their passengers,

including cyclists. Following a meeting I had with the cycling groups recently, they have agreed to produce a pamphlet explaining the commercial opportunity cyclists present to the operators of rail services and the ways in which services can be made more attractive to cyclists. I have agreed to bring this pamphlet to the attention of prospective franchisees.

Disability

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations with organisations representing workers with disabilities were undertaken before the reconstitution of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee.

Mr. Freeman: We consulted a wide range of organisations representing both transport and disability interests, including organisations of, and for, people with disabilities.

Consultants

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the consultants currently employed by his Department, Railtrack and the British Railways Board on work relating to the implementation of the Railways Bill together with their terms of reference.

Mr. Freeman: My Department's consultants and their areas of advice are listed in the table:

Linklaters and Paines—Legal issues
Samuel Montagu and Co.—Merchant Banking
KPMG Peat Marwick—Accountancy
Coopers and Lybrand—Access charges
Richard Ellis—Property matters
Dewe Rogerson—Marketing
PJR—Management and organisation
Mercer—Freight: Access and regulation
—Franchising
Ernst & Young—Information systems

Consultants employed by the British Railways Board are a matter for the board. Railtrack is at present a division of the board.

Buses

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which county councils he formally consulted in relation to the consultation paper on operation of local bus services outside London.

Mr. Freeman: The paper was sent to the Association of County Councils and to all those county councils which asked for a copy. We are ensuring that all county councils are aware of the consultation.

Public Transport, London

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the type and scope of parliamentary questions from hon. Members in respect of London's public transport service on which he will not provide substantive answers.

Mr. Norris: It is for the House authorities to decide what questions are accepted, for answer by Ministers. Where a question has been so accepted, I will always, as far as practicable, provide a substantive answer on the matters for which I am responsible.

Rail Bridge, Barmouth

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his Department's involvement in the current situation in respect of the rail bridge link to Barmouth and the Cambrian coast line.

Mr. Freeman: I understand from British Rail that there are no significant problems with the Barmouth rail bridge.

Rolling Stock

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the criteria used to determine the figure of £150 million as the total available for a rolling stock leasing project; and if the sum will be treated as public expenditure.

Mr. Freeman: The purpose of the leasing concession announced in the autumn statement was to encourage the development of a private sector leasing market in the transition to the privatised railway. The figure of £150 million reflected a judgment on the size of the concession the Government considered prudent to make, given the need to offer the leasing industry some genuine experience of rolling stock leasing.

Only rental payments made by the public sector under the lease will score as public expenditure as they are made.

Rail Users' Consultative Committees

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers the rail users' consultative committees will have to publish their reports into closure proposals under his railway privatisation plans.

Mr. Freeman: The Government intend that rail users' consultative committees should be free to publish their reports on closure proposals and will propose that the Railways Bill be amended to that effect.

Trust Ports

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies he has made of *(a)* the potential regenerative effect of privatisation of trust ports in the regions and *(b)* the regenerative effects of such privatisations which have already taken place.

Mr. Norris: Privatised trust ports will be able to broaden their capital base and, as appropriate, diversify their activities, within a framework of accountability to shareholders.

This will be to their advantage in the development of the port and the local economy which it serves. It is not therefore necessary for the Secretary of State to undertake such studies.

Through Rail Tickets

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made as to the availability of through tickets to passengers starting journeys at Chepstow, Cromer, Felixstowe, Knaresborough, Newmarket, Whitby, Bishop Auckland, Burnley, Milford Haven and Welshpool stations after rail privatisation;

(2) if his proposals for the continuing availability under rail franchising arrangements, of through tickets, will include ticket sales at unmanned stations.

Mr. Freeman: We have made it clear that through tickets will be available at as many stations as possible. The precise coverage is not yet determined.

Rolling Stock

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what sums his Department has approved for capital expenditure by British Rail for the Network SouthEast system, excluding replacement of existing rolling stock and equipment;

(2) what sums he has authorised for investment expenditure on regional railways in 1993-94, excluding replacement of rolling stock and existing equipment but including all new facilities and expansion of the existing system.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answers 7 July 1993]:* The Government have set British Rail's external financing limit at £1,495 million for 1993-94. This should allow investment of some £1·1 billion. Priorities within that figure are for British Rail to determine, but they will include investment related to the channel tunnel which will benefit Network SouthEast infrastructure as well as international services. The estimate for investment by Network SouthEast in 1993-94 excluding rolling stock and channel tunnel preparations will amount to approximately £95 million and for Regional Railways approximately £44 million. In addition British Rail is exploring the scope for utilising private finance to enable further improvements to be made.

From next April, the responsibility for infrastructure investment will lie with Railtrack. It will take a strategic view of investment and will be charged with producing an indicative 10-year investment plan.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Repurchased Homes

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate by district the number of homes repurchased and allocated by the Housing Executive and housing associations, respectively, the total amounts spent and the priority categories of the households to whom the homes were allocated.

Mr. Atkins: The information in relation to properties repurchased by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and housing associations, excluding the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Association, as a result of the housing initiative announced by the Chancellor in his autumn statement, is given in the table.

All the properties repurchased by the Housing Executive have been allocated to households in urgent housing need or to transfer applicants whose vacated properties were then used to house urgent housing need applicants. Of the eight properties repurchased by housing associations, six have been allocated to households in urgent housing need and two are being repaired prior to allocation.

Properties repurchased by the Housing Executive and housing associations under the house purchase initiative.

District	*Northern Ireland housing executive*	*Housing associations*
Antrim	—	—
Armagh	3	—
Ballycastle	1	—
Ballymena	4	—
Ballymoney	1	—
Banbridge	2	—
Bangor	1	—
Belfast 1	6	—
Belfast 2	7	—
Belfast 3	4	—
Belfast 4	4	
Belfast 5	—	—
Belfast 6	—	—
Belfast 7	5	—
Carrickfergus	11	—
Castlereagh 1	1	—
Castlereagh 2	4	—
Coleraine	2	—
Cookstown	—	—
Craigavon	—	—
Downpatrick	7	—
Dungannon	2	—
Fermanagh	3	—
Larne	5	—
Limavady	6	—
Lisburn 1	3	—
Lisburn 2	3	—
Lisburn 3	3	—
Londonderry 1	—	8
Londonderry 2	—	—
Londonderry 3	2	—
Lurgan	8	—
Magherafelt	1	—
Newry 1	5	—
Newry 2	4	—
Newtonwabbey 1	3	—
Newtownabbey 1	2	—
Newtownards 1	4	—
Newtownards 2	3	—
Omagh	—	—
Portadown	1	—
Strabane	1	—
Total number	122	8
Total Cost	£2,558·750	£174,500

HEALTH

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has had regarding the retention in St. Bartholomew's hospital of a casualty unit capable of treating cardiac failure and other life-threatening events and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have received a number of representations regarding the accident and emergency department at St. Bartholomew's hospital. Where appropriate, details have been referred to North East Thames regional health authority which was responsible for consulting on the proposed closure of the accident and emergency department.

St. George's Hospital, Tooting

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many nursing and auxiliary staff have been made redundant at St. George's hospital, Tooting in each of the last three years;

(2) at the latest date for which information is available what percentage of the facilities at St. George's hospital, Tooting, were in full use, in part use and closed;

(3) what has been the salary and wages or remuneration of the following grades *(a)* business managers, *(b)* nurses and midwives, *(c)* administration and clerical, *(d)* ancillary staff, *(e)* non-national health service staff and *(f)* the chairman of the trust at St. George's hospital, Tooting, in each of the last three years.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Dr. Elizabeth Vallance, the chairman of St. George's Healthcare National Health Service Trust, for details.

The chairman's remuneration is £19,285 a year.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which district health authority chairmen are also chairs of NHS trusts; and if he will name the trusts and authorities involved.

Dr. Mawhinney: Members of district health authorities are ineligible under national health service regulations to serve concurrently as directors of NHS trusts.

Medical Waste

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is her latest estimate of the scale of demand in England and Wales over the next 10 years for new facilities for disposing of medical waste, broken down *(a)* by region, *(b)* by volume, *(c)* by the proposed means of disposal and *(d)* by the type of operator envisaged;

(2) if she will give details of current proposals for further units for incineration of medical waste, including the location of the units and the firms or organisations which will operate them.

Dr. Mawhinney: Around 125,000 tonnes of waste produced by the national health service in England each year is disposed of as clinical waste. Health authorities are individually responsible for making arrangements for disposing of their waste. Each health authority has confirmed that its waste is disposed of in accordance with the interim standards of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and that by 1995 it will meet the full requirements of the Act. Incineration is expected to be the normal means of disposal, and will be carried out by health authorities themselves, or public or private contractors depending on local circumstances.

The Department has issued strategic guidance, copies of which will be placed in the Library, to assist health authorities to formulate and implement environmental policies. Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mental Illness

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric patients were resident in mental illness institutions operated by her Department in each year since the commencement of the Mental Health Act 1983, distinguishing between those compulsorily detained under the Act and those voluntarily admitted.

Mr. Bowis: The available information is shown in the table.

The table provides the number of patients resident in mental illness and mental handicap hospitals and units, and special hospitals at 31 December; number formally detained under the Mental Health Act 1983, and number treated informally, England, for the years 1983 to 1986, and the total number of residents under the mental illness specialty in NHS hospitals and units at 31 March for the years 1989 to 1992.

Year	*Residents: formally detained*	*Treated informally*	*Total*
31 December			
1983	6,216	104,194	110,410
1984	5,892	99,636	105,528
1985	6,423	94,738	101,161
1986	6,295	88,821	95,116
31 March			
1989	n.a.	n.a.	83,900
1990	n.a.	n.a.	81,800
1991	n.a.	n.a.	70,800
1992	n.a.	n.a.	64,700

Data for 1987 and 1988 are not considered reliable; data for 1989 to 1992 cannot be identified separately.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps her Department is taking to monitor the impact of the NHS management executive letter TEL 93/2 on the time within which detained patients' appeals are heard and the ability of NHS trusts to convene early and effective hearings;

(2) when she intends to bring forward legislative proposals to amend the Mental Health Act 1983 so as to correct the error identified in NHS management executive letter TEL 93/2;

(3) what training is available to non-executive directors of NHS trusts to equip them for their responsibilities towards patients and the public, with particular reference to hearings pertaining to patients' appeals.

Mr. Bowis: The Mental Health Act Commission keeps in touch with national health service trusts about the arrangements for hearing patients' appeals. We will consider carefully any proposals it makes.

We recognise the pressures placed on non-executive directors of NHS trusts as a result of the problem described in the NHS management executive's letter TEL 93/2. This can only be corrected by primary legislation and we shall be seeking the earliest opportunity to introduce it.

We are committed to ensuring that high-quality training is provided to chairmen and non-executive directors of trusts. A wide range of training and induction is available locally and nationally, and the NHS management executive will be making proposals this autumn for enhancing and improving the way in which training and support is provided. On the issue of managers' power to discharge detained patients, training and guidance are available from the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts, in conjunction with the Mental Health Act Commission, and from the NHS Trust Federation. A copy of the NHS management executive's letter TEL 93/2 will be placed in the Library.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times section 4 of the Mental Health Act 1983 has been used each year since the Act came into force.

Mr. Bowis: The information is shown in the table.

The Mental Health Act 1983 came into force in September 1983. The table gives the number of admissions under section 4 and changes during the year from other sections and from other Acts to section 4 and data for that year have been analysed in terms of the 1983 Act.

Table provides data on the use of section 4 of the Mental Health Act 1983: covering admissions to national health service facilities, private nursing homes and special hospitals under this section, and changes in legal status of patients in national health service facilities from other sections or other Acts to section 4 in each of the years 1983 to 1989-90.

Year and source	*Mental Health Act 1983, section 4: Assessment in emergency*
1983	
Admissions[1]	5,640
Changes to[2]	N/a
TOTAL	5,640
1984	
Admissions[1]	3,622
Changes to[2]	N/a
TOTAL	3,622
1985	
Admissions[1]	3,464
Changes to[2]	N/a
TOTAL	3,464
1986	
Admissions[1]	2,786
Changes to[2]	N/a
TOTAL	2,786
1987-88	
Admissions[1]	2,196
Changes to[2]	288
TOTAL	2,484
1988-89	
Admissions[1]	2,030
Changes to[2]	263
TOTAL	2,293
1989-90	
Admissions[1]	1,868
Changes to[2]	236
TOTAL	2,104

[1] Admissions to special hospitals relate to calendar years.
[2] Patients in national health service facilities only (not available before 1987-88: changes to section 4 are mostly from informal status, with some from place of safety orders.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the national director of MIND will receive a full reply to the letter sent to her dated 11 May 1993.

Mr. Bowis: I met the national director of MIND informally earlier this month and am having a full meeting with her on 12 July when we shall be discussing a range of issues including matters raised in her letter.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training is provided for primary health care teams, social workers and carers in the field of mental illness; and what plans she has to improve that training.

Mr. Bowis: Guidance to health authorities and local authorities on developing human skills and resources for all mental health workers is contained in the "Mental Illness Key Area Handbook", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where in her Department the responsibility for providing the resources for training programmes for health care workers and others concerned with mental illness in the community lies.

Mr. Bowis: The responsibility for providing resources for training programmes lies with health and local authorities from within their overall financial allocations.

Training Initiatives

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how she intends to facilitate the resourcing of major national training initiatives in health care, with particular reference to those offered by open distance learning providers.

Dr. Mawhinney: The national health service management executive has consistently supported the development of major national training initiatives which improve the delivery of care to patients. Such initiatives provide professional and managerial development opportunities for a wide range of NHS staff. Given the prevalence of shift and rota working within the NHS, some of these initiatives are delivered through open and distance learning.

It is the policy of the management executive to support these programmes through meeting their development costs. Decisions about the investment in training for particular individuals must remain a decision for local managers, in the light of local need to develop better services.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Abortion

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with police forces about the steps taken to protect women who choose to seek legal abortion from intimidation.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None. Enforcement of the Public Order Act 1986 as it relates to threatening words or behaviour likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress is the responsibility of chief officers of police.

Winston Silcott

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration is being given by his Department to a reference to the Court of Appeal in the case of conviction for murder of Winston Silcott.

Mr. Maclean: My Department is considering a report of inquiries made on its behalf by the Metropolitan police. In the light of the results of that consideration my right hon. and learned Friend will decide whether there are grounds for any action on his part.

Immigration

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the content of the acquis built up by intergovernmental co-operation between the 12 member states referred to in the press release of the meeting of 1 and 2 June of the Ministers responsible for immigration in Copenhagen; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The "acquis" will be those instruments and agreements between the member states which the applicant countries will be required to accept on acceding to the Community. This will include legally binding instruments such as the Dublin convention. Discussions between the member states on other items to be included are at an early stage.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what work has been begun by the Centre for Information, Discussion and Exchange on the Crossing of Borders and Immigration referred to in the Copenhagen meeting of Ministers responsible for immigration on 1 and 2 June.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Centre for Information, Discussion and Exchange on the Crossing of Borders and Immigration (CIREFI) is intended to provide a permanent mechanism for regular exhange of information, consultation and collaboration on practical matters between the relevant departments of the member states including information on member states' control procedures and immigration legislation.

It has so far held only one meeting, on 7 April 1993.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the agenda of the ad hoc group on immigration under the Belgian presidency; and how many days have been allocated for its meetings.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Belgian presidency has provisionally allocated a total of eight days to four meetings of the ad hoc group on immigration.

It will be for the Belgian presidency to determine the agenda for each of these meetings as they arise. The main agenda item for the first meeting will be the presentation of the presidency's programme for the coming six months. It is expected that the ad hoc group and its sub-groups will continue work currently in hand both on preparations for implementation of the Dublin convention and external frontiers convention, and under the immigration and asylum work programme agreed by Ministers at the end of the Dutch presidency in December 1991, including on admission for employment, harmonisation of asylum procedures and measures to combat illegal immigration.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the budget of the Centre for Information, Discussion and Exchange on the Crossing of Borders and Immigration; and what are the sources of its funding.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Centre for Information, Discussion and Exchange on the Crossing of Borders and Immigration (CIREFI) has no separate budget. Meetings are serviced by a small number of staff from the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Communities and accommodation is provided within the offices of the Council.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for further relaxation of controls at internal borders of the European Community as referred to in the press release of the meeting of 1 and 2 June of the Ministers responsible for immigration in Copenhagen.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend, the then Home Secretary, informed the House in a written answer on 17 December 1992, at column *445*, that we would be considering what further changes might be made in the course of 1993 to the United Kingdom immigration arrangements vis-á-vis member states of the Europoan Community, in furtherance of our policy of reducing checks on European Community nationals to the minimum compatible with the retention of effective immigration controls on third-country nationals, together with adequate safeguards against the entry of terrorists and other serious criminals.

The change which we have in mind is that EC nationals arriving at ferry ports from other European Community member states would be required to confirm their EC status by holding up an EC passport or identity card, but immigration officers would not normally examine the document in detail. The officer would, however, make a full examination where there was any suspicion that the document was not genuine or that the passenger was not in fact an EC national. We have not yet reached any decision on exactly when this arrangement might be introduced at ferry ports or on whether, as the European Commission have suggested, it might be possible to extend it to some smaller regional airports in respect of EC passengers arriving from elsewhere within the European Community.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the relationship between United Kingdom immigration policy and the premise referred to in the report of the meeting of Ministers responsible for immigration at their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 and 2 June on the necessity of control of migratory flows for the successful integration of immigrants lawfully resident in the territories of member states.

Mr. Charles Wardle: At the meeting of EC Immigration Ministers in Copenhagen, which I attended, there was a general consensus that the maintenance of effective immigration controls was an important factor in achieving the successful integration of immigrants lawfully resident in member states of the Community.

This view is entirely compatible with the Government's policy of applying immigration controls which are both firm and fair.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the address and the name of the director of the Centre for Information, Discussion and Exchange on the Crossing of Borders and Immigration.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Centre for Immigration, Discussion and Exchange on the Crossing of Borders and Immigration (CIREFI) has no director. Meetings are chaired by the EC presidency and are held in Brussels in the offices of the Council of the European Communities.

Small Firms (Crime)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken to help small firms guard against crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Home Office Crime Prevention Centre has recently issued to police forces a retail security guide for use by beat police officers. It gives detailed guidance on how small retail premises can be protected from burglary and will help police officers to provide appropriate advice to shopkeepers. Specialist crime prevention officers and architectural liaison officers are also available in police forces to advise on particular problems.

The Government have encouraged the development of business watch, shop watch and industry watch schemes —along the lines of the neighbourhood watch model. Many small businesses have also benefited directly from various crime prevention schemes supported and funded by the Home Office safer cities programme. We are also proposing to set up a retail action group.

Erwin Van Haarlem

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds Erwin Van Haarlem was released from prison and deported to Prague.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Mr. Van Haarlem was convicted on 3 March 1989 for an offence under Section 7 of the Official Secrets Act 1920, and was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, with a recommendation that he should be deported on his release. The then Home Secretary accepted this recommendation. Section 46 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 permits the early release of prisoners who are subject to deportation orders. Mr. Van Haarlem was released under this provision and deported to Prague on 5 April this year.

Prisoners (Visiting Facilities)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of *(a)* demand for and *(b)* availability of legal visiting facilities for category A remand residents at (i) Belmarsh and (ii) other prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Peter Bottomley dated July 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to write to you in response to your Parliamentary Question about the demand and availability of legal visit facilities for Category A remand prisoners at HM Prison Belmarsh and other establishments.

It is for the governor of each establishment to monitor the demand for legal visiting facilities to ensure that adequate facilities are available to members of the legal profession so that they can conduct interviews with remand prisoners in the interests of the criminal justice system.

In the case of Belmarsh, there are adequate facilities to cope with the normal demand for legal visits requested by category A prisoners and the governor has made available additional facilities to deal with any urgent or immediate request which cannot be accommodated in the usual way.

London Bombings

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been *(a)* held under the provisions of the prevention of terrorism Acts *(b)* charged and *(c)* released in connection with the Bishopsgate bomb and the London taxi bombs.

Mr. Howard: Following the incidents on 24 April 1993 in Bishopsgate, EC2, Seven Sisters road, N4 and Judd street, WC1, 10 people were detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. One person was charged with a terrorist-related offence, but the charge was not proceeded with. One person was charged in relation to other offences and one person was returned to Northern Ireland to complete a prison sentence. The remaining seven people were released without charge.

Metropolitan Police/RUC Consultations

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Metropolitan police take to consult the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Londonderry in appropriate cases.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Metropolitan police have a close working relationship with the Royal Ulster Constabulary and will take whatever steps are appropriate to consult the RUC where necessary.

Racial Hatred

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to respond to the Commission for Racial Equality's recommendation in its 1992 review of the Race Relations Acts calling for an independent review of the law on incitement to racial hatred.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In its second review of the Race Relations Act 1976 the Commission for Racial Equality put forward a number of wide-ranging recommendations. These are currently under consideration and a formal response for the review as a whole will be issued as soon as possible.

Domestic Violence

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) of 29 March, *Official Report*, column *103*, how many times the interdepartmental group on domestic violence has met; which Departments participated; and how frequent are their meetings.

Mr. Maclean: The official interdepartmental group on domestic violence, chaired by the Home Office, and with participation from the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Departments of Employment, the Environment, Health and Social Security, the Department for Education, the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland Offices and the Treasury, has met twice to discuss areas in which work on domestic violence can be taken forward at national and local level. It will continue to meet as and when appropriate.

Refuges

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the interdepartmental co-ordination on refuge provisions.

Mr. Maclean: As stated in the Government's reply to the third report from the Home Affairs Committee, Session 1992-93, (Cm 2269), refuge provision is one of a number of matters that will be considered by the interdepartmental group on domestic violence.

Mentally Ill Prisoners

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions during the past five years he has exercised his power of recall under section 42 of the Mental Health Act 1983 in respect of a person who was at time of recall a sentenced prisoner detained in prison.

Mr. Maclean: The total number of conditionally discharged patients recalled under section 42 of the Mental Health Act 1983 in the last five years for which the information is available is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1987	40
1988	43
1989	36
1990	41
1991	56

Information as to the number of these who were serving a sentence of imprisonment at the time is not separately recorded and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the last five years he has used his power under section 50(1) (b) of the Mental Health Act 1983 to release on licence or discharge under supervision a prisoner who has been the subject of a transfer direction and a restriction direction.

Mr. Maclean: I regret that this information can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedural arrangements his Department requires to be complied with before he will use his power under section 50(1)(b) of the Mental Health Act 1983 to release on licence or discharge under supervision in the case of a person considered fit to leave treatment in hospital and suitable for release or discharge.

Mr. Maclean: The power to discharge a patient under section 50(1)(b) of the Mental Health Act 1983 can be used to discharge, on life licence, a life sentence prisoner who has been transferred to hospital during the course of his sentence. In such a case, if the patient's responsible medical officer or a mental health review tribunal have recommended that the patient be discharged, the practice has been to consult the Lord Chief Justice and the trial judge, if available, about the length of time for which the patient should be detained in order to satisfy requirements of retribution and deterrence. In any case in which that period has already been served, the views of the parole board would be sought about the discharge recommendation. If the parole board supported the proposed discharge, consideration would then be given as to whether in all the circumstances of the case, it would be appropriate for the patient to be discharged on life licence. In any case in which the decision was taken not to discharge such a patient, and it was not considered appropriate for that patient to remain in hospital, the patient would be returned to prison in order to continue to serve the life sentence.

Consideration is presently being given to what procedures will apply in the case of discretionary life sentence prisoners who have been, or will be, transferred to hospital, and who will benefit from the new arrangements governing their release contained in part II of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Immigration Office, Birmingham Airport

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publicise the availability of the new immigration office at Birmingham airport.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Local organisations have been advised of the new immigration public enquiry office and its opening has received publicity in the Birmingham press. It will be given further publicity following an official opening to take place shortly.

Prisoners' Health Care

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which Prison Service establishments the health care service for prisoners now purchases NHS services; and what has been the annual cost *(a)* by establishment and *(b)* in total in each of the last five years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Liz Lynne dated July 1993:

I have been asked to reply to your Question seeking information about Prison Service establishments which are purchasing services from NHS providers and the cost of these services.

The health care services (excluding pharmaceutical services) at present provided under contracts with NHS provider authorities and units, as distinct from contracts with individual practitioners, are indicated in the following table. The aggregate cost of the contracts in this financial year is £225,000. For reasons of commercial confidentiality I am unable to give information about costs in earlier years when there was only one contract.

Establishment	*Type of Service*
HM Prison Belmarsh	General Medical Services
HM Prison Durham	Psychiatric Services
HM Prison Frankland	Psychiatric Services
HM Remand Centre Low Newton	Psychiatric Services

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which Prison Service establishments negotiations are in progress with the NHS for the provision of health care services.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Liz Lynne, dated July 1993:

I have been asked to reply to your Question about current negotiations between Prison Service establishments and the NHS for the provision of health care services.

I am not aware that any establishment is in formal negotiation with NHS providers at the present time. Invitations to tender for a contract to provide genito-urinary services to three establishments—HM Prisons Brixton, Wandsworth and Wormwood Scrubs—are expected to issue soon.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what complaints procedure exists for prisoners who wish to complain about any aspect of medical care or treatment which they receive from the health care service for prisoners or the NHS contractor.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Liz Lynne, dated July 1993:

I have been asked to reply to your Question about the complaints procedure available to prisoners who wish to complain about any aspect of medical care or treatment.

In Prison Service establishments formal complaints which relate to clincal care or treatment received in prison are normally first considered by the head of health care of the establishment. They may also be referred, either on appeal or by exercise of a right of direct confidential access, to the Directorate of Health Care at Prison Service headquarters where they are considered by a senior doctor. In general this procedure is available whether the service complained of is provided by staff of the Health Care Service for Prisoners or by an external provider under contract, but individual contracts may provide—and one current contract does so provide—for clinical complaints to be considered under NHS procedures.

Other avenues normally available to prisoners, including Boards of Visitors and Members of Parliament, can also be used to ventilate complaints about health care.

WALES

Council Homes (Juveniles)

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice he has issued to local authorities regarding juveniles in council homes, including the use of restraint where necessary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Draft guidance on permissible forms of control in children's residential care was issued for consultation to Welsh local authorities and voluntary organisations in November 1992. As a result of that exercise, which ended in December 1992, the guidance was changed substantially from the draft originally circulated.

The final guidance issued by the Department on 29 April 1993 under cover of Welsh Office circular 38/93 was much stronger and more explicit. It sets out a broad framework of principles and circumstances where a child may be restrained. It is designed to cover young people living in both secure and open children's homes and offers positive and practical advice to staff and managers on the care and control of young people in residental care. At the same time, it recognises that managers will need to decide who best to put this guidance into operation. The onus is on the care worker to make judgments as to whether restraint is required in the predominating circumstances and to determine the degree of restraint appropriate and when it should be used. Copies of this guidance are being placed in the Library of the House.

Mobile Libraries

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many mobile libraries were operating in each local authority area of the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The available information is given in the following table:

Number of mobile libraries

	1980[1]	*1985*[1]	*1992*[1]
Gwynedd	7	7	7
Clwyd	17	14	13

[1] At 31 March.
Source: CIPFA.

Village Halls

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many village halls were located in each local authority area of the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is not available centrally.

ENVIRONMENT

Medical Waste Incinerators

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what guidelines and procedures exist or are proposed on the role and responsibilities of metropolitan districts in monitoring and supervising medical waste incinerators in *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* the NHS;

(2) what guidelines and procedures exist or are proposed on the role and responsibility of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in monitoring and supervising medical waste incinerator facilities in the private sector.

Mr. Yeo: The incineration of medical waste is a prescribed process under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is responsible for the integrated pollution control of private sector and NHS incinerators with a capacity of 1 tonne per hour or more. They have issued a process guidance note, IPR5/2 "Clinical Waste Incineration", which sets out in detail how these processes should be operated and monitored. Local authorities, including metropolitan districts, are responsible for air pollution control of private sector and NHS incinerators with a capacity of less than 1 tonne per hour; the Secretary of State's guidance note PG 5/1(92) "Clinical Waste Incineration Processes," provides guidance relating to these smaller incinerators. The Secretary of State has also issued waste management paper 25, which gives guidance to waste regulation authorities in relation to their responsibilities in respect of the licensing of the handling and storage of medical waste.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the locations, the names of the companies involved, their capacities and their proposed timetable for development for medical waste incinerators which currently are in receipt of planning consent.

Mr. Yeo: The Department does not keep this information.

Dioxin

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the levels of recorded dioxin contamination *(a)* in the north-west of England, *(b)* on Merseyside and *(c)* in Knowsley.

Mr. Yeo: As part of a larger survey of milk in the United Kingdom, carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, two samples of whole cow's milk were obtained in 1990 from north-west England, but outside the Merseyside and Knowsley areas. Concentrations of dioxins and furans in the milk were within the normal range observed in the United Kingdom (0·04-0·27 ng TEQ/kg milk).

In 1986 a background survey of dioxins and furans in soils of the United Kingdom was carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution. Samples were taken from sites in north-west England but outside the Merseyside and Knowsley areas. A report of the results is in the Library of the House.

In 1992 measurements of dioxin levels in soil and grass adjacent to the Cleanaway incinerator at Ellesmere Port were obtained as part of a national survey of emissions from incinerators carried out by HMIP. The results obtained for soil and grass were 0·26 and 0·11 ng TEQ/kg respectively.

Rural Development Commission

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the budget for the Rural Development Commission in each year since 1990-91; and what is the proposed budget for the next financial year.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 28 June 1993]:* The Rural Development Commission's expenditure for the first three years is as follows:

	£ million
1990-91	35·058
1991-92	32·263
1992-93	36·210

The commission's budget for this and the next financial year is as follows:

	£ million
1993-94	39·002
1994-95	41·020

All figures include corporation tax except 1994-95 which is a planning figure only.

SCOTLAND

Local Government

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what conclusions he has reached about the future of local government in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I gave yesterday.

Police Reform

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about his proposals for police reform in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The existing police forces in Scotland will continue after local government reorganisation but joint police committees willl be established where forces cover more than one council area.

In line with the principles of the citizen's charter, we wish our police forces to be seen to consult the public they serve about priorities, to publish annual targets and to report on performance achieved against those targets. I expect forces to build on their existing procedures for consulting the public, especially community councils, and for setting targets for various activities as required under the Justice Charter for Scotland. To ensure that performance can be measured against resources devoted to policing, we shall require chief constables to produce their annual reports on a financial year basis and I propose to take statutory power to prescribe classes of information which these reports should contain. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and the Commission for Local Authority Accounts in Scotland will continue to monitor the performance of forces. Reports by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary on its annual inspections of police forces have been published for some time and we shall expect chief constables in future to make public their responses to the recommendations of inspection reports.

Our police forces have become multi-disciplinary bodies with a wide range of professional skills, deployed by civilians as well as by uniformed officers. We wish chief constables and their subordinate commanders within forces to have greater freedom to deply those resources. Accordingly, I intend to remove the statutory controls exercised by the Secretary of State and by police authorities over police and civilian establishments. The police grant payable to police authorities will become subject to a cash limit, though police authorities will retain a measure of discretion in determining expenditure. I shall take reserve powers to ensure that police authorities provide sufficient funds to maintain an efficient force with adequate manpower; and to ensure sensible collaboration and common standards between forces in the interests of efficiency—including standards for information systems. My Department will shortly be issuing fresh guidance on civilianisation to help ensure that police officers perform only those tasks requiring their powers. Some Scottish forces have already introduced local command units with budgets delegated to the local cammanders and we shall encourage wider adoption of these arrangements.

With my right hon. and learned Friends the Secretaries of State for the Home Department and for Northern Ireland, I shall be considering the recommendations of the report of the inquiry into police responsibilities and rewards and, after consultation with interested parties, will reach decisions on the recommendations of the report. I am also undertaking a review of police conduct and performance procedures in Scotland and, depending on responses to the consultation paper being issued this month, new procedures will be introduced to deal with unsatisfactory performance and unacceptable conduct in the police service. These changes together should enhance

the professionalism of the police by increasing flexiblity to reward good performance and to deal effectively with poor performance.

In conjunction with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary I shall be considering legislative provision to ensure that constables from different jurisdictions have adequate powers throughout Great Britain.

Where primary legislation is required I propose to take the earliest suitable opportunity to introduce new provisions.

I believe that these proposals will ensure that, in keeping with the requirements of the justice charter, the organisation of the police in Scotland both achieves a proper accountability to local people, and promotes the efficiency and effectiveness of individual police forces in their fight against crime.

Midwives

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many midwives were employed in national health service hospitals each year since 1980; how many community midwives were employed over the same period; and if he will describe the changes in Government policy concerning staffing complements for midwives over the same period.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* The data requested for the years 1980-91 are published in the annual issues of "Scottish Health Statistics". Data for 1992 are contained in "Health Briefing—NHSiS Non-medical/dental Manpower Summary: 1980-1992". Copies of these publications are available in the House of Commons Library. There have been no changes during this period in Government policy concerning staffing complements for midwives. It remains for individual health boards and national health service trusts to decide the level of midwifery staffing appropriate to their needs in the light of local circumstances.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many women, in each health board area, were refused the services of a community midwife in 1992 on the grounds of non-availability.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* Following inquiries of health boards, I am advised that in 1992 no woman, in any Scottish health board area, was refused a community midwife service on grounds of non-availability.

Women's Refuges

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many places are currently available in women's refuge hostels in Scotland; and what is the rate per 10,000 population.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* There are currently 283 places in women's refuge hostels in Scotland; this is 0·55 places per 10,000 population.

Community Care

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve provision for *(a)* the elderly, *(b)* children with special needs, *(c)* adults with mental or physical handicap, *(d)* adults experiencing and recovering from mental illness and *(e)* persons with a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse under the care in the community legislation.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* Under the new community care arrangements, local authorities, in consultation with health boards and other agencies, are responsible for assessing care needs and developing plans to meet these needs. The authorities have been provided with extensive guidance and considerable additional resources. Local authorities should, therefore, be well placed to ensure that good quality services are available for these vulnerable groups.

The local authority inspection units and the Scottish Office social work services inspectorate are both concerned with promoting higher standards in all types of care provision.

Hospital Building Programme

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the capital allocated for the hospital building programme announced in November 1992 for new build hospitals in Lothian, Lanarkshire and Glasgow remain available for this purpose.

Mr. Stewart: *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* Yes.

Care of the Elderly

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effects on the elderly since the implementation on 1 April of the care in the community legislation.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* My officials have regular meetings with staff from local authority social work departments, housing departments, health boards, voluntary organisations and representatives of independent sector home owners concerning the operation of the new arrangements. A programme of monitoring will also take place through the analysis of statistical returns, the commissioning of research and the work of the social work services inspectorate.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by her Department since 1988 to quasi-autonomus non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, any salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Jack: Our records show that only one member of the House of Lords has been appointed by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food since 1988. Details of this appointment as requested by the hon. Member are as follows:

Name	Title of Post	Salary	Duration
Lord Mackay of Ardbreknish[1] (John Jackson Mackay)	Chairman, Sea Fish Industry Authority	£28,780 per annum	Three years from 1 October 1990

[1] Appointed jointly with Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The other information requested by the hon. Member is not held centrally. To provide it could be done only at disproportionate cost.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

THORP

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the actual and projected figures for current and future employment at the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield with an explanation for the basis of the figures and a sector-by-sector breakdown of the jobs involved.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc. I understand that the company will shortly be publishing information of the type requested.

Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether any plutonium of weapons-useable quality has been exported to Japan from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: The usefulness of reprocessed plutonium for weapons purposes depends on its composition. It is not in the public interest for me to comment further. All reactor grade plutonium is held in secure conditions while in the United Kingdom. Any exports are subject to stringent internationally accepted standards of safeguards and physical protection. The Government would allow the export of plutonium from reprocessing only on receipt of satisfactory assurances that the material would be used only for peaceful purposes.

Miners (Retraining)

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what proportion of miners leaving the industry in each year since 1989-90 went on a retraining scheme on leaving the industry;

(2) what proportion of miners leaving the industry in each year since 1989-90 went on *(a)* a training scheme funded through the job and career change scheme and *(b)* a Government training scheme.

Mr. Eggar: British Coal Enterprise has advised us that of the 58,018 former British Coal employees registered for assistance with them since 1989-90, 13·1 per cent., 7,586, have entered retraining. These figures are detailed on a year-by-year basis, with information given on those who went on the job and career change scheme and those who have taken other retraining. Other retraining includes Government schemes and further education support by local education authority grants.

Year	Registered with BCE	JACCS training	Other training	Total training	Percentage of those registered with BCE
1989-90	18,251	1,384	552	1,936	10·6
1990-91	10,441	796	218	1,014	9·7
1991-92	15,536	1,671	155	1,826	11·8
1992-93	13,790	2,475	335	2,810	20·4
TOTALS	58,018	6,326	1,260	7,586	13·1

These figures do not include those who entered retraining directly via other agencies, jobcentres, restart programmes etc.

Information about previous occupation and/or industry before entering a Government training scheme is not collected centrally.

From April 1993 entrants to training for work who have been made redundant as a result of pit closures will be identified if they are not covered by normal eligibility rules.

Coal

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total amount of coal produced in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* England in the last year for which full figures are available; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1986.

Mr. Eggar: The amounts of coal produced in England, Scotland and Wales were as follows:

Thousand tonnes

	Wales	Scotland	England	Total[1]
1986	9,295	6,758	88,582	108,099
1987	8,037	6,143	87,475	104,533
1988	7,374	6,086	88,210	104,066
1989	6,789	6,251	85,245	100,605
1990	6,398	6,519	78,146	93,508
1991	5,194	7,072	79,469	94,921
1992	4,873	6,935	68,730	84,874

Source: British Coal, Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics.

[1] Only direct production by British Coal is readily available by country. The total also includes an estimate for slurry etc. recovered and disposed of other than by British Coal from dumps, ponds, rivers etc.

Energy

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has on the proportion of energy used in *(a)* housing, *(b)* commercial, *(c)* industrial and *(d)* public buildings since 1990.

Mr. Eggar: The percentages of energy consumption by sector are given in the table. Further details will be published in the 1993 edition of the Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics at the end of July. A detailed description of the consumer sectors used is given on pages 14 and 15 of the 1992 edition of the digest.

Sector	*Percentage of energy consumed*		
	1990	*1991*	*1992*
Domestic	42	44	43
Commerce	11	11	11
Industry	40	37	37
Public services	8	8	9

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of total United Kingdom energy expenditure was accounted for by *(a)* transport, *(b)* buildings and *(c)* other industries in each year since 1990.

Mr. Eggar: The percentage of United Kingdom energy expenditure by various sectors are given in the table. Further details will be published in the 1993 edition of the Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics at the end of July. A detailed description of the consumer sectors used is given on pages 14 and 15 of the 1992 edition of the digest.

Sector	*Percentage of total expenditure on energy*		
	1990	*1991*	*1992*
Transport	45	44	44
Domestic, public services and commerce	39	41	41
Industry	15	14	14
Other (agriculture)	1	1	1

Company Investigations

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement outlining his Department's reasons for not acknowledging the existence or otherwise of investigations into the affairs of individual companies' or accountancy partnerships in response to parliamentary questions about business collapses and frauds; and for how long this practice has been in operation.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My Department undertakes a number of inquiries every year into companies under the Companies Acts 1985 and 1989, Insurance Companies Act 1982 and Financial Services Act 1986. Further details are available in the companies annual report published each year. It has long been the policy under Labour as well as Conservative Governments to announce only the appointment of inspectors under certain Companies Act powers. The vast majority of inquiries are not announced both for operational reasons and in order not to prejudice the outcome. Public announcement would undermine the effectiveness of the inquiries and would unduly damage the business of the companies concerned, particularly where no misconduct is discovered.

Warren Spring Laboratory

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will publish the estimated costs to his Department and to other Government departments of the move of Warren Spring Laboratory to the Atomic Energy Authority, including the costs of disruption to existing research programmes, staff relocation and redundancies;

(2) if he will publish a list of the organisations he consulted before deciding to close Warren Spring Laboratory.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 29 June 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central on 7 July 1993, *Official Report*, column *153*.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is Her Majesy's Government's policy towards the reprocessing of Iraqi nuclear waste at Dounreay.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 8 July 1993]:* As was explained in the reply of my right hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy of 5 November 1991 to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), *Official Report*, column *68*, the United Kingdom and France expressed willingness to assist with recovery of material from Iraq. During these discussions, the United Kingdom and France went to considerable lengths to accommodate the International Atomic Energy Agency's concerns over the responsibility for the long-term storage of waste from reprocessing and questions over the legal liability for the material. In the event, the IAEA decided to pursue another option.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kashmir

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent information he has received on the activities of the Indian security forces in Indian-controlled Kashmir; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We receive regular information from our high commission in Delhi on the activities of the Indian security forces in Jammu and Kashmir, as well as media reports. The continuing loss of life on all sides is a cause of grave concern.

Brazilian Embassies (Dogs)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice he has given to the Brazilian ambassador to the Court of St. James's in respect of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and the keeping of Filo Braziliero dogs in Brazilian embassies.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None.

Mr. Asil Nadir

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) of 14 June, *Official Report*, column *423*, what assistance he has now received from Turkish authorities in connection with the return of Mr. Nadir to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Turkish authorities offered co-operation and assistance to investigators of the Serious

Fraud Office during their visit to Ankara from 7 to 9 June. They have since provided substantial responses to the major part of a detailed commission rogatoire.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Tests (Nevada)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has received from the United States Administration in regard to the future use of the nuclear test site in Nevada by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Aitken: We are in close contact with the United States Administration on all aspects of nuclear testing. President Clinton announced on 3 July that he was extending the moratorium on testing at the Nevada test site to the end of September 1994, provided that no other state tests before then.

Iraq

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will seek to obtain a copy of the testimony given before the United States Congress on 29 June by the Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs, Mr. Gallucci, in regard to the current evaluation by the United States Administration of the Iraqi military nuclear programme; and if he will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Hanley: A copy of Mr. Gallucci's testimony has been obtained which will be placed in the Library.

RAF Support Command

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flying days have been lost due to bad weather, at each RAF base in Support Command since 1979.

Mr. Hanley: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been spent on maintenance by each base in Support Command since 1979.

Mr. Hanley: Information is available only from financial year 1990-91. The information shown is for property maintenance work costing less than £300,000 which comes under the unit's own budget. Projects costing more than £300,000 are controled centrally and cannot be accredited to the individual unit or establishment without disproportionate cost.

£ million

Station	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	Total
Amport House	0·184	0·295	0·199	0·678
Biggin Hill	0·618	0·716	0·448	1·782
Boscombe Down	0·636	0·821	0·632	2·089
Brampton	2·061	2·408	2·451	6·920
Central Medical Establishment, Kelvin	0·910	0·109	0·830	0·283
Ely	0·779	0·828	0·296	1·903
Farnborough	0·253	0·762	0·249	1·264
Harrogate	0·306	0·164	0·291	0·761
Headley Court	0·711	0·802	0·647	2·160
Inspectorate of Recruitment, Cranwell	0·208	0·265	0·229	0·702
Innsworth	2·034	1·873	1·402	5·309
London Dental Centre, Uxbridge	0·500	0·160	0·900	0·300
Rudloe Manor	1·219	1·752	2·305	5·276
Stanbridge	0·545	1·075	0·803	2·423
Swanton Morley	1·049	1·433	0·000	2·482
Uxbridge	2·974	2·697	2·813	8·304
Wroughton	1·460	1·399	1·873	4·732
Abingdon	1·830	1·660	0·683	4·173
Bampton Castle	0·000	0·000	0·200	0·200
Cardington	0·286	0·423	0·514	1·223
Carlisle	1·155	2·543	4·200	7·898
Chilmark	0·784	1·232	0·687	2·704
Digby	0·482	0·932	0·780	2·195
Henlow	1·340	1·523	2·517	5·380
Kemble	0·290	0·327	0·387	0·743
North Luffenham	1·021	1·730	1·253	4·005
Oakhangar	0·140	0·442	1·113	1·569
Quedgeley	0·918	1·214	1·122	3·254
Sealand	1·244	2·146	2·124	5·514
Stafford	1·579	3·117	3·284	7·980
St. Athan	5·605	7·700	7·453	20·758
Rudloe Manor	0·000	0·000	0·300	0·300
Swanton Morley	0·000	0·000	0·778	0·778
Special Signals Unit, Woolwich	0·000	0·125	0·000	0·125
Chivenor	1·300	1·800	3·431	6·531
Church Fenton	0·864	0·854	0·347	2·065
Cosford	4·182	4·052	3·648	11·882
Cranwell	2·497	3·139	3·247	8·883
Finningley	3·069	2·695	2·368	8·132
Halton	2·862	3·806	4·263	10·931
Hereford	1·316	1·610	1·083	4·009
Linton	1·175	1·509	1·844	4·528
Locking	1·683	2·271	2·699	6·653
Newton	1·322	1·375	1·584	4·281

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the area of land, in acres, of each RAF station in Support Command; what are the number and length of runways at each station; and what type of aircraft each station has.

Mr. Hanley: The following information shows only those airfields supporting training aircraft; RLG denotes relief landing ground.

Unit	Runway Length (ft)	Aircraft Type	Area (acres)
RAF Chivenor	6,000 4,400	Hawk	508
RAF Cranwell	6,800 4,800	Tucano	1,823
RAF Barkston Heath	6,000 4,200	RLG Tucano	553
RAF Linton-on-Ouse	6,000 4,400	Tucano	718
RAF Elvington	10,000	Disused	405
RAF Church Fenton	5,800 5,500	RLG Tucano	445
RAF Topcliffe	6,000 4,100	Light aircraft	197
RAF Dishforth	6,100 4,500	RLG Light aircraft	477
RAF St. Athan	6,000	Various	992
RAF Scampton	9,000	Tucano/ Bulldog	898

Unit	Runway Length (ft)	Aircraft Type	Area (acres)
RAF Binbrook	7,500 4,200 4,200	Disused	570
RAF Shawbury	6,000 4,500	Helicopters	748
RAF Ternhill	3,100 3,200	Helicopters	279
RAF Swinderby	6,000 4,100	Chipmunk	629
RAF Valley	7,500 5,400 4,200	Hawk	797
RAF Mona	5,500	RLG Hawk	170

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of service personnel and civilian personnel at each RAF base in Support Command; and what is the total pay bill incurred in respect of each base per annum.

Mr. Hanley: As at 7 July the information is as follows:

RAF station	Civilian establishment	Service establishment	Civilian/Service pay costs 1992-93 (£ million)
2 Signals Unit, Bampton Castle	4	64	1·444
9 Signals Unit, Boddington	7	99	1·878
Boscombe Down	15	19	1·206
Bracknell	103	178	5·377
Brampton	690	980	31·710
217 Maintenance Unit, Cardington	113	6	1·441
14 Maintenance Unit, Carlisle	892	13	12·310
Chaplains School Amport House	32	—	0·280
11 Maintenance Unit, Chilmark	232	13	3·422
Chivenor	119	794	14·607
Cosford	309	512	14·969
Cranwell	458	1,248	34·557
Digby	54	72	1·982
Finningley	149	557	15·671
Halton	358	978	24·899
Harrogate	24	36	0·847
Headley Court	61	116	3·119
Henlow[1]	841	928	28·664
Hereford	141	299	7·123
Innsworth	88	172	3·577
Linton-on-Ouse	165	363	9·511
Locking	235	527	13·415
Newton	384	562	12·953
North Luffenham	140	652	13·331
1001 Signals Unit, Oakhangar	31	368	6·567
7 Maintenance Unit, Quedgeley	145	8	4·879
Rudloe Manor[2]	226	717	12·071
St. Athan	1,208	2,639	65·484
Scampton	93	438	15·758
30 Maintenance Unit, Sealand	1,283	469	29·382
Shawbury	131	341	8·398
16 Maintenance Unit, Stafford	763	664	20·878
Stanbridge	176	217	11·683
Swanton Morley	347	863	16·419
Swinderby	33	202	4·664
Uxbridge	135	451	13·368
Valley	211	805	15·638
Wittering	5	257	4·360
PA Hospital Wroughton	130	438	9·852
London—various locations	52	79	2·536

[1] Including detachment at Wyton.
[2] Including detachments.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service families, and how many service houses, are on station for each RAF base in Support Command.

Mr. Hanley: As at 7 July the information requested is as follows:

	Total married quarters	Total occupied
Flying training units		
Chivenor	325	321
Cranwell	451	403
Finningley	375	285
Linton-on-Ouse	162	127
Shawbury	160	126
Valley	374	356
Other units		
Amport House	3	2
Bedford Rae	7	4
Boscombe Down	135	133
Bracknell	138	103
Brampton	404	349
Carlisle	14	14
Chilmark	5	4
Cosford	339	305
Digby	230	127
Henlow	401	381
Hereford	165	146
Innsworth	355	332
Halton	550	530
Harrogate	114	111
Headley Court	63	63
Locking	325	304
North Luffenham	269	249
Oakhangar	92	91
Quedgeley	9	8
Rudloe Manor	217	207
St. Athan	829	812
Scampton	427	294
Sealand	276	189
Stafford	286	254
Stanbridge	128	119
Swanton Morley	224	208
Swinderby	155	47
Uxbridge	833	736
Wroughton	131	130

Yugoslavia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional expense has been incurred by his Department as a result of the passing of UN Security Council resolution 816; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The additional annual costs are currently assessed at around £20,000,000.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the military consequences of the mobilisation of Bosnian-Croat citizens of fighting age in Bosnia-Herzegovina on 30 June and the imposition of curfew; if he will consider the withdrawal of British forces deployed near Vitez; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The mobilisation of Bosnian-Croat citizens to serve in the Croatian Defence Council, a militia type force based throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina and organised for the local defence of Bosnian Croat communities, was in response to the on-going fighting against Bosnian government, mainly Muslim, forces.

It is unlikely the mobilisation will have any implications for the British forces in Vitez. The safety of our troops is paramount, however, and we keep their deployment continually under review.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) of 1 April, *Official Report*, column 500, what assessment he has made of UNMO document DTG: 131600Z Mar 93 and note verbale S/24900/Add.27 of 16 March in relation to the identity, origin or destination of the aircraft that violated the no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina near Gladovici on 13 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Assessment of available evidence of the reported no-fly zone violation on 13 March has not produced conclusive proof as to the nature of the mission, the identity of the aircraft operators, or the location of the aircraft operating base.

Desert Storm Syndrome

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will place in the Library details of all organisations and individuals who have made representations to his Department about the Desert Storm syndrome.

Mr. Hanley: Apart from questions from various hon. Members, which are recorded in the *Official Report*, and letters from the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright), my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes), my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), my Department has record of only eight written representations to date concerning the alleged condition popularly known as Desert Storm syndrome. For reasons of confidentiality I am not able to provide names. There has additionally been recent media interest in this subject and other representations may be in the process of being made as a result.

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's assessment of the medical evidence related to the alleged Desert Storm syndrome.

Mr. Hanley: The wide variety of symptoms which are alleged to make up the condition popularly known as Desert Storm syndrome are prevalent within the general population. There is no evidence that the incidence of these symptoms in the services has increased since the Gulf conflict. There is nothing in the available medical evidence in the United Kingdom that would suggest that the symptoms described cannot be explained in conventional medical terms, but my Department is actively seeking further information and will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Depleted Uranium Shells

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether depleted uranium ammunition was used by United States forces in accidental attacks on British forces during the Gulf war.

Mr. Hanley: No.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 12 July 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Commercial Leases

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what new proposals he has to improve the law on leases on commercial property.

Mr. John M. Taylor: As I announced in my answer on 31 March to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), *Official Report*, column *197*, the Government have, after careful consideration, decided to implement the recommendations in the Law Commission's report on Landlord and Tenant Law: Privity of Contract and Estate (Law Com. No. 174), for future leases but not for existing leases.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning has also announced the publication of a consultation paper on upward-only rent reviews, confidentiality clauses and dispute resolution procedures in relation to new commercial leases. The Government will carefully examine the responses before considering whether it is appropriate to legislate or take any other action on any of these issues.

Appointments

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department further to his answer of 12 February, *Official Report*, column *788*, what changes have taken place since 1 January in the total number of *(a)* Lords of Appeal in Ordinary, *(b)* Lords Justices of Appeal, *(c)* Heads of Division, *(d)* High Court judges, *(e)* circuit judges, *(f)* recorders, *(g)* assistant recorders, *(h)* stipendiary magistrates, and *(i)* full-time chairmen who are (i) men, (ii) women, (iii) barristers, (iv) solicitors, (v) black or Asian, and (vi) ex-Oxford or Cambridge; and if he will give revised figures for the average ages in each category.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The available information, as at 1 July 1993, is set out in the table, with net changes since 1 January 1993 shown in brackets. As before, the figures for black or Asian office-holders are believed to be correct, but since the formal recording of the ethnic background of applicants for judicial office began only on 1 October 1991, such information may be incomplete. Aggregated information is not generally kept on the university background of judges or their average ages and no new information is available in relation to these matters.

	Number	*Men*	*Women*	*[1]Barrister*	*Solicitor*	*Black/Asian*
Lords of Appeal in Ordinary	10	10	—	10	—	—
Lords Justices	29 (+2)	28 (+2)	1	29 (+2)	—	—
Heads of Division (excludes Lord Chancellor)	4	4	—	4	—	—
High Court Judges	88 (+4)	83 (+3)	5 (+1)	87 (+3)	1 (+1)	—
Circuit Judges	491 (+9)	463 (+5)	28 (+4)	436 (+11)	55 (−2)	2
Recorders	815 (+51)	778 (+51)	37	743 (+42)	72 (+9)	8 (+2)
Assistant Recorders (excludes Assistant Recorders in training)	436 (−50)	386 (−49)	50 (−1)	359 (−48)	77 (−2)	9 (+1)
Stipendiary Magistrates	77 (−1)	68 (−1)	9	38	39 (−1)	1
Industrial Tribunal Chairmen	70 (+9)	59 (+9)	11	35 (+4)	35 (+5)	1
Value Added Tax Tribunal Chairmen	3	3	—	3	—	—
Social Security Appeal Tribunal Chairmen	29 (+4)	20 (+1)	9 (+3)	7 (+3)	22 (+1)	—

[1] Or member of the Faculty of Advocates.

Legal Aid

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects a final decision to be made on the eligibility for legal aid of Mrs. J. M. Ward, 4 St. John's road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Decisions on the grant of civil legal aid are a matter for the Legal Aid Board. I understand that the legal director of the Legal Aid Board wrote to the hon. Member on 7 July explaining in detail the background to this case and the current position.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Asil Nadir

31. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on further discussions he has had on issues arising from the Asil Nadir case.

The Attorney-General: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* witten and *(b)* oral representations he received from honourable Members regarding the case of Mr. Nadir before his departure from the United Kingdom.

The Attorney-General: Pursuant to my answer given on 10 June 1993, col. *334*, to the honourable Member for Walsall, North, I should add to that list letters written by two honourable Members to the then Home Secretary about Mr. Nadir to which my predecessor replied on points relating to the arrest and investigation. Because of the indirect route by which they came to my office they were not recorded on the departmental register of Members' correspondence so as to be included in my original answer. The overall number of Members who have made representations to me or my predecessor is therefore eight rather than six—since the honourable Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) made both oral and written representations, he figured twice in my answer of 10 June. I have not included questions tabled by honourable Members in replies relating to representations.

My reference to correspondence from whichever part of the House, *Official Report*, 30 June 1993, col. *969*, was founded on recollection of a list prepared by officials detailing all occasions when the case was raised through parliamentary channels which included reference to a question asked by the right honourable Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) on 12 November 1990, col. *34*.

Magistrates Courts

32. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the proportion of Crown Prosecution Service prosecutions in the magistrates courts which are successful.

The Solicitor-General: For the year ending 31 March 1993, 97·6 per cent. of cases which proceeded to a hearing in the magistrates court resulted in either a guilty plea or a conviction.

Constitutional and Legal Functions

33. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to reassess the constitutional and legal functions of his office.

The Attorney-General: The constitutional and legal functions of my office have an essential part to play in the administration of justice. My object is to uphold them.

Crown Prosecution Service

34. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the staffing of the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service has recently completed a recruitment campaign which has resulted in a further 45 experienced lawyers being recommended for appointment. There are now very few vacancies for either legal or administrative staff.

International Investments Ltd.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Attorney-General what recent representations have been made to the Gibraltar authorities regarding the letter of request for information relating to inquiries into International Investments Ltd. Gibraltar, in liquidation.

The Attorney-General: Officials of the Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland have been in recent oral and written communication with Senior Crown Counsel of the Attorney-General's Chambers in Gibraltar in order to finalise arrangements for the attendance of counsel and the investigating officer from the Royal Ulster Constabulary at a judicial hearing scheduled to take place in Gibraltar on 12 July 1993. This hearing is in response to the letter of request for evidence in relation to the affairs of International Investments Ltd. (In Liquidation) issued by Belfast magistrates court on 1 November 1990 and forwarded to the Gibraltar authorities on 5 November 1990 under the provisions of article 9 of the Criminal Justice (Evidence Etc) (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Attorney-General how many persons of Greek-Cypriot ethnicity are employed in the Serious Fraud Office.

The Attorney-General: The Serious Fraud Office is aware of only one employee whose ethnic origins lie within the Greek Cypriot community. Ethnic survey questionnaires are issued to all staff joining the Serious Fraud Office and are completed on a voluntary basis. The categories covered are those agreed with the civil service unions for the purposes of such a survey and do not isolate Greek Cypriot origins as a separate ethnicity.

United Nations

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Attorney-General how many staff in his Department have as their primary function work in connection with his duty of providing advice on matters involving adherence to international law in respect of the United Nations and use of force.

The Attorney-General: One member of my Department has as his primary function work in connection with my duty of providing advice on matters involving adherence to international law.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Silverware

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what provision was made in the terms of the sale of House of Commons silverware for scrap to forbid resale or to require erasure of identifying marks or the scrapping of the material.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: This is a matter for the Director of Catering Services and I shall ask her to write to the hon. Member.

Vote Office

Mr. Harris: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on the Vote Office.

Mr Beith: In April 1992 Vote responsibility for parliamentary printing, publications and supply services was transferred from Her Majesty's Stationery Office to the House. An interim arrangement was entered into with HMSO to ensure continuity of existing services. In May 1993, the House of Commons Commission approved in principle the establishment of new systems for the management of the printing and publishing requirements of the House. The particular aim of the changes was to bring closer together within individual Departments the management responsibility for generating House documents and the financial responsibility for paying for those publications. As part of this process, the Commission has agreed the transfer of the Vote Office from the Library Department to the Clerk's Department with effect from 1 November 1993; and the creation within that Office of improved facilities for the production of certain internal House documents.

ENVIRONMENT

Market Testing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much the market-testing programme has cost his Department since November 1992.

Mr. Gummer: Since November 1992, the cost of my Department's market-testing programme has amounted to approximately £729,000 and the Department has already achieved efficiency savings in the relevant activities worth about £1 million annually. This is in advance both of the results of the majority of tenders and of calculating the gains expected from Property Holdings' programme of putting out professional services to competitive tender which is due for completion at the end of this year.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whom he has consulted in regard to miscellaneous paper 179 (1993) on the advice given by his Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee in its letter of 10 October 1992 on British Nuclear Fuels plc's proposals for the return of waste resulting from reprocessing of nuclear spent fuel to overseas utilities.

Mr. Yeo: There have been no formal consultations on RWMAC's advice in its report on waste substitution. There remain a number of technical points on which we require further information from RWMAC before their advice can be considered properly.

Building Regulations (Fuel and Power)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses he has received to his Department's consultation document on building regulations (conservation of fuel and power); and what proportion *(a)* endorsed the Government's insulation proposals, *(b)* wished to see a reduction in, or postponement of, the Government's insulation proposals and *(c)* sought an improvement in the Government's insulation proposals giving a greater reduction in carbon dioxide emissions and an improved rate of energy conservation.

Mr. Baldry: A total of 170 responses have been received to the consultation document which proposed strengthening of the building regulations for the conservation of fuel and power. The proposals include improved standards of insulation for roofs, walls, floors, windows and doors together with alternative higher standards for roofs and floors.

To date the Department has analysed 70 per cent. of the responses. Of these:

(a) 26 per cent. favour the recommendations in the consultation document. A further 28 per cent. did not specifically comment on the insulation standards, and it could be assumed that they are also content with the proposals;
(b) 8 per cent. wished to see the alternative higher standards for roofs or floors;
(c) 8 per cent. wished to see a reduction or postponement of the insulation proposals; and
(d) 30 per cent. sought an improvement in one or more of the insulation standards.

In deciding what action to take in the light of these responses, the reasoning behind the arguments advanced will of course be given due weight rather than relying on a numerical breakdown of this sort.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when section 61 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will be implemented.

Mr. Yeo: The Secretary of State announced on 24 March, *Official Report*, columns *633-34*, a review of responsibilities for contaminated land and liabilities. The duties and powers of authorities under section 61 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in respect of landfill sites form part of the subject matter of the review. The Government do not propose to bring section 61 of the Act into force while it is still the subject of that review.

Letting Value

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of whether the establishment of letting value under part I of the Housing and Urban Development Bill 1993 will be prevented by the absence of or withholding of estate records; and what forms of indirect alternative evidence of letting value including pre-1963 rating records there are, from which such letting values could appropriately be derived.

Mr. Baldry: We have no evidence from landlords, tenants, or professional bodies that the derivation of letting values in relation to the rent test in section 4 of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 has caused difficulties. We do not anticipate any difficulties with establishing letting values for the purposes of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Bill. Most professional valuers have the knowledge and experience to do it.

Estate records are not essential to the assessment of letting values, although they might provide evidence to show that a particular lease is not at a low rent.

Indirect alternative evidence includes pre-1963 rating records, calculations deduced from capital values and the experience of solicitors and valuers in practice at the relevant time. In many cases, in particular for very old leases, the rent will often be so low as to create no doubt that it is a low rent as defined.

Olympic Games

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the latest efforts to attract the 2000 Olympic Games to Manchester.

Sir George Young: The Government are doing all they can to back Manchester's bid to stage the Millennium Games in Britain. In particular:—

We have made available up to £75 million to support the bid and the immediate construction of key facilities. Excellent progress is being made on the Olympic arena, the national cycling centre and the acquisition and clearance of the site for the Olympic stadium in East Manchester.

There has been a large number of visits by International Olympic Committee members to Manchester in recent months and over 70 members will have seen what Manchester offers by the time the IOC decide the nomination on 23 September. Minsiters are playing a full part in these discussions.

We have given full backing to Manchester's recent initiative for a $25 million Millennium Foundation to help with the training and travel cost of teams competing in the Manchester Olympic Games. This far-sighted proposal will promote equality of opportunity and provide assistance for teams who need it.

The Prime Minister welcomed members of the IOC to Downing street on 28 June; he is meeting IOC President Samaranch again this week; and he has announced that he will be going to Monte Carlo to help promote Manchester's bid at the time of the IOC vote in September.

Water Contamination

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to publish the full reports prepared by the drinking water inspectorate on all water contamination incidents.

Mr. Yeo: Reports by the drinking water inspectorate will continue to be made public where its investigations of the particular incident show that there are lessons to be learnt or reveal issues of general interest.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, following his recent announcement on a further consultation period for THORP, he will set out the terms of reference for the consultation.

Mr. Yeo: The consultation will provide an opportunity for public comment on the additional material mentioned in the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 28 June to the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), *Official Report*, col. 392.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to comply with the Paris Commission resolution regarding radioactive discharges from nuclear reprocessing plants; by what dates he will supply the information detailed in the resolution; by what means he intends to consult the Paris Commission; and how this relates to the further consultation period recently announced for THORP.

Mr. Yeo: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to Paris Commission recommendations 93/5. The United Kingdom did not accept this recommendation. We shall therefore be taking no specific action as a result of it.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the HMIP report on draft authorisations for the discharge of radioactive wastes from Sellafield will be published.

Mr. Yeo: The inspectors' report will be made available when the further round of public consultation which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 28 June is initiated.

Housing Associations

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy as to the proportion of seats which should be reserved for tenant representatives on the management committees of housing associations formed to take over local authority housing stock; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: This is a matter for the Housing Corporation as the body responsible for regulating housing associations. The corporation encourages the involvement of tenants on the committees of LSVT associations but does not specify any particular proportion of seats for them.

The corporation also expects committee members to have an appropriate range of financial, legal and management skills relevant to the running of a housing association.

Shelter

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much grant has been paid by his Department to Shelter for each of the last three years; and what proportion of the total grants budget this represents.

Mr. Baldry: Shelter has received grants under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985 of £422,000 in 1990-91; £916,500 in 1991-92, and £995,500 in 1992-93, to provide specialist homelessness advice to citizens advice bureaux outside London and an emergency homelessness telephone advice service in London. These payments represented 21 per cent., 20 per cent., and 17 per cent. of the funds allocated for section 73 schemes around the country in each of those years.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to abolish local authorities' power to introduce registration schemes for houses in multiple occupation under section 346 of the Housing Act 1985.

Sir George Young: The Department has reviewed local authorities' power to set up HMO registration schemes. We have no plans to remove this power.

Local Authority Management

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the report of the joint working party on the internal management of local authorities in England will be published.

Mr. Curry: The working party's report will be published tomorrow and copies will be available in the Libraries of both Houses by 11 am.

Homelessness

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects his survey of local authorities to evaluate the impact of the code of guidance on homelessness legislation on their homelessness policies to be completed; and when he expects to publish it.

Sir George Young *[holding answer Friday 9 July]:* Research on the evaluation of the code of guidance is currently being commissioned. The study is due to start in August 1993 and is expected to be completed by the end of 1994. The Department expects to publish the results in due course.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the Audit Commission's review of the Local Government Commission costings.

Mr. Gummer: It is for the Local Government Commission to decide whether to publish any opinions provided to it by the Audit Commission. I have therefore written to the chairman of the Commission, Sir John Banham, to ask if he would write to the hon. Member with his comments.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

China

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he discussed the matter of nuclear testing with his Chinese counterpart during his recent visit to China.

Mr. Goodlad: No. My right hon. Friend did, however, raise proliferation issues—both in relation to North Korea and the sales of Chinese M-11 missiles to Pakistan.

Maastricht Treaty

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the German constitutional court to rule on the constitutional validity in Germany of the Maastricht treaty; and what is his estimate of the effect on the ratification process.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The German Constitutional Court held an oral hearing on the constitutional validity of the Maastricht treaty on 1-2 July. A ruling is not expected before the end of September. The Maastricht treaty will enter into force on the first day of the month following ratification by the last signatory state to do so.

Macedonia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to enable citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to obtain in that country visas to visit the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no plans to issue visas in Skopje at present. The office of the British Government representative in Skopje has just been set up, and is operating as a one-person post. Even when it reaches planned full strength, with two United Kingdom diplomats, it will have neither the capacity nor resources to offer such a service. Whether the post might offer a service at some time in the future would depend on both demand and the availability of resources, in the light of competing priorities.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs where is the nearest United Kingdom diplomatic point to Macedonia at which citizens of that country can obtain a visa to visit the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The British embassy in Sofia is able to issue visas to Macedonians wishing to visit the United Kingdom. Macedonians may also apply for visit visas at any other British mission offering a full visa service.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the effect of the multi-fibre arrangement on developing countries' economies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A number of hon. Members have written to me and to ministerial colleagues on this subject. The Government support a progressive and orderly phasing out of the multi-fibre arrangement. We recognise the positive impact that the removal of trade barriers can have on economic development and the eradication of poverty in the third world. Free and fair trade in textiles and clothing is a goal to which we are committed. However, the ending of the MFA must be conditional upon our trading partners elsewhere giving a commitment to open their markets to our exports and to abide more closely by GATT rules and disciplines.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the destination, dates and purpose of each official overseas visit he has undertaken since April 1992.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Secretary of State's visits are as follows:

Destination	*Purpose of visit*	*Dates*
Turkey	Bilateral	21-23 April 1992
Greece	Bilateral	23 April 1992
Portugal	Informal EC Foreign Ministers Meeting	1-2 May 1992
Spain	Bilateral	2-4 May 1992
Czechoslovakia	Bilateral	4-5 May 1992
Belgium	Foreign Affairs Council	10-11 May 1992
France	In attendance upon Her Majesty The Queen	12 May 1992
Italy	Bilateral	15 May 1992
Kuwait	Gulf Cooperation Council	15-16 May 1992
Egypt	Bilateral	16-17 May 1992
Mexico	Bilateral	26-30 May 1992
France	In attendance upon Her Majesty The Queen	9-12 June 1992
Luxembourg	Foreign Affairs Council	14-15 June 1992
Germany	Western European Union Ministerial Meeting	18-19 June 1992
Luxembourg	EC Foreign Ministers Conclave	20 June 1992
Portugal	European Council	25-27 June 1992
Germany	G7 Economic Summit	5-8 July 1992
France	European Parliament Plenary	8 July 1992
Finland	CSCE Summit	9-10 July 1992
Yugoslavia	Official Talks	15-18 July 1992
Macedonia	Official Talks	18 July 1992
Albania	Official Talks	18-19 July 1992
Belgium	Foreign Affairs Council	19-20 July 1992
Philippines	ASEAN Conference	23-26 July 1992
Hong Kong	Official Talks	26-28 July 1992

Destination	Purpose of visit	Dates
Malaysia	Bilateral	28-29 July 1992
South Africa	Bilateral	1-4 September 1992
USA	47th Session of the United Nations General Assembly	21-30 September 1992
Luxembourg	Foreign Affairs Council	4-5 October 1992
Portugal	Bilateral	7 October 1992
Spain	Bilateral	7-8 October 1992
Netherlands	Bilateral	9 October 1992
Belgium	Bilateral	9-10 October 1992
Germany	In attendance upon Her Majesty The Queen	19-23 October 1992
France	Council of Europe	27 October 1992
Philippines	EC/ASEAN Ministerial	29-30 October 1992
Pakistan	Bilateral	31 October to 1 November 1992
Belgium	Foreign Affairs Council	8-9 November 1992
Italy	Western European Union Ministerial Meeting	19-20 November 1992
Belgium	EC Foreign Ministers Conclave	26-27 November 1992
Belgium	Foreign Affairs Council and EC Foreign Ministers Conclave	6-8 December 1992
Sweden	CSCE Ministerial Meeting	14-15 December 1992
Switzerland	International Conference on the former Yugoslavia	15-16 December 1992
Belgium	North Atlantic Council Ministerial Meeting	16-17 December 1992
Belgium	Foreign Affairs Council	20-21 December 1992
Ghana	Bilateral	3-4 January 1993
Nigeria	Bilateral	4-5 January 1993
Argentina	Bilateral	6-10 January 1993
Chile	Bilateral	10-11 January 1993
France	Bilateral	13-14 January 1993
Netherlands	Bilateral	20 January 1993
Belgium	Bilateral	25 January 1993
Switzerland	World Economic Forum	29-31 January 1993
Belgium	Foreign Affairs Council	31 January to 2 February 1993
France	Council of Europe	2 February 1993
Germany	30th Munich (Wehrkunde) Conference on Security Policy	5-6 February 1993
Germany	Bilateral	17 February 1993
France	Bilateral	24 February 1993
Belgium	North Atlantic Council Ministerial Meeting	25-26 February 1993
Spain	Anglo/Spanish Talks on Gibraltar	28 February to 1 March 1993
USA	United Nations	3 March 1993
Belgium	Foreign Affairs Council	7-8 March 1993
USA	Bilateral	24-25 March 1993
Germany	Address the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung	29 March 1993
France	Bilateral	1 April 1993
Russia	Bilateral	2 April 1993
Indonesia	Bilateral	3-5 April 1993
Japan	Bilateral	6-7 April 1993
Korea	Bilateral	7-9 April 1993
Japan	Joint Ministerial G7 Meeting	12-15 April 1993
Denmark	EC Foreign Ministers Informal Weekend	24-25 April 1993
Finland	Bilateral	25-26 April 1993
Sweden	Bilateral	26-27 April 1993
Ireland	Bilateral	30 April 1993
Hungary	In attendance upon Her Majesty The Queen	6-7 May 1993
Belgium	Foreign Affairs Council	9-10 May 1993
France	Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly	13-14 May 1993
Italy	Western European Union	19 May 1993
USA	Bilateral	21 May 1993
Denmark	EC Foreign Ministers Troika with Turkey	24 May 1993
Belgium	Bilateral	24 May 1993
France	Bilateral	1 June 1993
Romania	Bilateral	1-3 June 1993
Bulgaria	Bilateral	3-4 June 1993
Macedonia	Bilateral	4 June 1993
Luxembourg	Foreign Affairs Council	7-9 June 1993
Greece	Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council	9-11 June 1993
Denmark	European Council	21-22 June 1993
Singapore	Bilateral	5-6 July 1993
Japan	G7 Economic Summit	7-8 July 1993
China	Bilateral	8-9 July 1993
Hong Kong	Official Talks	9 July 1993

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the peace negotiations in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We fully support the continuing efforts of Lord Owen and Mr. Stoltenberg to secure a peace settlement, acceptable to all parties and based on the principles of the London conference. The latest peace proposal for Bosnia-Herzegovina is a Serb and Croat initiative which has not been endorsed by the international community. We are actively supporting the co-chairmen's efforts to encourage all three sides to engage in serious negotiations.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to raise at the next meeting of EC Ministers Croatia's response to the warning of the EC Foreign Ministers on 8 June of their obligations to co-operate with the international community in ensuring a peaceful resolution of the problems in the Krajinas and in Bosnia-Herzegovina; what is his policy towards the introduction of sanctions against Croatia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The meeting of EC Foreign Ministers on 19 July is likely to address how the European Community can contribute further in support of the co-chairman's efforts to achieve a peace settlement in Bosnia, including the question of further pressure on Croatia.

Mrs. Naseem Akhtar

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision is to be taken by the United Kingdom post in Islamabad on the application by Mrs. Naseem Akhtar and her children (REF: IMM/B7202) to join her husband in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In the absence of any information about this case, I have asked the High Commission in Islamabad for a full report. I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as soon as possible.

Sudan

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations the Government have made to the Khartoum Government over their human rights record.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Such representations have been made on many occasions, most recently by the EC troika ministerial mission which visited Khartoum on 22 June, and in which the United Kingdom was represented.

TRANSPORT

Teesside Park

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will provide signs to Teesside park on the A19 northbound and southbound in the vicinity of its junction with the A66;

(2) if he will provide signs to Teesside park on the A66.

Mr. Key: It is not my policy to install such signs at the intersection of two primary routes. However, I am reviewing the particular circumstances of this case.

Superintendent Earnshaw

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department intends to reply to a letter from Superintendent Earnshaw of Stockton police dated 21 April, Ref. DN 504726/1/01.

Mr. Key: A reply was sent to Superintendent Earnshaw on 1 July 1993.

M66, Manchester

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will now take steps to arrange the meeting recommended in paragraph 16.33.1, on access to Nut Bank house, in the inspector's report on the public inquiry into the M66-Manchester outer ring road (Denton to Middleton section) proposals, published on 19 February.

Mr. Key: We are in contact with solicitors acting for the owner of Nut Bank house. A meeting will be arranged as soon as possible.

A1, Lancashire

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are his Department's current plans for a major road development linking the Lancashire border to the A1; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: I have no current plans for a new major road development linking the Lancashire border to the A1. The trans-pennine study considered options for roads in the area. The consultation period on the study has only recently finished and I shall make a statement in due course.

A13, Newham

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the cost of installing a footbridge, together with approach ramps suitable for prams and push chairs, across the A13 Newham way near to its junction with Beckton road or Forty Acre lane.

Mr. Norris: At present, there are no plans for a footbridge at this location. However, if a bridge was to be provided typical construction costs would be of the order of £300,000 depending on circumstances at the site.

Roads

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next intends to publish a White Paper on roads.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to publish a White Paper on roads. He is at present consulting on his Green Paper "Paying for Better Motorways".

Ferries

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which roll-on roll-off ferries operating from United Kingdom ports do not yet full conform with safety

regulations arising from the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster; by what date the vessels are expected to conform; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: All roll-on roll-off passenger ferries operating from United Kingdom ports must comply with national and international safety regulations including those arising from the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster.

M25

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the various studies he has commissioned or put out to tender to consider the need for widening the M25 beyond eight lanes and the sections of the M25 to which they apply.

Mr. Key: Three commissions have already been let to study the need for the feasibility of providing more than four lanes on the M25. They relate to the following sections:

Junctions 10-12 (A3 to M3)
Junctions 12-15 (M3 to M4)
Junctions 15-16 (M4 to M40)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to announce a preferred route for the link roads proposed alongside the M25 from junctions 12 to 15.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend hopes to have completed his consideration of the issues to enable a decision to be issued soon.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies he has carried out to date into the effects of building link roads alongside the M25 between junctions 5 and 28 on *(a)* pollution including carbon dioxide emissions, *(b)* development pressures and *(c)* sites of nature conservation and landscape importance.

Mr. Key: Each individual scheme's environmental statement includes an assessment of the impact of the proposals on both atmospheric pollution and any land to be affected. No studies have yet been carried out into development pressures resulting from M25 widening proposals.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his powers to control the levels of tolls on the proposed Birmingham northern relief road, and on his reserve powers to take over the operation of the proposed road.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend has no powers to control the level of tolls on the Birmingham northern relief road. The New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 provides for a toll order to specify the maximum tolls which a concessionaire may charge only in the case of major crossings to which there is no reasonably convenient alternative.

The 1991 Act provides that where a concession agreement terminates for any reason before the end of a toll period the Secretary of State shall take reasonable steps to secure the appointment of a new concessionaire; and that he may himself collect tolls pending such appointments or in accordance with an extension toll order.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide an estimate of the proportion of his Department's total expenditure, including an appropriate allocation of running costs, which is spent on *(a)* road transport, *(b)* railways, *(c)* aviation and *(d)* shipping.

Mr. Norris: Full details of the Government's expenditure plans for transport are published in the Department of Transport report 1993, Cm 2206. Over the three-year period 1993-94 to 1995-96 total planned expenditure is £18,351 million of which 53 per cent. is for national and local roads, 38 per cent. for public transport, including rail, and just over 2 per cent. for air and sea transport; the remainder is accounted for by central administration, the Department's executive agencies, and miscellaneous services.

British Rail

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has had from the North West Regional Association about British Rail privatisation; what reply he is sending; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: An official reply was sent to the secretary of the North West Regional Association on 1 July in response to its letter of 23 June. I am sending a copy of the correspondence to the hon. Member.

Railways (Vandalism)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 14 May, *Official Report*, columns *613-4*, if he will provide a regional breakdown of prosecutions for acts of vandalism on rail lines.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not readily available in the form requested.

A6(M)

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions he has made to ensure there is no conflict of interest between the advice given by L. G. Mouchel and Partners as consultants to his Department in respect of traffic modelling and design for the A6(M) and their acting as consultants to the applicants in respect of planning applications for a superstore on Melford road, Stockport, and a superstore on Stockport road west, where his Department is a statutory consultee.

Mr. Key: I am aware of the consultants' involvement and believe that they are acting in a proper and professional manner.

The application for Melford road has been considered largely in relation to its impact on the existing road network, given its distance from the proposed bypass.

My Department has formed its own view on all the evidence available in connection with the Stockport road west development and has responded accordingly.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the percentage of motor vehicles on the road that are *(a)* unlicensed, *(b)* do

not have a valid MOT certificate or *(c)* whose regular driver is uninsured; what these figures approximate to in terms of numbers of vehicles and drivers and how many prosecutions were undertaken in respect of each category in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Key: In Great Britain there are 35 million drivers holding full or provisional driving licences and 24·8 million licensed vehicles.

It is estimated that there were 1·3 million unlicensed vehicles in use on the public road at the end of September 1992. In 1992-93 over 435,000 vehicle licence evaders were penalised either by prosecution—193,000—or through out-of-court settlement—242,000—recovering £37·5 million in revenue. In addition it is estimated that 180,000 evaders relicensed their vehicles as a direct result of enforcement action recovering a further £14 million.

There is no reliable estimate of the percentage of motor vehicles on the road which do not have an MOT test certificate or whose regular driver is uninsured. In 1991, 253,813 persons were found guilty in England and Wales of vehicle insurance offences and in Scotland 15,816 drivers were found guilty of driving while uninsured. In the same period in Great Britain 141,450 persons were found guilty of vehicle test offences.

Speed Limits

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the trials of the variable speed limits outside schools are to begin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The first experimental site at Howick on the A5092 trunk road in Cumbria has come into operation today. This is the first of the 14 school sites on trunk roads and 100 sites on local authority roads where variable limits are being introduced on an experimental basis. The results will be monitored and, if the signs are effective in reducing drivers speeds, provision will be made to permit variable speed limits to be more widely applied.

M27 Aircraft Crash

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 5 July at column *8*, whether the aircraft which crashed on the M27 on 26 May carried a co-pilot licensed to act as pilot in command.

Mr. Norris: I understand that the co-pilot holds a licence which entitled him to act in the capacity of a co-pilot on that particular aircraft, but not as a pilot in command.

Night Flights

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, (1) using the new system for restricting night flights announced on 6 July, how many noise quota points would have been used up by the aircraft that operated into and out of Heathrow airport during *(a)* the night quota hours of the 1992-93 winter period and *(b)* the night quota hours of the 1992 summer period;

(2) using the new system for restricting night flights announced on 6 July and the aircraft that have operated or are scheduled to operate into or out of Heathrow airport during the night quota hours of the 1993 summer period, how many noise quota points will be used up during this period.

Mr. Norris: More data on aircraft type, engine fit and maximum certificated landing and taking off weights are required to classify aircraft under the new night restrictions system than under the present regime. Not all this data is available for past movements, so only estimates can be given. These are *(a)* about 6,000 in winter 1992-93 *(b)* about 6,225 in summer 1992 and *(c)* about 6,400 in summer 1993.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many air traffic movements took place at Heathrow airport during *(a)* the night quota hours of the 1992-93 winter period and *(b)* the night quota hours of the 1992 summer period.

Mr. Norris: The total number of runway movements—that is, air transport movements and all other movements such as empty positioning flights—during the night quota periods was

(a) 3,413:1992-93 winter
(b) 3,409:1992 summer

Of these movements at *(a)* 3,078 counted against the main quota, 21 counted against the delayed quota, 225 were by aircraft exempt from the restrictions, and 89 movements were granted dispensations and exemptions according to current arrangements.

Of the movements at *(b)* 2,649 counted against the quota, 60 counted against the delayed quota, 678 were by aircraft exempt from the restrictions and 22 were granted dispensations and exemptions according to current arrangements.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many air traffic movements he estimates will occur at Heathrow airport during the night quota hours of the 1993 summer period on the basis of the number of aircraft that have or are scheduled to operate into and out of the airport.

Mr. Norris: In total, about the same as in summer 1992.

Bus Companies

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to bring in legislation to require municipal authorities to sell off their bus companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Our manifesto contained a pledge to privatise the remaining local authority bus companies. I am pleased that many authorities are selling their companies voluntarily. It is our intention to introduce legislation at an early opportunity to require the rest to do so.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much the Government have spent on the proposed east London river crossing up to 7 July.

Mr. Norris: Approximately £31 million. The bulk of the expenditure has been on scheme preparation but the figure also includes some £3 million on advance works and £9 million on land and property purchase.

Civil Aircraft

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what consideration his Department has given to the mandatory fitment of high-intensity strobe lights to civil aircraft regularly involved in low-level flying activities such as power line and pipeline surveying and crop spraying;

(2) what consideration his Department has given to the provision of air-to-air transponder equipment for civil aircraft regularly engaged in activities at low altitude;

(3) what capability the civil aircraft notification procedure has for the notification of linear activities such as power line and pipeline surveying;

(4) what measures have been introduced by his Department since 1988 to encourage civilian pilots and aircraft operators to make use of the civil aircraft notification procedures; and if he will make a statement as to what further measures are under consideration.

Mr. Norris: Aviation safety matters such as these are for the Civil Aviation Authority, in the first instance. I have therefore passed the hon. Member's questions to the chairman of the authority, asking him to write to the hon. Member.

I am always ready to consider any proposals for changes in primary or secondary legislation which the authority may put to me.

German Merchant Fleet

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he is making to the European Commission about German plans to increase tax concessions to the German merchant fleet.

Mr. Norris: It is our policy to urge the Commission to look into all cases of state aids in the transport sector, including aids to shipowners, in order to secure the removal of those that distort competition. I understand that what is proposed by Germany in this particular case would renew fiscal arrangements that have been in place for some time.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Stefan Kiszko

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to provide the families involved with the results of the investigation on the completion of any criminal proceedings arising from the Lancashire police force's investigation into the Stefan Kiszko case.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is for the chief constable of West Yorkshire police and the Director of Public Prosecutions to decide what information may be disclosed to the Kiszko and Molseed families. As the Prime Minister has already informed the hon. Member, West Yorkshire police have assured both families that they will brief them fully about what happened as soon as they are free to do so.

Firearms

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many thefts of shotguns there were in 1991 in each police force area *(a)* from domestic premises and *(b)* from all premises.

Mr. Maclean: The following table shows, for each police force in England and Wales in 1991, the number of notifiable offences of burglary and theft in which shotguns were reported to have been stolen from domestic and all premises:

Notifiable offences of burglary and theft in which shot guns were stolen

Police force area	*Domestic premises*	*All premises*
Avon and Somerset	15	20
Bedfordshire	4	8
Cambridgeshire	9	10
Cheshire	7	13
Cleveland	3	4
Cumbria	7	8
Derbyshire	5	6
Devon and Cornwall	27	35
Dorset	2	2
Durham	21	24
Essex	14	17
Gloucestershire	4	6
Greater Manchester	4	5
Hampshire	16	20
Hertfordshire	2	2
Humberside	7	7
Kent	30	46
Lancashire	18	27
Leicestershire	7	13
Lincolnshire	6	9
London, City of	—	—
Merseyside	6	7
Metropolitan Police District	22	28
Norfolk	17	25
Northamptonshire	10	11
Northumbria	15	21
North Yorkshire	12	18
Nottinghamshire	1	4
South Yorkshire	20	26
Staffordshire	—	—
Suffolk	11	11
Surrey	17	20
Sussex	13	16
Thames Valley	21	35
Warwickshire	6	10
West Mercia	8	11
West Midlands	8	11
West Yorkshire	7	11
Wiltshire	3	5
Dyfed-Powys	3	6
Gwent	—	—
North Wales	6	10
South Wales	2	6
England and Wales	416	574

False Imprisonment

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce measures to ensure that compensation awards to persons having been falsely imprisoned are harmonised; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: It has been the long-standing practice for the amount to be paid in an award of compensation under section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, or under the related ex-gratia scheme, to be settled according to the assessment or advice of an independent assessor, currently Sir David Calcutt QC. The assessor applies principles analogous to those governing the assessment of damages for civil wrongs. I am satisfied that these arrangements result in fairness and consistency in the determination of amounts to be paid.

Mr. John Matthews

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on his decision to place an exclusion order on Mr. John Matthews;

(2) what consideration he gives to *(a)* acquittal decisions by the courts in respect of terrorist-related offences with which a person has been charged and *(b)* decisions by the Crown Prosecution Service to withdraw charges against such a person, in deciding whether to place an exclusion order on such a person.

Mr. Howard: On Tuesday 6 July I exercised the powers conferred upon me by part II of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 to exclude John Gerard Matthews from Great Britain. Before reaching a decision I carefully reviewed all the information which had been placed before me. On the basis of that information I was satisfied that the criteria set out at section 5 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act were met in this case.

The decision which I am required to take in relation to exclusion orders is different in kind from that which the prosecuting authorities apply in deciding whether to continue criminal proceedings. They consider whether, on the basis of evidence which will be admissible in court, there is a realistic prospect of persuading a jury beyond reasonable doubt that a person is guilty of a specific offence. I have to be satisfied that a person is or has been concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland. In making that assessment it is open to me to consider information which would not be admissible in court. Whilst I would have regard to the fact that a person had been acquitted, or criminal proceedings discontinued, that fact would not preclude the making of an exclusion order.

Notifiable Offences, London

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many notifiable offences were reported in the Metropolitan police area in the first three months of 1993; and if he will give a breakdown of the figures by category of offence.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not yet available.

Parliamentary Boundaries

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current timetable for the work of the Boundary Commission for England in reviewing the current parliamentary boundaries; and what will be the effect on this timetable of re-examination by the commission of the population figures on which its work has so far been based.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Boundary Commission for England is required, by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, to make its final report by 31 December 1994. I understand that it is confident that it will be in time. The enumeration date for its review is February 1991, and the release of subsequent electoral statistics, or indeed a more recent evaluation of the accuracy of the electoral register, will not affect its timetable.

Fire Services, Merseyside

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority following its consideration of the report of Her Majesty's inspector of fire services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend has received from the clerk to the Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority a copy of a resolution made at the authority's annual general meeting on 28 June. The resolution relates to the report of an inspection of the Merseyside Fire Brigade conducted by Her Majesty's inspector of fire services during the week beginning 25 January 1993. We shall consider the resolution carefully alongside the report of the special inspection of the Merseyside brigade which was conducted during the week beginning 5 July, once that report is available.

Ex-offenders

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions the Prison Department has had with each training and enterprise council regarding schemes to provide employment for ex-offenders;

(2) how much the Prison Department spent in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 on funding schemes which provide employment for ex-offenders; and what proportion this was of the Prison Department's budget.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated July 1993:

TRAINING AND ENTERPRISE COUNCILS EMPLOYMENT SCHEMES FOR EX-OFFENDERS

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question seeking information about what discussions the Prison Service has had with each Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) regarding schemes to provide employment for ex-offenders.

TECs are responsible for adult and youth training schemes. Prison Service establishments are encouraged to work with their local TEC in helping to meet offenders' training needs. Discussions between the Prison Service and individual TECs normally take place at a local level; the details are not recorded centrally.

As a result of these local contacts, a number of important joint ventures between prisons and TECs have been developed. To build on these, the Prison Service is working with the Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate and the Probation Service to produce a good practice guide for TECs on meeting the training needs of offenders and ex-offenders. The guide will be issued later this year.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated July 1993:

Expenditure on Employment schemes for ex-offenders

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how much the Prison Department spent in 1991 and 1992 on funding schemes which provide employment for ex-offenders.

The Prison Service undertakes a wide range of work aimed at preparing, training and assisting prisoners to find jobs on release. The cost of this is not separately distinguished. The work is described in "Employment in Prisons and for Ex-Offenders. The Government Reply to the First Report from the Employment Committee Session 1991-92 HC30". I

enclose a copy of the Report, which I hope will help to fill out the picture for you. Since the Government's Reply was published, the Employment Service has agreed to provide additional funding to enable the number of prison job clubs and prisons running job search preparation courses to be increased. In consequence, as part of its business plan for 1993-94, the Prison Service aims to increase the number of prisons running job search preparation courses from 24 to 48 and the number of prison job clubs from 5 to 10.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of the working group examining the future of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board have *(a)* English legal qualifications and *(b)* Scottish legal qualifications.

Mr. Maclean: There is no working group examining the future of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. As my right hon. and learned Friend the member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) announced on 23 November 1992, col *457*, the Government have decided that the present criminal injuries compensation scheme should be replaced in 1994 by one based on a tariff of awards. The intention is to offer a better, more straightforward service to claimants.

Officials are working up the more detailed proposals in the normal course of their duties under the direction of Ministers. The officials take legal advice as and when appropriate. Details of the new scheme will be set out in the White Paper within the next two or three months.

Bosnian Refugees

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to accelerate the programme for the reception of Bosnian refugees and their dependants announced on 30 November.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In response to the humanitarian organisations' priorities the programme has initially concentrated on former detention camp inmates and their dependants. We have already received a total of 250 ex-detainees and 421 dependants, but there have been difficulties, particularly in securing further releases from the detention camps. In discussion with UNHCR we have made clear our readiness to consider other vulnerable individuals for inclusion in the 1,000.

Anti-Abortion Protesters

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to prevent the entry into the United Kingdom of anti-abortion protesters from the United States.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to prevent the entry to the United Kingdom of activitists from *(a)* Operation Rescue and *(b)* Rescue America.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Citizens of the United States of America are subject to immigration control and must qualify to enter under the terms of the immigration rules. My right hon. and learned Friend may direct exclusion if a person's presence would not be conducive to the public good. Consideration will be given to any evidence which would justify exclusion on this ground.

City of London (Road Closures)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has held with the City of London Corporation on the closure of roads on security grounds; and what is the maximum time that such road closures can be maintained.

Mr. Howard: The experimental traffic scheme now in operation was introduced by the Commissioner of Police for the City of London with the agreement of the Corporation of London, under section 12 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. A scheme introduced under this section may remain in force for up to six months and may thereafter be continued for a maximum of 12 months in all. The City's proposals did not require my approval, although the City corporation and police discussed them with members of my Department before implementation.

Immigration Rules

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the progress of discussions on proposals to remove sex discrimination from the immigration rules; when he expects the conclusions to be implemented; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We are currently considering these and other aspects of the immigration rules and hope to publish proposals shortly.

Macedonia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to abolish the visa requirement for citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None.

Car Park Attacks

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis concerning *(a)* the attacks on women that have taken place recently in supermarket car parks in south London and *(b)* the consideration he is giving to crime prevention advice to shoppers and to the proprietors of supermarkets about improved security; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: All such attacks are investigated and an arrest has been made in the recent case of an attack on a women shopper returning to her car parked in a supermarket car park. There is no indication that this type of crime is increasing. Sensible precautions are promoted by the Metropolitan police and the national "Secured Car Parks" scheme operates in London. This scheme extends throughout the Metropolitan police district and is open to all car park owners and operators, including supermarket proprietors.

Sheehy Inquiry

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the experience or qualifications possessed by each member of the inquiry into police responsibilities and rewards prior to their appointment which were considered to be of particular relevance to that appointment.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The chairman and each member of the inquiry between them possessed an impressive range of skills and experience drawn from the management of large private and public sector organisations, a practical understanding of business, and in particular effective service delivery.

Electoral Register

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to bringing forward proposals for a rolling register whereby names can be added to the list of voters throughout the year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The introduction of a "rolling" electoral register is one of the matters being discussed in the post-election review. The five working groups set up as part of the review are expected to report their findings in the late summer. Representatives of the political parties and the local authority associations will then be invited to discuss the reports at a meeting in the autumn.

Racial Incidents

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) of 17 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *443*, if he will provide a breakdown of the figures given by ethnic group of victim, for the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Maclean: The information given to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey can only be further broken down by ethnic group for the Metropolitan police district, and is given in the table.

Recorded racial incidents in the Metropolitan police area

Year	*White European*	*Dark-skinned European*	*Black/ Afro-Caribbean*	*Ethnic grouping Asian*	*Oriental*	*Arabic/ Egyptian*	*Origin unknown/ Other*	*Total*
1988	270	54	532	1,348	32	15	25	2,276
1989	384	86	558	1,616	35	25	43	2,747
1990	439	104	649	1,661	46	36	27	2,962
1991	610	114	686	1,893	36	47	2	3,388
1992	654	130	796	1,860	58	42	134	3,674

Note.—These figures do not agree with the table for classified racial incidents as in certain cases there is more than one victim per incident.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department since 1988 to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, any salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Howard: The information requested is not available, apart from the following information in respect of part *(b)* of the question:

Lord Belstead
Chairman of the Parole Board
Salary £45,060
Appointed 3 October 1992 until 2 October 1997

Lord Brassey of Apethorpe
Member of the Board of Visitors, HM Prison, Gartree
Expenses only
Appointed 1981 for 3 years; reappointed on a 3-yearly basis

Rt. hon. Lord Carlisle of Bucklow, QC
Chairman of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
Salary £31,350
Appointed 1 March 1989 until 31 March 1995

Lord Kimball
Chairman of the Firearms Consultative Committee
Expenses only
Appointed for 5 years from 1989

Lord Macaulay of Bragar, QC
Member of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
Fee £246 per day
Appointed 12 January 1989 until 31 March 1995

Baroness Masham of Ilton
Member of Board of Visitors, HM Young Offender Institution, Wetherby
Expenses only
Appointed 1963; reappointed on a 3-yearly basis

Lord Nathan
Chairman of the Animal Procedures Committee
Expenses only
Appointed January 1990 until February 1993

Professor Lord Soulsby of Swaffham Prior
Member of the Animal Procedures Committee
Expenses only
Appointed 1985; renewed 1987 for 4 years

Lord Swaythling
Member of the Horserace Totalisator Board
Salary £7,772
Appointed 1981; reappointed for 5 terms until 1993

Lord Wyatt of Weeford
Chairman of the Horserace Totalisator Board
Salary £92,000
Appointed 1976; reappointed 1993 for 2 years.

Information in respect of the Parole Local Review Committees is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Oxfam

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to consult Oxfam before the G7 conference about the issues to be raised there.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The conclusions in Oxfam's recent report "Africa, Make or Break" were widely considered in the run-up to the summit, and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development met representatives of Oxfam on 8 July. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also met members of the all-party group, the "Africa Caucus", on 29 June, and discussed issues raised by the report.

Kashmir

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to withhold aid programmes to India until the Indian Government allow independent observer groups from the British Parliament to visit the Indian-occupied area of Kashmir; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no plans to withhold aid programmes to India.

Vegetable Waste (Exports)

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he will take in the light of the representations made to him concerning the production of compost/soil enricher from vegetable waste for export to the third world; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We do not believe exporting compost from the United Kingdom is an appropriate or cost-effective way to improve soil fertility in the developing world.

We aim to address developing country problems through promoting economic growth and self-reliance, and are assisting smallholder farms in Africa and Asia to produce compost from their own organic wastes.

Indonesia

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 April to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), *Official Report*, column *172*, when it became the policy of Her Majesty's Government to seek to influence Indonesia by dialogue rather than by attaching conditions to aid.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government explained their policy on good government in speeches by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 6 June 1990 and by my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development on 25 June 1991. When determining the flows of development aid, Her Majesty's Government studies each individual case carefully. Respect for human rights, among other factors, is taken into account.

Irrigation Projects

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level of United Kingdom aid for irrigation projects; which are the main countries involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In financial year 1992-93, we spent £6·54 million on irrigation and associated drainage projects. The main beneficiaries were Pakistan, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe. We also spend about £750,000 per annum on research into irrigation and drainage and fund scholarships in the United Kingdom for irrigation specialists from overseas.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Hotel and Restaurant Industry

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had from the hotel and restaurant industry regarding deregulation.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The hotel and restaurant industry is represented on the sectoral task forces and many individual operators and trade organisations have provided evidence of over regulation. The issues identified are being pursued vigorously with the Government Departments concerned.

THORP

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what approaches he has received from foreign customers for BNFL's THORP regarding the cancellation or amendment of contracts, the return of fuel or whether it will be reprocessed.

Mr. Eggar: None.

Music Industry

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total amount in exports earned by the British music industry in 1992.

Mr. Needham: Exports of records, cassettes and compact discs as reported by Customs and Excise and shortly to be published by the British Phonographic Industry in its 1993 handbook were £211·9 million in 1992. BPI will also publish an estimate of invisible earnings in the form of royalties returning from overseas of £500 million in 1991.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what monitoring his Department undertakes of firms receiving regional financial selective assistance once their projects have been completed.

Mr. Sainsbury: Regional selective assistance offer letters require beneficiaries to confirm to the Department at intervals of 18 months and 36 months after the last payment of grant, that job totals and assets relating to the project remain in place or to explain any changes and the reasons for them.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 9 June, *Official Report*, column *254*, what information he has about any of the firms benefiting from regional financial selective assistance now having ceased trading.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Department may become aware that individual firms have ceased trading at any time during the normal monitoring of regional selective assistance and this information would be recorded on the case file. However, identifying all such cases would involve disproportionate costs. Firms that discontinue trading

after completion of the monitoring period are treated as all other firms and the Department keeps no specific record of them.

Post Office (Privatisation)

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those remaining Crown post offices which it is intended to convert to privatised status.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. Decisions on which individual Crown post offices should be proposed for conversion to agency status are an operational matter for the Post Office. The Post Office always consults publicly on individual proposals in accordance with a code of practice agreed with the Post Office Users National Council.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations he held with the Post Office on its decision to convert an additional 200 Crown post offices to privatised status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand that the Post Office has made no decision about the number of Crown offices to be converted to agency status. The Crown office conversion programme delivers costs savings which help to protect the rest of the post office network; it also ensures that the delivery of post office services is responsive to customer needs by, for example, increasing opening hours. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade does not have detailed discussions with the Post Office on implementation of this programme, which is a matter within their operational responsibility.

Public Houses

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 5 July, *Official Report*, column *35*, how many of the representations from Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd. lessees expressed concern over rent levels; how many referred to the effect of a beer tie on rent levels; and how many of the complainants have obtained redress of their grievances as a result of his intervention.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The majority of representations received recently by my Department from Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd. lessees expressed concern over rent levels. Levels of rent are essentially a commercial matter between company and lessee. We understand from the company that rent levels negotiated by the company take account of the individual circumstances of each public house, including whether or not it is tied. The Government asked all the major brewers in 1991 to introduce procedures associated with long-term leases to be determined by independent arbitration or through independent assessment by a professional expert where they could not be agreed with the tenants; these are available under the IEL lease. It would not be appropriate for the Government to intervene in individual cases.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 5 July, *Official Report*, column *35*, what were the specific issues raised with Mr. R. G. Williams, chairman and managing director of Grand Metropolitan Estates Ltd. in respect of Inntrepreneur leases; what was his response; what reduction in rents resulted from the removal of beer ties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The purpose of the discussion was to assist officials in advising me on how to respond to points made in representations to the Department. In particular the Department needed to be clear whether the representations made to us revealed any evidence that the company was not complying with the Beer Orders or undertakings given to the Director General of Fair Trading following the MMC report on the Elders IXL Ltd./Grand Metropolitan plc merger; and further, whether the company was abiding by assurances given to Ministers in 1991 about treatment of tenants. On the level of rents, the release of a pub from tie affects its market rent because it allows the tenant/lessee freedom of choice in sourcing his beer and in obtaining discounts.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 5 July, *Official Report*, column *36*, what assurances have been obtained from Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd. in respect of its treatment of their lessees since 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: In meetings with the company, my officials have been assured that the company continues to abide by the assurances given to Ministers in 1991 about the treatment of tenants. In addition, I understand that the company has recently introduced more flexibility into leasing arrangements; for example, the incorporation, where appropriate, of a three-year break clause, exercisable by the lessee only, into the standard Inntrepreneur lease.

Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986

Mr. Bell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the operation of the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 22 June 1993]:* There has been no formal assessment of the legislation by the Attorney-General. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has responsibility for the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986. The Department monitors the effectiveness of all legislation for which it is responsible.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what volume, in cubic metres, of intermediate level radioactive waste will remain in the United Kingdom under return of waste agreements between British Nuclear Fuels plc and overseas customers *(a)* in absolute terms and *(b)* as a proportion of the waste imported;

(2) what volume, in cubic metres, of low level radioactive wastes will remain in the United Kingdom under return of waste agreements between British Nuclear Fuels plc and overseas customers *(a)* in absolute terms and *(b)* as a proportion of the waste imported.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 23 June 1993]:* Since 1976, BNFL's contracts for the reprocessing of overseas spent fuel have contained options for the return of wastes. Under these agreements, the company has the right to return all three types of waste—high, intermediate and low-level—to the country of origin. The possible substitution for low and intermediate-level waste of a radiologically equivalent amount of high-level waste, in addition to the customer's normal HLW allocation, was referred to in my reply to the hon. Member of 7 June 1993, *Official Report*, column *161*.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Council of Ministers meeting on Friday, 2 July in relation to the European regional development fund.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 8 July 1993]:* I refer to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside on 6 July, *Official Report*, columns *105-06*.

Misleading Pricing

Mr. Moss: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what response he has made to the recommendations of the Monitoring Committee on Misleading Price Indications; and if he will publish their report.

Mr. McLoughlin *[pursuant to the answer given by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) on 7 May 1993, Official Report, columns 276-77]:* My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms has announced today that the Department is going out to consultation on proposed regulations under section 26 of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 which would require resellers of tickets for theatre performances and other such events to tell consumers the standard of the seat being offered including its face value.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ballygowan

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated population of Ballygowan; and what the population of Ballygowan was 10 years ago.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Prior to 1991, the official mid-year estimates of population were not produced to ward level. However, the 1991 census records the population of the ward of Ballygowan as 4,027. Allowing for boundary changes, the comparable 1981 census figure is estimated at 2,949.

Optical Appliances Vouchers

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the total number of optical appliances vouchers redeemed in Northern Ireland in each year since 1986; and what was the total cost of the optical appliances voucher scheme in Northern Ireland in each year since 1986.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The information is as follows:

Year	*Total number of vouchers redeemed*	*Total cost of vouchers scheme (£)*
1986[1]	67,519	972,808
1987	124,222	2,287,157
1988	122,080	2,485,425
1989	119,207	2,681,090
1990	118,152	2,889,159
1991	[2]141,687	3,573,688
1992	[2]162,365	4,381,207

[1] The 1986 figures represent only six months as the scheme was introduced on 1 July 1986.

[2] The figures for 1991 and 1992 are provisional.
Source: Northern Ireland Central Services Agency for Health and Personal Social Services.

Opera House, Belfast

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated cost of repairing the Opera house in Belfast after its recent bombing; if he expects this cost to be met from ordinary funding of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The estimated cost of repairing the Grand Opera is £1·75 million. The Compensation Agency has accepted liability for the necessary repairs.

Arts Council

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much funding is allocated to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for the current year; and what were the figures for the five preceding years.

Mr. Ancram: In the current financial year the Arts Council of Northern Ireland will receive funding amounting to £6·349 million. Allocations in the five preceding years were:

	£ million
1988-89	4·272
1989-90	4·797
1990-91	5·565
1991-92	6·461
1992-93	6·580

President, Irish Republic

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many representatives of Her Majesty's Government have been in attendance during engagements performed by the President of the Irish Republic during each of her private visits to Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: A representative of Her Majesty's Government was in attendance at one event attended by the President of the Irish Republic in February 1992 during one of her five private visits to Northern Ireland. On that occasion the then Secretary of State, Mr. Brooke, hosted a reception in Stormont castle.

Disallowed Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by month for the last 12 months and by employment region the number of people disallowed unemployment benefit.

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 8 July 1993:

As I am responsible for Social Security operational matters, your recent Parliamentary Question on the number of disallowances of Unemployment Benefit in the employment regions of Northern Ireland each month in the last 12 months has been passed to me for reply.

There are 11 Districts in Northern Ireland for social security purposes. The number of people disallowed Unemployment Benefit for each of the last twelve months in the Districts is set out in the table attached.

I hope you find this information helpful. A copy of this reply will appear in the *Official Report* and copies will be placed in the Library.

Unemployment benefit disallowances in Northern Ireland from July 1992 to June 1993

District	1992 July	August	September	October	November	December	1993 January	February	March	April	May	June
Belfast North	175	145	136	134	160	140	140	150	140	152	115	201
Belfast South and Down	174	150	161	182	197	161	139	178	193	137	111	168
North West	132	101	141	170	163	168	133	119	148	181	180	172
Laganbann	123	165	147	240	217	210	201	203	212	182	186	202
North East	150	104	122	186	203	189	174	176	210	211	184	176
Central	161	72	105	132	94	82	167	105	123	170	99	112
Mourne	121	113	107	164	149	151	131	165	174	131	153	151
East	184	205	266	715	545	349	317	435	364	369	404	542
Belfast West	62	92	67	59	69	33	89	61	101	49	114	86
South East Antrim	194	218	238	410	265	235	299	350	342	329	259	315
West	104	64	118	120	113	126	91	143	150	145	83	85
TOTAL	1,580	1,429	1,608	2,512	2,175	1,844	1,881	2,085	2,157	2,056	1,888	2,210

PRIME MINISTER

UK-Japan Nuclear Trade

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister whether he discussed the matter of United Kingdom-Japan nuclear trade during his visit to the G7 summit in Tokyo.

The Prime Minister: At our meeting, the Prime Minister of Japan and I discussed a wide range of bilateral and international issues.

Serbia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had during the past two weeks with Lord Owen on the issue of the selective lifting of sanctions against Serbia; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have had no such discussions with Lord Owen during the past two weeks. At the Group of Seven economic summit in Tokyo on 7-9 July, I and other Heads of Government reaffirmed that sanctions will be upheld against Serbia and Montenegro until the conditions in the relevant Security Council resolutions on the former Yugoslavia are met.

Public Bodies

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what is the Government's policy towards the appointment of known members of the Labour party to non-ministerial public bodies, including health authorities and hospital trust boards.

The Prime Minister: The Government seek to make all appointments, including those to health authorities and NHS trusts, on merit. Individuals are carefully appraised against the key criteria set for each appointment which cover the qualities, skills and experience required. Details of political affiliation are not specified, and are not required on nomination forms. The successful candidate is the one who meets the criteria, and has the ability and aptitude to meet the demands of the appointment, and to contribute to the effective working of the body concerned.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the destination, dates and purpose of each official overseas visit he has undertaken since November 1991:

The Prime Minister: The information requested is as follows:

Destination	Purpose of visit	Dates
Italy	NATO Summit Meeting	6-8 November 1991
Germany	Bilateral	10 November 1991
Italy	Bilateral	27 November 1991
Germany	Bilateral	27 November 1991
Netherlands	Bilateral	1 December 1991
Republic of Ireland	Bilateral	4 December 1991
Netherlands	European Council	8-10 December 1991
USA	United Nations Security Council Meeting	30-31 January 1992
Poland	Bilateral	25-26 May 1992
Czechoslovakia	Bilateral	26-28 May 1992
Hungary	Bilateral	28-29 May 1992
Germany	Bilateral	5 June 1992
USA	Bilateral	6-9 June 1992
Colombia	Bilateral	9-10 June 1992
Brazil	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)	10-12 June 1992
Portugal	European Council	25-27 June 1992
Germany	G7 Economic Summit	6-8 July 1992

Destination	Purpose of visit	Dates
Finland	CSCE Summit	9-10 July 1992
Spain	Olympic Games	7-9 August 1992
Spain	Bilateral	16-17 September 1992
France	Bilateral	30 September 1992
Egypt	50th Anniversary Commemorations at El Alamein	23-25 October 1992
Belgium	Bilateral	23 November 1992
Italy	Bilateral	27 November 1992
Luxembourg	Bilateral	30 November 1992
Greece	Bilateral	27-28 November 1992
Spain	Bilateral	30 November to 1 December 1992
Portugal	Bilateral	1 December 1992
Denmark	Bilateral	2 December 1992
Netherlands	Bilateral	6-7 December 1992
Republic of Ireland	Bilateral	7 December 1992
France	European Parliament Plenary	15-16 December 1992
Canada	EC/Canada Talks	17-18 December 1992
USA	EC/United States Talks	18-20 December 1992
Bosnia	Visit British Forces	22 December 1992
India	Republic Day Celebrations	23-28 January 1993
Oman	Bilateral	28 January 1993
Saudi Arabia	Bilateral	28 January 1993
USA	Bilateral	23-25 February 1993
Switzerland	Bilateral	5-6 April 1993
Austria	Bilateral	6 April 1993
France	Bilateral	27-28 May 1993
Denmark	European Council	20-22 June 1993
Japan	G7 Economic Summit	5-9 July 1993

SCOTLAND

Mortgage Rescue Schemes

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress Scottish Homes has made with developing mortgage rescue schemes in Scotland; and if he will make a statement relating to future plans for progressing such schemes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I asked Scottish Homes in 1991 to consider the need for such schemes in Scotland. After consulting the Building Societies Association it advised that due to the generally low level of repossessions and the relative buoyancy of the Scottish housing market, specific mortgage rescue schemes were not appropriate in Scotland. The situation is kept under review.

Crown Office

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representatives of the Crown Office have attended courses in racial awareness.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service is an equal opportunities employer whose training courses where appropriate have a component dealing with racial awareness. Procurators fiscal are also encouraged to meet representatives of local community relations councils and similar bodies to discuss issues of concern to ethnic minorities. Crown Office staff meet and correspond from time to time with the Commission for Racial Equality.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to enable the Crown Office to equip procurators fiscal and depute fiscals to prosecute in cases of racially motivated crimes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is not the function of the Secretary of State for Scotland to equip prosecutors to carry out their duties. Procurators fiscal have been instructed by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate always to take into account, when considering whether proceedings are in the public interest, evidence that a crime was racially motivated. They will also ensure that information about such an aggravating factor is brought to the attention of the court before sentence is passed.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland *(a)* how many cases of racial harassment or racially motivated crimes or offences have been reported by Scottish police forces to the Crown Office during the last full year for which such figures are available, *(b)* how many of such cases have been brought to prosecution by the Crown Office and *(c)* how many such prosecutions have resulted in convictions.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Figures are not available which show the total number of cases of racial harassment reported by the police to procurators fiscal, although in 1992 the police recorded 38 cases in the category comprising offences under the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Public Order Act 1986. Cases involving racial harassment are often prosecuted at common law and in that event prosecutions and convictions are not being recorded in such a way as to allow those which are racially motivated to be counted separately.

Labour Statistics

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were registered as unemployed in the Greenock travel-to-work-area; and what was the figure in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1988 and *(c)* 1991.

Mr. Stewart: In April 1993, the number of people registered as unemployed in Greenock travel-to-work-area was 5,726, representing 13·2 per cent. of the work force.

The equivalent figures in April 1985, 1988 and 1991 were *(a)* 9,368—19·5 per cent.—*(b)* 9,116—20·9 per cent.—and *(c)* 5,699—13·5 per cent.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Foreign Tourists

8. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what initiatives the Government are taking to increase the number of tourists from abroad to this country.

Mr. Sproat: The British Tourist Authority receives £32 million from my Department to promote Britain overseas. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the number of overseas visits to the United Kingdom over the three months to April is 12 per cent. up on the same period last year.

I am also conducting an urgent and detailed inquiry into regulations affecting tourism to establish the scope for deregulation and so allow the industry to become more competitive.

British Library

11. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received regarding the new British Library site at St. Pancras.

Mr. Brooke: I have received several representations on various aspects of the St. Pancras project.

Theatre-in-Education

15. **Mr. John Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will establish an independent inquiry into the funding of Theatre-in-Education.

Mr. Sproat: My Department does not involve itself in the funding of individual arts organisations. It is for the appropriate agencies—in this case, the Arts Councils, regional arts boards and local authorities—to consider support of Theatre-in-Education in the context of their own funding policies and priorities.

English Heritage

16. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he next plans to meet the chairman of English Heritage to discuss funding.

Mr. Brooke: I have frequent meetings with the chairman of English Heritage at which a whole range of issues, including funding, are discussed.

Industrial Heritage

17. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent assessment his Department has made on the implications for the tourism industry of industrial national heritage.

Mr. Sproat: The English Tourist Board has designated 1993 as Industrial Heritage Year with the regional tourist boards undertaking a series of promotional activities on this theme. It is too early to make any assessment of the outcome of the campaign. However, I understand that there has been an encouraging response to the campaign "Experience the Making of Britain".

Arts and Sports, Chelmsford

19. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement about opportunities for funding for arts and sports in Chelmsford.

Mr. Sproat: Funding for the arts in Chelmsford is mainly provided by the borough council with Essex county council. Chelmsford borough council supports its own directly managed venues and promotions. The Government-funded regional arts board, Eastern Arts, supports the Chelmsford Spectacular and the Chelmsford Cathedral Festival. All of these bodies offer individual project grants. Chelmsford borough council and Eastern Arts have supported a feasibility study into the possibilities of converting Chancellor Hall into a major regional dance centre and, as a follow-up, are presently launching a more detailed architectural study of Chancellor Hall.

The Government's business sponsorship incentive scheme has this year made an award of £4,000 to a Chelmsford-based arts organisation, the Essex Regional Dance Council, to match sponsorship by United Distillers, London.

In addition to local authority funding, financial assistance for sport is provided through the Sports Council and the business sponsorship incentive scheme for sport, both sponsored by my Department, the Foundation for Sport and the Arts (FSA) and the Football Trust. In recent years Chelmsford has benefited from a number of these sources, including a grant of £100,000 from the FSA in 1992 to rebuild an indoor cricket school at the Essex County Cricket Club ground.

The Crescent, Buxton

20. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the latest information he has on plans to restore the Grade I listed Crescent in Buxton.

Mr. Sproat: A public local inquiry into my right hon. Friend's draft compulsory purchase order for the former St. Ann's hotel has been arranged to take place in Buxton on 17 August. If the order is subsequently made, my right hon. Friend's intention is to dispose of the building to High Peak borough council, which would carry out the necessary repairs.

Sports Grant

21. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what level of grant will be given to the new United Kingdom Sports Commission and Sports Council for England.

Mr. Brooke: I announced on 9 July, *Official Report*, column 599-602, that the Government did not intend to proceed with the creation of the United Kingdom Sports Commission.

Television News

22. **Mr. Milligan:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessments he has made of the ability of the Independent Television Commission to preserve the quality of the news coverage of ITV.

Mr. Brooke: The ITC became the regulator, rather than the broadcaster, of ITV on 1 January this year. The

Commission has shown its determination to ensure that the ITV companies comply with the provisions of the Broadcasting Act 1990 and the conditions of their licences.

Press Regulation

23. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations he has held with owners and editors of national newspapers about the proposals by the Press Complaints Commission to strengthen self-regulation.

Mr. Brooke: None; but I have regular informal contacts with a range of owners and editors of national newspapers and am well aware of their views on press self-regulation, as on other matters. On 5 March I met representatives of the Press Standards of Finance Ltd. to discuss the industry's response to Sir David Calcutt's review of press self-regulation.

Hotel Tax

24. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what response he has made to the proposal by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities for a tourism tax on hotels.

Mr. Sproat: I am aware of the document produced by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, although I have not been approached for a response. I shall monitor developments with interest, although local taxation is primarily a matter for the Department of the Environment.

I am glad to see that the paper acknowledges the difficulties inherent in introducing a tourism tax. Many sectors of the tourism industry are opposed to the idea, and the impact of such a tax on tourism earnings would have to be very carefully considered.

British Broadcasting Corporation

25. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to discuss the renewal of the BBC charter with governors of the BBC.

Mr. Brooke: None at present. I discussed the future of the BBC, and other matters, when I met the board of governors and senior managers on 16 June.

National Museums

26. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he proposes to visit the national museums of Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England to discuss funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: I visit many museums throughout the United Kingdom. I have direct funding responsibility for the national museums of England only.

Taylor Report

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress has been made on the implementation of the Taylor report.

Mr. Brooke: Six clubs in the FA Premier League and First Division of the Football League have already met the requirement of seating for all, and many others will achieve this objective within the next few months.

National Lottery

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress is being made towards determining the site for the headquarters of the national lottery.

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is an extremely effective champion of anything that is in the good interests of Basildon. I congratulate him on that. In this case, of course, the choice of a site for the headquarters of the national lottery is not a matter for Ministers, but for the chosen operator of the national lottery. The choice of the operator, which will be made by the Director General of the Office of the National Lottery—OFLOT—will not be made until after the National Lottery Etc. Bill has received Royal Assent, and the Director General of OFLOT has been appointed.

My hon. Friend may care to identify potential candidates for the role of operator of the national lottery, before one such candidate is chosen, and explain to them all, and seek to convince them of the benefits, as he sees them, of Basildon as a site, so that whoever is chosen is fully briefed on Basildon. No doubt other hon. Members may also seek to convince potential operators of the benefits of other sites for the headquarters of the national lottery

Windsor Castle

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when work on the repairs at Windsor castle are expected to be completed.

Mr. Brooke: The reconstruction of the fire-damaged areas is planned to be completed in 1998. I am pleased to announce that the Duke of Edinburgh will be chairing a committee to advise on the restoration project. The deputy chairman will be the Prince of Wales. Other members are the president of the RIBA, the chairman of the Royal Fine Art Commission, the chairman of English Heritage, the Lord Chamberlain and two other members of the royal household, and the Permanent Secretary of my Department.

Regional Theatre

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received about the future of British regional theatre.

Mr. Brooke: The Arts Council recently conducted an artistic review to set its funding priorities. Following that review, I have received a number of letters about the future of particular theatres and support for drama. The levels of funding given to theatres and drama companies are matters for the Arts Council.

EDUCATION

LEA Spending

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to improve the analysis of local education authority spending figures by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: For the 1992-93 financial year, we aim to have a complete data set by January 1994, about two months earlier than hitherto.

Achievement of this aim depends on LEAs completing and submitting the relevant returns on time.

Non-teaching Staff

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will provide for each local education authority the numbers of *(a)* non-teaching staff in schools and *(b)* non-teaching staff employed centrally, providing for each group a breakdown by job function into (i) education support staff, (ii) premises related, including school meals, caretakers and (iii) administration.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on the full-time equivalent numbers of education support and administrative staff employed in maintained schools in England in January 1992—the latest date for which information is available—is shown in the table. Information on premises-related staff in schools is not collected centrally.

Similar information on centrally employed non-teaching staff is not collected by the Department, although tables showing the total numbers of teachers and lecturers and of other staff employed in the education service of each local authority have been placed in the Library.

Full-time equivalent[1] numbers of education support staff and administrative staff in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in England

Position at January 1992

Local education authority	*Education support staff*	*Administrative staff*
Corporation of London	4	1
Camden	284	104
Greenwich	428	160
Hackney	395	119
Hammersmith	246	88
Islington	339	95
Kensington and Chelsea	158	66
Lambeth	403	129
Lewisham	281	118
Southwark	406	146
Tower Hamlets	444	152
Wandsworth	590	146
Westminster	225	111
Barking	232	102
Barnet	423	171
Bexley	175	118
Brent	288	142
Bromley	193	175
Croydon	379	207
Ealing	481	161
Enfield	340	135
Haringey	426	109
Harrow	263	117
Havering	210	160
Hillingdon	407	153
Hounslow	331	146
Kingston upon Thames	134	120
Merton	153	133
Newham	439	125
Redbridge	196	158
Richmond upon Thames	121	86
Sutton	149	127
Waltham Forest	403	179
Birmingham	1,692	572
Coventry	499	243
Dudley	309	166
Sandwell	502	217
Solihull	270	148
Walsall	509	195
Wolverhampton	421	157
Knowsley	283	134
Liverpool	618	289
St. Helens	235	106
Sefton	295	199
Wirral	331	173
Bolton	316	162
Bury	228	84
Manchester	901	289
Oldham	369	124
Rochdale	269	142
Salford	402	157
Stockport	411	184
Tameside	357	122
Trafford	159	112
Wigan	322	177
Barnsley	334	113
Doncaster	329	243
Rotherham	342	155
Sheffield	692	308
Bradford	1,134	380
Calderdale	332	114
Kirklees	514	237
Leeds	1,232	405
Wakefield	430	220
Gateshead	217	109
Newcastle upon Tyne	426	163
North Tyneside	278	123
South Tyneside	168	62
Sunderland	425	155
Isles of Scilly	3	3
Avon	1,332	654
Bedfordshire	781	483
Berkshire	980	515
Buckinghamshire	1,082	460
Cambridgeshire	1,271	469
Cheshire	1,258	596
Cleveland	772	384
Cornwall	752	263
Cumbria	601	251
Derbyshire	1,484	487
Devon	1,312	640
Dorset	608	369
Durham	832	299
East Sussex	712	428
Essex	1,540	1,166
Gloucestershire	609	360
Hampshire	2,127	1,273
Hereford and Worcester	538	408
Hertfordshire	1,468	698
Humberside	1,265	570
Isle of Wight	193	98
Kent	1,567	1,017
Lancashire	1,563	838
Leicestershire	1,290	664
Lincolnshire	757	333
Norfolk	804	457
North Yorkshire	656	429
Northamptonshire	751	442
Northumberland	338	194
Nottinghamshire	1,376	579
Oxfordshire	888	363
Shropshire	572	281
Somerset	755	300
Staffordshire	1,324	698
Suffolk	706	434
Surrey	972	824
Warwickshire	587	319
West Sussex	775	572
Wiltshire	701	377
England	64,398	31,193

[1] The hours worked during the survey week by non-teachers in various job categories are converted to full-time equivalent staff numbers by dividing 32·5 hours for nursery assistants and 37 hours for other categories.

Local Management of Schools

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the estimate of the unspent balances held by schools at the year end under local management of school schemes for 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Forth: Unspent balances in respect of all local education authority-maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England at the end of the 1990-91 financial year, as recorded on LEAs' annual revenue outturn returns to the Department of the Environment, amounted to £322 million. The estimated figure for 1991-92 is £394 million.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many complaints his Department has received from parents concerning the conduct of head teachers or governing bodies during a ballot for grant-maintained status.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department does not collate information on the number or source of complaints about conduct during ballots on grant-maintained status, nor on whose conduct is complained about.

All such complaints are considered carefully and are investigated as appropriate. Particular attention is given to complaints alleging breaches of the law or where there may have been improper influence on the outcome of a ballot.

Special Needs

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many special needs schools there were in each of the last five years; and if he will break down the figures by category of special need.

Mr. Forth: Information about the number of maintained and non-maintained special schools is shown in the table. Many of these schools make provision for more than one kind of learning difficulty, so it is not possible to provide a breakdown of these figures by category of special need.

Maintained and non-maintained special schools in England (1988-1992)
Position at January of each year

Year	Maintained	Non-maintained
1988	1,359	84
1989	1,332	82
1990	1,317	81
1991	1,299	81
1992	1,274	78

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children had statements of educational need, in each of the last five years nationally and by each educational authority.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) on 7 June 1993, *Official Report*, columns *25-28*.

Cumbria County Council (Court Case)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the costs incurred by his Department following his court case with Cumbria county council.

Mr. Robin Squire: Fees in respect of this case are not yet available. I will write to the hon. Member when the information is available.

Education Assets Board

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 5 July, *Official Report*, columns *19-20*, if he will describe in general terms the nature and use of the premises at each educational establishment where his determination of an Education Assets Board recommendation is awaited.

Mr. Robin Squire: Of the 14 cases awaiting final determination by my right hon. Friend, only nine of them involve the transfer of land and/or property. These are as follows:

Grant-maintained schools

Dartford Grammar School for Girls, Kent—A dispute between the school and Kent county council over (i) transfer of an area of playing field, (ii) pedestrian rights of access and (iii) transfer of a further area of land.

Great Barr School, Birmingham—A dispute between the school and Birmingham county council over the ownership of an adjacent sports hall and an area of playing field which is used by both the school and the local community.

Kingsley Park School, Northamptonshire—A dispute between the school and Northamptonshire county council over the transfer of a gymnasium block in a building on the school site which is also used by another of the authority's schools.

Pate's Grammar School, Gloucestershire—A dispute between the school and Gloucestershire county council over the transfer of the site of a former secondary school which had been leased to Pate's grammar school while major building work was carried out on their own school site.

Stratford School, London—A dispute between the school and the London borough of Newham over the transfer of the freehold of a house.

Thamesview School, Kent—A dispute between the school and Kent county council on the transfer or retention of a house.

Higher education institutions

Greenwich—A dispute between the London borough of Wandsworth, which inherited the Inner London Education Authority's education responsibilities in the area, and Thames polytechnnic—now the university of Greenwich—over the transfer of the freehold of property known as Manresa house, and the grounds surrounding this property. Wandsworth uses part of Manresa house for adult education.

Falmouth School of Art and Design—A dispute between Cornwall county council and Falmouth school of art and design over the transfer of properties in Falmouth and Camborne, used by the school.

Further education institutions

Somerset College of Arts and Technology—The EAB has determined that the freehold interest in the access road serving the college and Castle school should transfer to the college. Somerset county council have appealed to the Secretary of State against this determination.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education by what statutory authority he either permits or prevents any local education authority or governing body of a school wholly dependent on public funds to engage teachers on pay less than that of agreed national scales or

without professional qualifications recognised in the United Kingdom; and if he plans to bring forward proposals for any change of the law in either respect.

Mr. Robin Squire: Under the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1991, school teachers employed by local education authorities or by the governing bodies of voluntary schools must be paid in accordance with a school teachers' pay and conditions document given force by an order of the Secretary of State. School teachers employed by the governing body of a self-governing—grant-maintained—school must also be so paid unless the school has sought exemption from the Act. The Act does not apply to teachers employed by other kinds of school or by private agencies.

Under the Education (Teachers) Regulations 1993, teachers employed at a school maintained by a local education authority, a self-governing—grant-maintained—school or a non-maintained special school must ordinarily possess qualified teacher status as defined in the regulations. There are exceptions for licensed teachers; overseas trained teachers; student teachers; and certain existing unqualified teachers; and a suitable unqualified teacher may be appointed if no suitable qualified teacher, licensed teacher or overseas trained teacher is available. This part of the regulations does not apply to other kinds of school. The Act and the regulations apply to England and Wales.

My right hon. Friend has no current plans to bring forward proposals for changing the law in respect of these matters.

DEFENCE

UN Troops (Cyprus)

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to provide phone cards for British troops serving with the United Nations peacekeeping force in Cyprus.

Mr. Hanley: All United Kingdom service personnel deployed in Cyprus receive a local overseas allowance to compensate them for the additional cost of living in that country. The allowance, which is the same for personnel under United Kingdom and United Nations command, contains an element to enable personnel to maintain telephone contact with the United Kingdom.

The only areas of deployment in which service personnel currently receive a telephone allowance are Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia. Neither of these attracts an overseas allowance, but in recognition of the particularly difficult and dangerous circumstances a telephone allowance is given.

There are no plans to change the current position.

Defence Expenditure

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, in real terms and as a proportion of gross domestic product, the expenditure on the armed forces for each year since 1979 and the projections in such terms for such annual expenditure for as many years into the future as is practicable.

Mr. Hanley: Previous and planned expenditure on the armed forces between 1979-80 and 1995-96 was set out in the "Statistical Supplement to the 1992 Autumn Statement", (Cm 2219). Planned defence expenditure between 1993-94 and 1995-96 as a proportion of the forecast GDP gross domestic product—not given in the supplement—is as follows:

1993-94 — 3·7 per cent.
1994-95 — 3·5 per cent.
1995-96 — 3·2 per cent.

Queen's Flight

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which *(a)* Cabinet Ministers and *(b)* others are entitled to use aircraft from the Queen's Flight.

Mr. Hanley: Subject to the approval of Her Majesty the Queen, and the availability of aircraft, the following are entitled to use aircraft of the Queen's Flight when travelling on official business.

Members of the Royal Family

The Prime Minister
The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
The Chancellor of the Exchequer
The Home Secretary
The Secretary of State for Defence
The Secretary of State for Scotland
The Secretary of State for Wales
The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
The Minister of State for the Armed Forces
The Minister of State for Defence Procurement
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence
Chief of the Defence Staff
Chief of the Naval Staff
Chief of the General Staff
Chief of the Air Staff
General Officer Commanding London district

Visiting Heads of State and foreign dignitaries of equivalent status to the above.

Members of the Privy Council travelling to attend meetings of the Council outside London.

Navy Salaries

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the amount of pension receivable by *(a)* a lieutenant commander and *(b)* a chief petty officer each with 25 years service assuming that each had retired on (i) 1 June 1992 and (ii) 1 June 1993.

Mr. Hanley: For a lieutenant commander and a chief petty officer each with 25 years reckonable service, the amounts of pension are as follows:

Date of retirement	*Amount of award* £
Lieutenant commander	
1 June 1992	11,784
1 June 1993	11,962
Chief petty officer	
1 June 1992	7,101
1 June 1993	7,207

Research and Development

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on research and development from 1991.

Mr. Aitken: My Department's research and development expenditure is detailed in table 1.5 of the 1993 edition of "Defence Statistics". The total gross expenditure in 1991-92 was £2,680 million and the estimated outturn in 1992-93 is £2,912 million.

Service Projects

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the five current service projects involving the most expenditure; and what is the manpower requirement involved in each such project.

Mr. Hanley: The five current service projects involving the most expenditure are shown in table 1.15 of "Defence Statistics" 1993. They are Trident, EH 101, Eurofighter 2000, Rapier Field Standard C and Warrior.

It is not possible without disproportionate cost to identify all staff effort involved in these projects throughout the Department.

Procurement executive staff directly and exclusively involved in the management of these projects are as follows:

Project Manpower

	Number of staff involved
Trident	335
EH 101	42
Eurofighter 2000	91
Rapier (FSC)	41
Warrior	25

Anthrax Inoculation

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men and women in the Gulf conflict were inoculated against anthrax; and if the inoculation included inculation against penicillin-resistant anthrax.

Mr. Hanley: Vaccines giving protection against a number of biological warfare agents considered to be a threat during Operation Granby were administered to all consenting British personnel on a voluntary basis. The details of these vaccines are classified.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims for compensation by veterans of the British nuclear tests are currently pending; what action he is taking on their cases; what factors are delaying his making of a final decision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Five such claims are pending. They are being examined in the usual way, to establish whether there is any evidence of exposure to radiation, and if so whether this caused any subsequent disease. So far, however, no case of death or disease among British nuclear test veterans has been shown to have resulted from radiation from the tests.

Successive British Governments have explained that almost all the personnel involved received little or no radiation from the tests. If these assurances were wrong and people actually had been subjected to substantial additional radiation, medical experts would expect to find an excess of total cancer deaths subsequently. But according to the study published in 1988 by the National Radiological Protection Board, the total incidence of death and malignant disease has been no greater among test veterans than for people who were not involved in the tests. We know of no new evidence that would change this position.

Air Defence Alerting Device

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the purpose of the air defence alerting device recently brought into servive with the Army; which systems it replaces and in what roles; what similar equipment is in service with, or on order for, the other services; what are the approximate costs involved; who are the principal contractors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The air defence alerting device (ADAD) is a passive, infra-red surveillance device, manufactured by Thorn EMI, which has recently entered service. It will be deployed with the Army's and the Royal Marines' close air defence weapon systems to provide passive early warning of potential aerial targets. In addition to the free-standing version, which is now being deployed with the Javelin system, ADAD will be vehicle mounted for use with the self-propelled version of the Starstreak high-velocity missile, due to come into service in 1994. ADAD is a completely new system which will provide a significant enhancement to the Army's close air defence alerting capability, which previously relied on human detection. The overall investment in the programme will exceed £100 million.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the former Members of this House who have been appointed since 1988 by his Departments to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations; and if he will list in each case the title of the post, the salary, the duration of the appointment, and the party which the former hon. Member represented.

Mr. Nelson: No such appointments have been made.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department since 1988 to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, and salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Nelson: The information requested is as follows:

(a) none.

(b) none.

(c) Marchioness of Anglesy; Member, Royal Mint Advisory Committee; appointed in February 1991 for 7 years; no salary payable.

(d) This information is not held.

Gross Domestic Product (Hong Kong)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he estimates that the gross domestic product per capita of Hong Kong will equal that of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nelson: The future comparative paths of GDP per capita in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong will depend on exchange rate movements and relative growth rates of GDP and population.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list his estimates by range of income for *(a)* 1992-93 and *(b)* 1993-94 of the number of tax units receiving mortgage interest tax relief, the average value per mortgagor and the total cost of the relief.

Mr. Dorrell: The estimates are shown in the tables. The figures for 1993-94 are based on the conventional assumption of no further changes in interest rates.

Mortgage interest relief by range of total income[1]

Range of total income[1] *(lower limit)*	*Number of single people or married couples benefiting from mortgage interest relief*	*Average mortgage interest relief*	*Cost of mortgage interest relief*
£	*thousands*	£	*£ million*
1992-93			
0	840	410	340
5,000	1,130	460	520
10,000	2,670	510	1,360
15,000	2,400	560	1,340
20,000	1,050	570	600
25,000	510	590	300
30,000	610	610	370
40,000	590	630	370
Total	9,800	530	5,200
1993-94			
0	840	370	310
5,000	1,120	380	420
10,000	2,540	410	1,050
15,000	2,330	450	1,050
20,000	1,220	460	560
25,000	570	460	260
30,000	640	500	320
40,000	640	510	330
Total	9,900	430	4,300

[1] Total income of husband for married couples.

Civil Servants (Offices)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the office accommodation costs for civil servants and give an analysis under appropriate headings including a notional rental amount in respect of premises held on freehold or long-leasehold tenure for *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the most recent period.

Mr. Nelson: The information required is not centrally collected in the format requested. The table sets out the information in respect of departmental accommodation costs for central Government Departments for 1992-93, the last year available. Data for 1979 are not available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

£ million

	1992-93	
	Rent	*Other accommodation*
Defence	184·7	129·6
FCO (including ODA)	61·9	43·0
Agriculture	39·7	23·9
Trade and Industry	58·9	46·2
Employment	121·9	92·4
Transport	30·1	23·2
Environment	39·8	25·5
Home Office	63·1	91·3
Legal Departments	99·5	94·6
Education	10·8	5·6
Heritage	0·5	1·1
Health	30·0	19·6
Social Security	131·9	124·5
Scotland	37·8	19·3
Wales	2·8	3·7
Northern Ireland	8·4	35·3
Chancellor's Departments	199·9	134·1
Cabinet Office etc.	10·9	0·3
	1,132·7	913·2

Public Sector Pay

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his current plans for a review of the 1·5 per cent. limit on public sector pay increases for the next pay round; and what will be the position in that pay round of those employees in the public sector who had been awarded a higher figure than 1·5 per cent. for the present pay round.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government will review the situation with regard to public sector pay at the appropriate time bearing in mind all the relevant circumstances. Public sector pay is an important part of public expenditure and will have to be kept under tight control.

Under the Government's current approach to public sector pay restraint, every public sector group will be subject to one pay settlement only in the range 0 to 1·5 per cent. Those groups who received settlements in excess of 1·5 per cent. last year in respect of the 1992-93 pay round will have their 1993 settlement constrained appropriately.

Public Sector Pension Schemes

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state for each of the main public sector pension schemes the financial year when he expects the average pension in payment to reach £10,000 per annum based on current trends in lengths of service, earnings and price increases.

Mr. Portillo: The table shows when the average pension in payment from the main public service pension schemes would reach £10,000 per annum if the average level of price inflation were 1 per cent. or 4 per cent. in the longer term. These represent the top and bottom of the Government's target range for inflation.

Financial year when average pension is expected to reach £10,000 per annum

Scheme	*Rate of growth per annum*	
	1 per cent.	*4 per cent.*
Civil Service	2083-84	2016-17
NHS (England and Wales)	2082-83	2016-17
NHS (Scotland)	2094-95	2019-20

Scheme	*Rate of growth per annum*	
	1 per cent.	*4 per cent.*
Teachers (England and Wales)	2039-40	2005-6
Teachers (Scotland)	2037-38	2004-5
Armed Forces	2077-78	2014-15
Local Government (England and Wales)	2124-25	2026-27
Average	2084-85	2016-17

Pension Commitments

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to publish in the next Budget and autumn statement documents a statement of the Government's best estimate of the funded and unfunded pension commitments with an analysis by year and a statement of each unfunded liability of the public sector in excess of £10 million.

Mr. Portillo: We have no plans to do so at present.

Over-paid Income Tax

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the speed with which the Inland Revenue handles repayments of overpaid income tax.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue gives priority to claims for repayment of tax, and this means that many people receive their repayments in a very short time. However, some of the Inland Revenue's specialist offices deal with people who make their claims at around the same time of year and, while every effort is made to cope with these peaks, they slow down the speed with which repayments of tax can be made to the people concerned.

Inland Revenue (Employers' Returns)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons end-of-year returns to employers from the Inland Revenue included promotional material from commercial organisations; how many employers received the material; and what arrangements are made for those who do not wish to receive such material to refuse it.

Mr. Dorrell: No evidence has been produced which substantiates rumours and allegations about the deliberate or systematic inclusion of promotional material from commercial organisations in the annual pay-as-you-earn packs issued to employers.

Third-world Debt

Mr. Milligan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action his Department is taking to relieve the debt of the poorest third-world countries.

Mr. Nelson: The United Kingdom is leading the way in promoting international agreement on debt relief for those poorest third-world countries which owe most of their debts to Governments. It was a direct result of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's initiative for the poorest and most indebted countries following the International Monetary Fund sponsored programmes of reform, that the Paris Club of major creditor countries began implementing a modified version of the Trinidad terms in December 1991. This had the effect of halving the payments due to creditors and gave a commitment to consider restructuring the whole stock of a country's eligible debt after a good track record of economic reform had been established. Seventeen countries have so far benefited from these terms, resulting in the debt cancellation of almost $1¾ billion during the lifetime of the agreements. Moreover, this Government have relieved developing countries of the burden of over £1,000 million of old aid loans, and all new aid to the poorest countries has been on grant terms for many years.

The United Kingdom Government are, however, aware that, for some of the most desperate cases, Trinidad terms as currently applied are not generous enough. We are therefore taking every opportunity to pursue improvements to the terms with our creditor country colleagues.

Specifically, we would like to see the degree of concessionality increased to a range of 50 per cent. to 80 per cent. on a case-by-case basis for those countries that need it. We would also like to see quicker action on the stock of debt for those countries that already have a proven track record of reform with the IMF. Ministers continue to press these points on discussions with other creditor countries, most recently at the Tokyo summit.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on national debt in Africa.

Mr. Nelson: The United Kingdom Government are leading the way in promoting international agreement on debt relief for the poorest and most severely indebted countries many of which are in sub-Saharan Africa. It was a direct result of my right hon. and learned Friend the Prime Minister's initiative for the poorest and most indebted countries following IMF-sponsored programmes of reform, that the Paris Club of major creditor governments began implementing the Trinidad terms in December 1991.

Seventeen countries have so far benefited from Trinidad terms, including 13 of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Under these agreements, over $3 billion of sub-Saharan African debt has been rescheduled by the Paris Club, cancelling over $1 billion during the lifetime of these agreements.

Moreover, the Government have also cancelled nearly £200 million of old aid debts owed by sub-Saharan African countries which are successfully pursuing sound policies of reform. New aid to such countries is now provided only in the form of grants.

However, the Government are aware that, for some of the most desperate cases, the terms as currently applied will not be enough. We are therefore taking every opportunity to pursue improvements to the terms with our creditor country colleagues.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the application of VAT on domestic fuel to concessionary coal; and what representations he has received on the matter.

Sir John Cope: Treasury Ministers have received a small number of representations on this issue. I understand from British Coal that the change in VAT liability for domestic fuel and power will not lead to any changes in concessionary fuel allowances.

Fishing Vessel Decommissioning

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give his estimate of what will be recouped by way of capital taxation from the money provided for decommissioning; what information he is providing to fishing vessel owners about their capital gains tax liabilities; and if such information will be made available to owners before they apply for grants.

Mr. Dorrell: Decommissioning grants are taxable in the same way as other grants to the agriculture and fishing industries. But I regret that a reliable estimate of the tax involved could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

The Inland Revenue issues no general guidance to fishing vessel owners about the capital gains tax liabilities arising from their receipt of decommissioning grants. MAFF, which is responsible for administering this grant, does issue a general explanatory leaflet to all who apply for the decommissioning grant pointing out that the grant will be taxable. Vessel owners should contact their own tax office or financial adviser for detailed advice.

Private Medical Insurance

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give figures for the number of people who have received tax relief for private medical insurance in the years 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Dorrell: Tax relief for private medical insurance for those aged 60 or over was introduced in 1990-91. Nearly 350,000 contracts covering about 500,000 individuals aged 60 or over have received tax relief each year since then.

Inheritance Tax

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals have been granted exemption from inheritance tax in relation to chattels declared to be open to inspection by the public.

Mr. Dorrell: The total number of conditional exemptions from inheritance tax in relation to chattels granted in the years 1983-84 to 1992-93 is 358. Figures are not available prior to 1983-84.

Doubtful Debts

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table setting out for each of the years 1991-92 and 1992-93 *(a)* the amount allowed for the change in provisions against doubtful debts for corporation tax purposes, *(b)* the breakdown of these figures between new provisions against doubtful debts, doubtful debts which have since turned bad and doubtful debts which have become good and *(c)* the average period for which debts which became good were treated as doubtful for corporation tax purposes.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 8 July 1993]:* I regret that the information requested is not available.

Oil Companies

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the additional yield to the Exchequer if oil companies had only 24 hours to nominate an actual third-party transaction to match its equity production from the oilfield for 1993-94.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* The yield would probably be less than £10 million with oil price volatility at present levels.

Private Landlords

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was raised by income tax, capital gains tax and corporation tax from landlords providing private rental accommodation in the past five years.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* Estimated revenue raised by income tax and capital gains tax for 1988-89 to 1992-93 from landlords providing private rental accommodation is shown.

£ million

	Income Tax Accrual	*Capital Gains Tax Accrual*
1988-89	250	250
1989-90	350	210
1990-91	310	100
1991-92	320	80
1992-93	320	40

All estimates are subject to a wide margin of error and the latest two years are projections.

Capital gains tax figures exclude gains made by companies which are chargeable to corporation tax.

Information is not available to produce estimates of the revenue raised by corporation tax from companies providing private rental accommodation.

EMPLOYMENT

Redundancies

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the estimated total number of redundancies in the United Kingdom since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department's main source of redundancy statistics is the Labour Force Survey. This survey gives the numbers of redundancies that took place in the three months prior to interview. The extent of the available information is given in the following table:

Redundancies (not seasonally adjusted): Labour Force Survey, Great Britain

	Numbers
Spring 1989	142,000
Spring 1990	181,000
Spring 1991	388,000
Spring 1992	322,000
Summer 1992	278,000
Autumn 1992	310,000
Winter 1992	344,000

The main source of data prior to 1989, is the confirmed redundancy series. However, this series was discontinued because it proved to be an unreliable indicator of the actual number of redundancies taking place. The series was last published in tables 2.30 and 2.31 of the September 1992 *Employment Gazette*.

Working-time Directive

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 29 June, *Official Report*, column *473*, relating to the proposed working-time directive and its effects on offshore oil and gas workers, to which parts of the directive other than working hours the derogation applies; and if he will make a statement on arrangements for leave.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I explained in my reply to the hon. Member on 29 June 1993, *Official Report*, col *473*, that as a result of our negotiations all work at sea would be excluded from the scope of the proposed directive. This exclusion applies to all the provisions of the proposed directive.

Jobcentres

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received during the last 12 months regarding publicising the wage levels of jobs offered via jobcentres.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: One, from the hon. Member himself.

Mining Industry (Doncaster)

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the work force in the Doncaster travel-to-work area were employed in mining in each year since 1987.

Miss Widdecombe: Employment estimates for local areas, including travel-to-work areas, are compiled from the periodic censuses of employment. They cover employees in employment only and exclude the self-employed and members of Her Majesty's forces. The available information from censuses of employment taken in 1987, 1989, and 1991 is given in the following table:

Employees in employment in deep coal mines and opencast coal working[1]; September of each year.
Doncaster travel-to-work area

	Number	*Proportion[2] (per cent)*
1987	7,400	6·3
1989	6,000	5·2
1991	5,200	4·6

[1] Activity headings 1113 and 1114 of the Standard Industrial Classification 1980.

[2] Employees in activity headings 1113 and 1114 as a percentage of the workforce in the travel-to-work area.

Female Employees

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list by region the percentage of women currently employed in the labour market giving the comparable figures for *(a)* five and *(b)* 10 years ago.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is shown in the following table:

Percentage of females in the civilian workforce in employment
Not seasonally adjusted

	March 1983	*March 1988*	*March 1993*
South East (including Greater London)	41	43	46
Greater London	41	42	44
East Anglia	38	43	45
South West	40	43	46
West Midlands	40	42	45
East Midlands	40	43	46
Yorkshire and Humberside	41	44	46
North West	43	44	47
North	41	44	46
Wales	40	43	45
Scotland	42	44	46
Northern Ireland	42	44	46

National Alliance of Women's Organisations

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what applications have been received for core funding for the National Alliance of Women's Organisations *(a)* last year and *(b)* in the current year; and how much money has been paid.

Miss Widdecombe: Since 1992 there have been a number of applications by, or on behalf of, the National Alliance of Women's Organisations for core funding. This resulted in the payment of a £20,000 grant during the 1992-93 financial year.

After careful consideration, as part of the Government's overall review of public expenditure, it was explained, with some regret, that further funding for the organisation would not be possible.

Wage Settlements

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Emplolyment if he will list those industries in which wage settlements in the last 12 months have been below 10 per cent.; and if he will show against each entry the percentage settlement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 June 1993]:* Pay is primarily a matter for those who negotiate and determine it; the Government do not monitor the level of wage settlements in detail. The Confederation of British Industry's pay databank shows that for the first quarter of 1993 pay settlements average 2·5 per cent. in manufacturing and 2·8 per cent. in the private service industries respectively. These are the lowest levels reported in the 13-year history of the databank.

Young People

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number and percentage of *(a)* 18-year-olds, *(b)* 17-year-olds, *(c)* 16-year-olds in spring 1991 and 1992 and winter 1992-93 labour force surveys who were (i) in employment, (ii) International Labour Organisation unemployed and (iii) economically inactive and *(d)* the economic activity rate.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 8 July 1993]:* The available information from the Labour Force survey is given in the table.

Economic activity by age
Great Britain

(Thousands)

Age	*Spring 1991*	*Spring 1992*	*Winter 1992-93*
16 years old			
In employment	294	245	223
ILO unemployed	72	56	57
Economically inactive	328	354	355
Economic activity rate	52·7	46·0	44·1
17 years old			
In employment	422	387	360
ILO unemployed	57	66	68
Economically inactive	196	232	237
Economic activity rate	71·0	66·1	64·4
18 years old			
In employment	466	422	381
ILO unemployed	77	74	90
Economically inactive	179	213	223
Economic activity rate	75·1	70·0	67·9

Source: Labour Force Survey (not seasonally adjusted).

Job Vacancies

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many of the vacancies notified in each of the last six months to jobcentres *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in Wales were full-time and how many were part-time;

(2) what is the minimum number of hours involved in a job which qualifies to be registered as a vacancy at a jobcentre;

(3) how many of the vacancies notified in each of the last six months *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in Wales were temporary and how many were permanent.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. Turner to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 12 July 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, it is the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the Agency's Chief Executive to answer Parliamentary Questions about relevant operational matters. In his absence, I am replying to your questions to the Secretary of State about vacancies notified to Jobcentres in the United Kingdom and Wales.

The total number of vacancies notified to Jobcentres is collated monthly. Detailed full-time, part-time and temporary vacancy information is available on a quarterly basis. It is collected from offices throughout Great Britain, not the United Kingdom.

The tables attached show the information you requested for the past three quarters for Great Britain and Wales.

You also asked what is the minimum number of hours involved in a job which qualifies to be registered as a vacancy at a Jobcentre. We do not place any such restrictions before displaying vacancies.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee to the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Numbers of full-time and part-time vacancies notified to jobcentres

	Quarter		
	5 October 1992 to 8 January 1993	*11 January 1993 to 2 April 1993*	*5 April 1993 to 2 July 1993*
Great Britain			
Number of full-time vacancies notified	291,814	300,859	362,263
Number of part-time vacancies notified[2]	156,237	149,041	171,469
Wales[1]			
Number of full-time vacancies notified	17,527	17,860	22,830
Number of part-time vacancies notified[2]	12,969	11,637	13,831

Numbers of permanent and temporary vacancies notified to jobcentres

	Quarter		
	5 October 1992 to 8 January 1993	*11 January 1993 to 2 April 1993*	*5 April 1993 to 2 July 1993*
Great Britain			
Number of permanent vacancies notified	344,723	368,124	422,656
Number of temporary vacancies notified[3]	103,328	81,776	111,076
Wales[1]			
Number of permanent vacancies notified	20,419	22,000	26,532
Number of temporary vacancies notified[3]	10,077	7,497	10,129

[1] Figures for Wales are included in the figures for Great Britain
[2] Part-time = under 30 hours work per week.
[3] Temporary = work lasting six months or less.

HEALTH

Nottingham Clinic

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will establish an inquiry into *(a)* the establishment of the Nottingham clinic and *(b)* the arrangements in hand for the sale of the Nottingham health authority share of the clinic; and what ministerial approval is required for the sale.

Mr. Sackville: The Nottingham health authority is awaiting the opinion of legal counsel and when this is received the appropriate action will be taken. No ministerial approval is required for the sale of the Nottingham clinic.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have taken place between her Department and Nottingham health authority over the establishment of the Nottingham clinic.

Mr. Sackville: A number of discussions have taken place between the Department of Health and the Nottingham health authority over the establishment of the Nottingham clinic.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what ministerial approval has been given to transactions and developments involving Regency Park Ltd. and the Nottingham clinic.

Mr. Sackville: No approval by Department of Health Ministers has been sought, or given, to transactions and developments involving Regency Park Ltd. and the Nottingham clinic.

Abortion

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of residents' abortions in Preston district health authority is carried out or paid for by the national health service; what is the national figure; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: In 1991, of the abortions performed on residents of Preston district health authority in England and Wales—under the Abortion Act 1967—9·2 per cent. were either carried out or paid for by the national health service. The equivalent figure for residents of England and Wales is 50·4 per cent.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has as to the number of children who are themselves HIV negative but who have one or both parents who are HIV positive.

Mr. Sackville: There are no data on the total number of children in the United Kingdom who have one or both parents who are HIV positive. Most such children are HIV negative, but they may be HIV positive if their mothers were infected with HIV prior to giving birth or breast feeding them.

By 30 April 1993, there had been 500 reports of children in the United Kingdom born to women known to be infected with HIV. One hundred and fifty-two of these children are known to be uninfected and the HIV infection status of 168 children has not yet been determined. However, the results of unlinked anonymous HIV surveys indicate that there have been many pregnant women whose HIV infection was not known to obstetric staff so there are an unknown number of children born to HIV-infected women.

Doctors

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many doctors have been struck off the medical register in each year since 1979;

(2) how many doctors have been found guilty of professional misconduct in each year since 1979.

Dr. Mawhinney: Registration of doctors is a matter for the General Medical Council, an independent statutory body, whose functions are determined by the Medical Act 1983. The GMC publishes information about numbers of erasures and cases of professional misconduct in its annual report, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken to make doctors more accountable for their actions; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have recently set up a review to examine the national health service systems for dealing with complaints about family health services; about hospital services; and about matters of clinical judgment. It will not cover NHS disciplinary procedures: a joint working group is currently reviewing the guidance on these procedures for hospital medical and dental staff and for community and public health doctors. Family health services authorities can make representations to the NHS tribunal if they feel that it would be prejudicial to the efficiency of the service for a particular general practitioner to be included in a list of practitioners providing general medical services.

The professional regulatory bodies like the General Medical Council also have an important role to play in safeguarding standards of medical care.

Drugs

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken to reduce the cost of the national health service drugs bill; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are taking a number of measures which we hope will reduce the rate of growth in the national health service drugs bill while ensuring that people get the medicines they need. These include action to ensure that general practitioners have full information about their prescribing and how it compares with that of others; to provide GPs with advice on effective prescribing and to encourage them to prescribe generic rather than branded drugs. The GP fund-holding scheme provides incentives for doctors to prescribe economically and incentive schemes are being introduced for GPs who are not fund holders.

We are seeking to constrain drug costs through the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme, which is currently being renegotiated, and by the extension of the selected list scheme from seven to 17 therapeutic categories.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for legislation to determine

the Government's liability for civil damages in cases of adverse reaction to a drug where a product licence has been reinstated on appeal following its suspension by the licensing authority.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Triazolam

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from the panel of persons appointed since announcing the revocation of all licences for triazolam products on 9 June.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish her correspondence with the chairman of the panel of persons appointed regarding the decision of the licensing authority to revoke all licences for triazolam products.

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend the Minister for Health wrote on 9 June to the chairman of the panel of persons appointed to inform her that the licensing authority's determination would be announced that day. The letter enclosed a note on the licensing authority's position on triazolam. The note is publicly available and a copy is available in the Library.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what conclusion she has drawn regarding the implications of the revocation of licences for triazolam products for the future of the appeals procedure set out in the Medicines Act 1968; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Before deciding to revoke these licences, the licensing authority followed the procedures set out in section 29 of, and schedule 2 to, the Medicines Act and took into account the reports it had received from the Committee on the Safety of Medicines, the Medicines Commission and the panel of persons appointed. The licensing authority is not obliged to follow the advice or accept the findings in these reports but must take them into account. The decision in this case has no implications for the future of these procedures.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish her correspondence with the chairman of the Medicines Commission regarding the decision of the licensing authority to revoke all licences for triazolam products.

Mr. Sackville: There has been no such correspondence.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce legislation to instruct NHS trusts to enter formal consultations with local community health councils and other local interested bodies about proposals for substantial development or substantial variations in services, with a prescribed time of three months, excluding major holidays, by which comments and views are sought; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: District health authorities are already required to consult the local community health councils when substantial changes in local services are under consideration, including services delivered by national health service trusts.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she will instruct health authorities to require NHS hospital trusts to publish *(a)* spending plans and *(b)* decisions affecting the delivery of services.

Mr. Sackville: No. National health service trusts are already required to publish their strategic directions, summary business plans, and their annual reports and accounts. Service contracts made with health authorities are also available publicly.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria she uses to determine who are appointed as non-executive members of NHS trust boards; and who is responsible for short-listing candidates for appointments.

Dr. Mawhinney: Non-executive directors of national health service trusts are appointed for their personal qualities and the knowledge and skills which they can bring to the post, and not to represent any particular body or interest. The aim is to achieve a balance of different skills on trust boards. Regional health authorities are responsible for identifying and selecting candidates for appointment to NHS trusts when they are initially established, and for recommending these to Ministers. For already established trusts, recommendations on the reappointment or replacement of non-executive directors are made by NHS trust chairmen after consultation with regional health authorities and the NHS management executive outposts.

Care Homes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will revise the regulations in respect of the Registered Homes Act 1984 to *(a)* extend a person's right to make a complaint to cover all residential and nursing homes in the private and public sectors and *(b)* require registration authorities to set out a model complaints procedure for use by homes within each registration area, to include a formal appeal mechanism to be used where complaints cannot be resolved satisfactorily after reasonable discussion with the home; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Private and voluntary residential care homes are required by law to operatate their own complaints procedures and to tell residents how they can make complaints to the registration authority. People in local authority homes and people in independent nursing and residential care homes, whose place there was arranged by a local authority, have access to the statutory social services complaints procedures. National health service patients in nursing homes can make use of NHS complaints procedures.

I have no current plans to revise these procedures.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce legislation to prevent the offering of financial inducements by private nursing homes to general practitioners to refer patients to those homes.

Mr. Sackville: We have no current plans to do so.

Hospital Closures, London

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list the hospitals that have been closed in the London borough of Wandsworth since 1979;

(2) if she will list the hospitals which have been closed in each of the four regional health authorities covering Greater London since 1979.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Purchasing Policies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will review the public consultation process applicable where there are alterations in the purchasing policies of a number of health authorities or general practitioner fund holders involving the move by each of the contract for a small number of patients from one local hospital to another leading to significant changes in the overall provision of the local health services; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: No. Purchasing shifts are required if national and local objectives for health gains are to be achieved. The national health service management executive has recently issued guidance to the service about how change should be managed under cover of EL(93)10 "Managing Activity and Change through Contracting," copies of which are available in the Library.

Children in Hospital

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the NHS Management Executive is taking to ensure all commissioners require their providers to implement fully her Department's guideline 3.9 in "The Welfare of Children and Young People in Hospital" in respect of the admission of parents with their children into anaesthetic rooms; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Child health services are among the topics selected this year for the regional reviews which the national health service management executive will be undertaking of health authorities' performance. Where appropriate, authorities will be reminded of the evidence which shows that children are calmed and comforted by the presence of parents during the administration of anaesthetics.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the annual report and accounts of the Medicines Control Agency.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have received the report and copies have today been laid before both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the requirements of section 5(2) and (3) of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921.

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who funds the Medicines Control Agency; what are the current levels of funding in 1993; what have been the levels in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Medicines Control Agency, as was agreed when it was established on 1 April 1989, is funded entirely by fees from licence applicants and licence holders, except as regards the subsequent processing of work in progress at 31 March 1989—the costs of which are being met by government funds.

As regards the level of funding required, the costs of the MCA for 1993-94 are estimated to be about £19·4 million.

For each of the last three years the costs have been as shown in the table:

	£ million
1990-91	15·2
1991-92	18·2
1992-93	18·5

NHS Fraud

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to receive the report of the Audit Commission inquiry into fraud in the national health service.

Mr. Sackville: We have been advised by the Audit Commissison that the study is due to commence early in 1994. The length of the study and the mechanisms for reporting are still under consideration.

Children in Care

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide information for each local authority in England of the total numbers of children in care in 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991, giving the reasons for the care episodes, the length of the care episodes by sex and by age and the number of children in care under orders.

Mr. Bowis: Information about total numbers of children in care, the reasons for the care episode and the number of children in care under orders for each local authority is given in the publication "Children in Care of Local Authorities year ending 31 March, England", copies of which are available in the Library. The information requested about the length of the care episodes by sex and by age for each local authority is voluminous and will be placed in the Library.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the hospitals closed since May 1979 in *(a)* the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale health authority area and *(b)* the Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley health authority area.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. William Ashworth, chairman of Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale health authority, and Mr. Ian Woolley, chairman of Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley health authority, for details.

Colostomy Bags

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average prescription cost of a colostomy bag.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available. The average net ingredient cost of prescribing a colostomy bag in 1992 was £1·84.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost to the NHS in each of the past years of providing colostomy bags on prescription.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally. The net ingredient cost of prescribing colostomy bags in England for the last 10 years was:

Year	*Net Ingredient Cost (£ million)*
1982	4·1
1983	6·2
1984	7·1
1985	11·3
1986	13·2
1987	15·7
1988	16·3
1989	19·5
1990	21·1
1991[1]	23·8
1991[2]	24·8
1992	28·0

Notes:

[1] 1982 to 1991 data cover prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors only.

[2] 1991 and 1992 data cover prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average production cost of a colostomy bag; and what discussion has been held with the pharmaceutical industry to ensure an adequate and economic supply of colostomy bags to those who require this facility.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on the production costs of colostomy bags is not available. The Department takes into account the cost of products, as well as their general availability, when deciding whether to add individual products to the general practitioner prescribable list or to keep them on the list. If the hon. Member has a particular problem in mind, he may wish to write to me about it.

Abuse of the Elderly

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to introduce legislation to give local authorities duties to investigate abuse of the elderly; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities already have powers to assess situations where abuse of an older person may be happening or suspected. Consideration is currently being given to the proposals set out in the Law Commission consultation paper No. 130, on which the Department of Health will be commenting.

Hydatidosis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of people who have *(a)* died and *(b)* had to undergo surgical operations but survived, because of hydatidosis in each of the last seven years.

Mr. Sackville: Deaths from hydatid disease in England and Wales are shown in the table:

Year	*Number*
1986	2
1987	4
1988	2
1989	3
1990	5
1991	3
1992	6

Source: OPCS.

In 1989-90, the latest year for which information is available, there were 46 finished consultant episodes involving surgical procedures in England. Information for previous years is not available.
Source: Hospital Episode Statistics.

Smoking

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action has been taken to achieve "The Health of the Nation" White Paper targets to reduce smoking prevalence in adults and children; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: "The Health of the Nation" White Paper sets out a comprehensive strategy to reduce smoking prevalence including action on price, health education and ensuring effective controls on advertising. It also emphasises the key role of health authorities in leading moves to improve the health of local people including action to reduce smoking.

Hospital Provision

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out the required consultation procedures and the chronology that health authorities should take when restructuring hospital provision.

Dr. Mawhinney: Guidance for health authorities on consultation procedures is contained in an executive letter, EL(90)185, which was sent to health service managers in September 1990. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Corporate Governance

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the terms of reference of the task force on corporate governance in the NHS; who are the members; when they will report; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Bottomley: The public must have confidence in the way in which the business of their public services is conducted. As both citizens and taxpayers, individuals have a right to expect that those who use their money to provide services carry out their jobs with responsibility and honesty and to the highest possible standards. I have every confidence that most national health service work is conducted in such a fashion. Indeed, the Audit Commission—which, since this Government extended its remit in 1990, has carried out independent and external scrutiny of the NHS—has reported that the overall financial management of all NHS activities has shown a significant and welcome improvement.

In an organisation the size and complexity of the NHS, there can never be any room for complacency. As one or two well-publicised cases have shown, the NHS is not immune from lapses in management standards. We have acted decisively in light of these reports. Sir Duncan Nichol, chief executive of the national health service, has issued guidance to the service on the "Standards of Business Conduct" which places obligations on NHS employers as well as management and staff, and set out our expectations of their integrity and professionalism.

We need to consider, however, what more can be done. On 18 June, I announced that Sir Duncan has set up a task force to spearhead an urgent review of the current guidance to the NHS on corporate governance. The task force will report to the NHS management executive by 31 December 1993. Its findings will help strengthen the existing system of non-executive oversight which is already an important feature of the NHS and a valuable pillar in upholding high public service standards in the health service.

The task force's terms of reference are published today:

To consider, in the light of the recommendations of the Cadbury report and good practice in NHS organisations, the following aspects of corporate governance in the NHS:

- how standards of public business and public service values in the NHS may be reinforced;
- how the role and functions of chairmen and non-executive directors may be matched with their part-time commitment;
- improvements in the arrangements for induction and training of chairmen, non-executives and boards as a whole;
- the role, responsibilities and functions of non-executive directors of health authorities and NHS Trusts in matters of finance and audit.

Membership

Corporate governance in the NHS—Steering Group Membership

John Shaw (Chairman), Director of Corporate Affairs: NHSME

Jonathan Charkham, Adviser to the Governors: Bank of England (retired)

Mavis Foden, Chairman: Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust

Rennie Fritchie[1], Chairman: South Western RHA

Sir Bruce Martin QC[1], Chairman: North Western RHA

David Hunter, Director: Nuffield Institute, Leeds University

Ken Jarrold[1], RGM: Wessex Regional Health Authority

Barbara Stocking[1], RGM: Oxford Regional Health Authority

Dr. Martin McNichol[1], Chairman: Central Middlesex NHS Trust and NHS Trust Federation

William Wells[1], Chairman: Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust

Anthony Merifield, Head of Public Appointments: Cabinet Office

Elspeth Metcalfe[1], Chairman: Hereford and Worcester FHSA, Non-executive Director West Midlands RHA

Zahida Manzoor[1], Chairman: Bradford HA

Ray Rowden, Director: IHSM

Michael Schofield, Chairman: Bradford Community Health NHS Trust, Deputy Chairman NAHAT

Chris West[1], General Manager: Portsmouth and SE Hampshire HA, Member of the Audit Commission

John Sherring[1], Regional Director: West Midlands Audit Commission

Dr. Donald Irvine, GP Fundholder: Ashington, Northumberland

An official from each of:
Corporate Affairs Directorate NHSME
Finance Directorate NHSME
Performance Management Directorate NHSME
[1] Members working in partnership.
Working Groups:
Chaired by Sir Bryan Askew, Chairman, Yorkshire Regional Health Authority
The reinforcement of public service values in the NHS.
Chaired by Dr. Stuart Burgess, Chairman, Oxford Regional Health Authority
Matching the role and functions of chairmen and non-executive directors with their part-time commitment.
Chaired by Mr. Michael Marchment, Chief Executive, Premier Health NHS Trust
The induction and training of chairmen, non-executive directors and Boards as a whole.
Chaired by Mr. Ken Punt, Senior Fellow and Head of Centre for Healthcare Financial Management, Health Services Management Unit, Manchester
The role of non-executive directors in finance and audit.
Time Scale
The task force will report to the NHS management executive by 31 December 1993.

Research Review

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects the report of the committee reviewing research in the London postgraduate special health authorities to be published; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The report of Sir Michael Thompson's committee is being published today. Copies are available in the Library. This review, which I announced in March, provides independent advice to Ministers. I thank Sir Michael and his review advisory committee for their findings which will be valuable in considering the future funding for the special health authorities. The findings will also be taken into account in considering the specialty reviews, the site option appraisals and other work currently in hand on the future of health care provision in London.

WALES

Police Stations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the police stations which were located in each local authority area of the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in the years *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is as follows:

Police stations—Clwyd

1992	*1985*	*1980*
	Alyn and Deeside	
Broughton	Broughton	Broughton
Buckley	Buckley	Buckley
Caergwrle	Caergwrle	Caergwrle
Coed-talon	Coed-talon	Coed-talon
Deeside	Deeside	Deeside
Hawarden	Hawarden	Hawarden
Penyffordd	Penyffordd	Penyffordd
Saltney	Saltney	Queensferry
Sandycroft	Sandycroft	Saltney
Sealand	Sealand	Sandycroft
—	—	Sealand
	Colwyn	
Abergele	Abergele	Abergele
Cerrigydrudion	Cerrigydrudion	Cerrigydrudion
Colwyn Bay	Colwyn Bay	Colwyn Bay
Llanddulas	Llanddulas	Llanddulas
Llanfair Talhaiarn	Llanfair Talhaiarn	Llanfair Talhaiarn
Llansannan	Llangernyw	Llangernyw
Llysfaen	Llansannan	Llansannan
Mochdre	Llysfaen	Llysfaen
Old Colwyn	Mochdre	Mochdre
Pensarn	Old Colwyn	Old Colwyn
Rhos on Sea	Pensarn	Pensarn
Towyn/Kinmel Bay	Pentrefoelas	Pentrefoelas
—	Rhos on Sea	Rhos on Sea
—	Towyn/Kinmel Bay	Towyn/Kinmel Bay
—	Trefnant	Trefnant
	Delyn	
Bagillt	Bagillt	Bagillt
Caerwys	Brynford	Brynford
Flint	Caerwys	Caerwys
Ffynnon Groew	Ffynnon Groew	Ffynnon Groew
Greenfield	Flint	Flint
Gronant	Greenfield	Greenfield
Halkyn	Gronant	Gronant
Mold	Gwernymynydd	Gwernymynydd
Mostyn	Halkyn	Halkyn
Nannerch	Holywell	Holywell
New Brighton	Mold	Lloc
Northop	Mostyn	Mold
Pentre Broughton	Nannerch	Mostyn
Rhydymwyn	New Brighton	Nannerch
—	Northop	New Brighton
—	Pentre Broughton	Northop
—	Rhydymwyn	Pentre Broughton
—	—	Rhydymwyn
	Glyndwr	
Chirk	Chirk	Chirk
Corwen	Clawddnewydd	Clawddnewydd
Denbigh	Corwen	Corwen
Glynceiriog	Denbigh	Denbigh
Llandegla	Froncysyllte	Froncysyllte
Llandrillo	Glynceiriog	Glynceiriog
Llandyrnog	Glyndyfrdwy	Glyndyfrdwy
Llanferres	Henllan	Henllan
Llangollen	Llandegla	Llandegla
Llanrhaeadr Y M	Llandrillo	Llandrillo
Ruthin	Llandyrnog	Llandyrnog
—	Llanfair D C	Llanfair D C
—	Llanferres	Llanferres
—	Llangollen	Llangollen
—	Llanrhaeadr Y M	Llanrhaeadr Y C
—	Llansilin	Llanrhaeadr Y M
—	Llantysilio	Llansilin
—	Nantglyn	Llantysilio
—	Ruthin	Nantglyn
—	—	Ruthin
	Rhuddlan	
Bodelwyddan	Bodelwyddan	Bodelwyddan
Dyserth	Dyserth	Dyserth
Meliden	Meliden	Meliden
Prestatyn	Prestatyn	Prestatyn
Rhuallt	Rhuallt	Rhuallt
Rhuddlan	Rhuddlan	Rhuddlan
Rhyl	Rhyl	Rhyl
St. Asaph	St. Asaph	St. Asaph
—	Trelawnyd	Trelawnyd
	Wrexham Maelor	
Acrefair	Acrefair	Acrefair
Bangor on Dee	Adwy	Adwy
Brymbo	Bangor on Dee	Bangor on Dee
Bwlchgwyn	Brymbo	Brymbo
Cefn Mawr	Bwlchgwyn	Bwlchgwyn
Coed-poeth	Cefn Mawr	Cefn Mawr
Garden Village	Coed-poeth	Coed-poeth
Gresford	Garden Village	Garden Village
Gwersyllt	Gresford	Gresford
Hanmer	Gwersyllt	Gwersyllt

1992	1985	1980
Holt	Hanmer	Hanmer
Johnstown	Holt	Holt
Llay	Johnstown	Johnstown
Marchwiel	Llay	Llay
Overton	Marchwiel	Marchwiel
Penycae	Overton	Overton
Rhosddu	Penycae	Penycae
Rhosllannerchrugog	Rhosddu	Rhosddu
Rhosnesni	Rhosllannerchrugog	Rhosllannerchrugog
Rhostyllen	Rhosnesni	Rhosnesni
Rossett	Rhostyllen	Rhostyllen
Ruabon	Rhosymedre	Rhosymedre
Southsea	Rossett	Rossett
Summerhill	Ruabon	Ruabon
Wrexham	Southsea	Southsea
—	Summerhill	Summerhill
—	Wrexham	Wrexham

Police stations—Gwynedd

1992	1985	1980
	Aberconwy	
Betws-y-coed	Betws-y-coed	Betws-y-coed
Conwy	Conwy	Conwy
Dolgarrog	Dolgarrog	Deganwy
Glan Conwy	Dolwyddelan	Dolgarrog
Llandudno	Eglwysbach	Dolwyddelan
Llandudno Junction	Glan Conwy	Eglwysbach
Llanfairfechan	Llandudno	Glan Conwy
Llanrwst	Llandudno Junction	Llandudno
Penmaenmawr	Llanfairfechan	Llandudno Junction
Penrhyn Bay	Llanrwst	Llanfairfechan
Trefriw	Penmachno	Llanrwst
	Penmaenmawr	Penmachno
	Penrhyn Bay	Penmaenmawr
	Trefriw	Penrhyn Bay
	Tynygroes	Trefriw
		Tynygroes
	Arfon	
Bangor	Bangor	Bangor
Bethesda	Bethesda	Bethesda
Bontnewydd	Bontnewydd	Bontnewydd
Caernarfon	Caernarfon	Caernarfon
Deiniolen	Deiniolen	Deiniolen
Llanberis	Llanberis	Groeslon
Llanrug	Llanrug	Llanberis
Maesgeirchen	Maesgeirchen	Llanllyfni
Penygroes	Penygroes	Llanrug
Port Dinorwig	Port Dinorwig	Llanwnda
Tregarth	Tregarth	Penygroes
Upper Bangor	Upper Bangor	Port Dinorwig
Waunfawr	Waunfawr	Rachub
		Tregarth
		Waunfawr
	Dwyfor	
Abersoch	Aberdaron	Aberdaron
Beddgelert	Abersoch	Abersoch
Criccieth	Beddgelert	Beddgelert
Llanaelhaiarn	Criccieth	Criccieth
Llanbedrog	Fourcrosses	Fourcrosses
Nefyn	Garn Dolbenmaen	Garn Dolbenmaen
Porthmadog	Llanaelhaiarn	Llanaelhaiarn
Pwllheli	Llanbedrog	Llanbedrog
	Morfa Nefyn	Morfa Nefyn
	Nefyn	Nefyn
	Porthmadog	Porthmadog
	Pwllheli	Pwllheli
	Meirionnydd	
Aberdovey	Aberdovey	Aberdovey
Bala	Bala	Abergynolwyn
Barmouth	Barmouth	Bala
Blaenau Ffestiniog	Blaenau Ffestiniog	Barmouth
Dolgellau	Dinas Mawddwy	Blaenau Ffestiniog
Dyffryn Ardudwy	Dolgellau	Corris
Harlech	Dyffryn Ardudwy	Dinas Mawddwy
Llwyngwril	Harlech	Dolgellau
Penrhyndeudraeth	Llanegryn	Dyffryn Ardudwy
Trawsfynydd	Llan Ffestiniog	Harlech
Tywyn	Llanuwchllyn	Llanegryn
	Llwyngwril	Llan Ffestiniog
	Maentwrog	Llanuwchllyn
	Pennal	Llwyngwril
	Penrhyndeudraeth	Maentwrog
	Trawsfynydd	Pennal
	Tywyn	Penrhyndeudraeth
		Trawsfynydd
		Tywyn
	Ynys Mon	
Aberffraw	Aberffraw	Aberffraw
Amlwch	Amlwch	Amlwch
Benllech	Beaumaris	Beaumaris
Brynsiencyn	Benllech	Benllech
Cemaes Bay	Brynsiencyn	Brynsiencyn
Gaerwen	Bodedern	Bodedern
Gwalchmai	Bodorgan	Bodorgan
Holyhead	Cemaes Bay	Cemaes Bay
Llanerchymedd	Gaerwen	Gaerwen
Llanfaerpwll	Gwalchmai	Gwalchmai
Llangefni	Holyhead	Holyhead
Menai Bridge	Llanerchymedd	Llanerchymedd
Newborough	Llanfaethlu	Llanfaethlu
Rhosneigr	Llanfairpwll	Llanfairpwll
Trearddur Bay	Llangefni	Llangefni
Valley	Llangoed	Llangoed
	Menai Bridge	Menai Bridge
	Newborough	Moelfre
	Pentraeth	Newborough
	Rhosneigr	Pentraeth
	Trearddur Bay	Rhosneigr
	Valley	Trearddur Bay
		Valley

Source: Police and Constabulary Almanac.

Abattoirs

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the abattoirs located in each local authority area of the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Redwood: Figures for 1980 are not available and information for 1982 has been listed as an alternative. Available information covers plants trading at any time in the years in question. Details for Gwynedd and Clwyd are as follows:

	1992	1985	1982
GWYNEDD			
(a) *Anglesey*			
McIntosh-Reynolds (formerly United Meat Packers), Gaerwen	—	—	x
Cig Mon (formerly Borthwicks) Llangefni	—	—	—
E. T. Jones, Lamia, Bodedern	—	—	—
Roberts, Corwas, Amlwch	—	—	—
(b) *Aberconwy*			
Conwy Valley Meats, Llanwrst[1]	—	—	—
(c) *Arfon*			
FMC, Caernarfon	—	—	—
(d) *Meirionydd*			
Tywyn Meat Co. Tywyn	—	—	—
Roberts & Jones, Blaenau Ffestiniog	—	—	—
Cae Iago, Ffestiniog	x	—	—

	1992	1985	1982
CLWYD			
(a) *Alyn & Deeside*			
Roberts, Pentre S/H, Treuddyn	—	—	—
Astons, Ichester Rd, Buckley	—	—	—
(b) *Colwyn*			
FMC, Mochdre	x	—	—
(c) *Delyn*			
T. Bellis, Strand Walk, Holywell, Delyn	x	x	—
(d) *Glyndŵr*			
Evans, Queens Building, Corwen,	—	—	—
Evans, Ty'n Llan, Llanrhaedr YM	—	—	—
Williams, 120 Vale Street, Denbigh	—	—	—
Jones, 92 Vale Street Denbigh	—	—	—
Halal Henllan slaughterhouse, Denbigh	—	—	—
(e) *Rhuddlan*			
Jones, Ywaen, St Asaph	—	—	—
Websters, 65 Ffordd Las, Rhyl	—	—	—
(f) *Wrexham Maelor*			
Thomas, Beech Avenue, Rhos	—	—	—
Jones, Stanstey Lodge, Wrexham	—	—	—
T. Bellis, Marchwiel slaughterhouse, Wrexham	—	—	—
Jones, Onnen Fawr Farm, Wrexham	—	—	—
Derick Blair, Overton on Dee	x	—	—

[1] 1982 and 1985 located at Betws-y-Coed

Farms (Plant and Machinery)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the level of investment in plant and machinery in farms in Wales at outturn and real prices in each year since 1986.

Mr. Redwood: The latest available information on the level of investment in plant and machinery on farms in Wales at outturn and real prices in each year since 1986 is as follows:

£ million

	Outturn prices	*1985 prices*
1986	29·0	29·4
1987	26·0	25·3
1988	27·0	23·9
1989	25·8	21·0
1990	27·9	21·7
1991	25·5	19·5

Public Houses

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many public houses were located in each local authority area in the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Redwood: The data given in the following table show the number of full on-licences and include public houses and other establishments. Information on the number of public houses is not collected centrally. The information is collated on a three-yearly basis and the figures given are for the nearest dates available to those requested. Information is available only by petty sessional divisions and not by local authority areas.

Number of On-Licences[1]

	30 June 1980	*30 June 1986*	*30 June 1992*
Gwynedd	497	534	570
Clwyd	710	740	764

[1] Premises licensed for the retail sale of intoxicating liquor, excluding restaurants, hotels and guest houses.
Source: Home Office Statistical Bulletin, on Liquor Licensing in England and Wales (Supplementary Tables).

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* chemist shops or pharmacies, *(b)* mobile libraries, *(c)* (i) post offices and (ii) post office counters, *(d)* public houses, *(e)* rural schools and *(f)* village halls there were in each local authority area in the county of Dyfed in (1) 1980, (2) 1985 and (3) 1992.

Mr. Redwood *[pursuant to his answer, 30 June 1993, c. 531-32]:* The information on the number of full on-licences which includes public houses and other establishments is given in the following table. The information is collated on a three-yearly basis and the figures given are for the nearest dates available to those requested.

Information is available only by petty sessional divisions and not by local authority areas.

Number of on-licences[1]

30 June	*Dyfed*
1980	985
1986	1,031
1992	1,074

[1] Premises licensed for the retail sale of intoxicating liquor, excluding restaurants, hotels and guest houses.
Source: Home Office Statistical Bulletin on Liquor Licensing in England and Wales (Supplementary Tables).

Fire Stations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the fire stations which were located in each local authority area of the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is given as follows. The list is the same for 1980, 1985 and 1992.

Gwynedd Fire Stations

Aberconwy: Llanfairfechan, Conwy, Llandudno, Llanwrst, Betwsy-y-coed
Arfon: Bangor, Caernarfon, Llanberis
Dwyfor: Pwllheli, Porthmadog, Nefyn, Abersoch
Meirionnydd: Blaenau Ffestiniog, Bala, Aberdyfi, Tywyn, Barmouth, Dolgellau, Harlech
Anglesey: Holyhead, Rhosneigr, Llangefni, Amlwch, Benllech, Beaumaris, Menai Bridge

Clwyd Fire Stations

Alyn and Deeside: Deeside, Buckley
Colwyn: Colwyn Bay, Abergele, Cerrigydruddion
Delyn: Holywell, Flint, Mold
Glyndwr: Denbigh, Ruthin, Chirk, Corwen, Llangollen
Rhuddlan: Rhyl, St. Asaph, Prestatyn
Wrexham Maelor: Wrexham, Johnstown

Livestock Markets

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the local livestock markets located in each local authority area in the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Redwood: The information is as follows.

1980
Gwynedd

Aberconwy
Llanwrwst
Talycafn

Dwyfor
Bryncir
Sarn
Pwllheli

Meirionnydd
Dolgellau
Bala

Ynys Môn
Gaerwen
Llangefni
Menai Bridge
Valley

1985
Gwynedd

Aberconwy
Llanrwst
Talycafn

Dwyfor
Bryncir
Sarn
Pwllheli

Meirionnydd
Dolgellau
Bala

Ynys Môn
Gaerwen
Llangefni
Valley

1992
Gwynedd

Aberconwy
Llanwrst
Talycafn

Dwyfor
Bryncir
Sarn

Meirionnydd
Dolgellau
Bala

Ynys Môn
Gaerwen
Llangefni
1980
Clwyd

Colwyn
Abergele

Delyn
Mold

Glyndwr
Denbigh
Llanrhaeadr Ym Mochnant
Ruthin
Corwen

Rhuddlan
St. Asaph

Wrexham Maelor
Wrexham

1985
Clwyd

Colwyn
Abergele

Delyn
Mold

Glyndwr
Denbigh
Ruthin
Corwen

Rhuddlan
St. Asaph

Wrexham Maelor
Wrexham

1992
Clwyd

Colwyn
Abergele

Delyn
Mold

Glyndwr
Ruthin
Corwen

Rhuddlan
St. Asaph

Wrexham Maelor
Wrexham

Job Centres

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the job centre offices located in each local authority area in the counties of Gwynned and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is shown in the following list, by district, for December 1992. In December 1985 and December 1980 there was no office at Dolgellau (Meirionnydd), but in December 1980 there was an additional office at Bethesda (Arfon).

Job Centre offices: December 1992

GWYNEDD
Aberconwy
Conwy
Llandudno
Llanwrst

Arfon
Bangor
Caernarfon
Penygroes

Dwyfor
Porthmadog
Pwllheli

Meirionnydd
Barmouth
Dollgellau
Blaenau Ffestiniog

Ynys Mon
Amlwch
Beumaris

Holyhead
Llangefni

CLWYD
Alyn and Deeside
Shotton
Buckley

Colwyn
Colwyn Bay

Delyn
Flint
Holywell
Mold

Glyndwr
Denbigh
Llangollen

Rhuddlan
Rhyl
Prestatyn

Wrexham Maelor
Cefnmawr
Wrexham
Source: Employment Department

Post Offices

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* post offices and *(b)* post office counters there were in each local authority area in the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is not readily available centrally.

Theatre Education

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received regarding the future of theatre in education provision.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Up to 7 July 38 representations have been received regarding theatre in education.

Low Pay

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the percentage change in income for the lowest-paid 10 per cent. of the population in Wales between 1979 and 1991.

Mr. Redwood: The new earnings survey estimates that, in 1979, 10 per cent. of full-time male employees in Wales earned below £60·10 per week gross with 10 per cent of female employees earning below £39·70 per week. The corresponding figures for 1991 were £147·90 and £114·10 per week: increases of 146 and 187 per cent. over 1979 levels for males and females respectively.

Nuclear Fuel Transport

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he holds with British Rail on the level of repair and maintenance of the railway lines which serve nuclear plants in Wales and are used for transport of spent nuclear fuel.

Sir Wyn Roberts: None. British Rail has assured Ministers that essential repair and maintenance work will be undertaken on all routes.

Radon

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date his Department asked the National Radiological Protection Board to start detailed survey work on radon levels in homes in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Contract arrangements for further systematic research across Wales and at district level will be finalised shortly.

Brynglas Tunnels

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of traffic flows between the M4 intersection in Newport that will follow the completion of the work on the Brynglas tunnels relief scheme.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The estimated annual average daily traffic flows on the M4 motorway between junctions 25 (Caerleon) and 26 (Malpas), after completion of the Brynglas scheme, is 55,000 vehicles.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

G7 Science Ministers

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met the other G7 Science Ministers to discuss Government support for science; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I last met my colleagues from the G7 countries in Canada on the weekend of 21 to 23 May. We discussed international co-operation in science and a number of issues of common interest.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

"Gamekeepers' Code"

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what examination has been made of the paragraphs in the leaflets by the British Association of Shooting and Conservation entitled "Gamekeepers' Code, July 1992" concerning the use of poisons and gases for killing wild animals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I am unaware of a British Association for Shooting and Conservation publication entitled "The Gamekeepers' Code" printed in July 1992. I believe the hon. Member may be confusing this with a BASC publication of the same name printed in July 1982. My officials have recently been in touch with the BASC to discuss certain sections of this code; they have been advised that this publication was withdrawn from circulation three years ago and that the BASC is making every attempt to ensure that any copies still in the public domain are removed from circulation as quickly as possible. The code has now been superseded by the advisory publication, "Pests and Predators and their Control", issued in January 1990.

Embryotomy

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what studies have been carried out over the last 10 years by the state veterinary service or the Farm Animal Welfare Committee into the practice of embryotomy; and if he will make a statement;

(2) further to his answer of 22 April to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), *Official Report*, column *196*, what statistics he has as to the number of embryotomies carried out during the lambing season in the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: As explained in my reply to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on 22 April, I am not aware of any evidence that embryotomy is carried out on live unborn lambs. The matter will however be considered by the Farm Animal Welfare Council during its current review of sheep farming.

Sea Fish (Conservation) Act

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will seek a moratorium on the implementation of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 until the other EC countries have enacted similar legislation and established appropriate enforcement machinery.

Mr. Jack: The aim of these restrictions in general terms will be to limit vessels to their 1991 level of activity. I confirmed that vessels permitted days at sea would not be reduced below these levels unless and until we and Parliament were satisfied.

Comfrey

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations she has received concerning the availability of comfrey.

Mr. Soames: I have received representations from the Society for the Promotion of Nutritional Therapy and the Action Group for the Relief of Pain and Distress about the recent decision to seek the withdrawal from sale of certain comfrey products containing the highest levels of toxic alkaloids.

I reiterate that this action was taken on the basis of unequivocal recommendations from the independent expert scientific committees that advise Ministers on food safety issues.

Essex Coast

Dr. Spink: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she expects to be able to make a statement about the proposed Essex coast environmentally sensitive area; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: We expect to make an announcement on the proposed Essex coast environmentally sensitive area and five other new ESAs at the end of this month or the start of next month.

Fisheries (Legal Action)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the budget allocation to her legal department for fishery matters including prosecutions in each year since 1989.

Mr. Jack: There is no separate budget allocation in the legal department for fishery matters.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 2 February, column *133* and, more generally, to the announcement which I made in the course of the debate on the fishing vessels decommissioning scheme on 7 July, column *413*.

Fishery Protection Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* oral and *(b)* written warnings were given by Her Majesty's fishery protection vessels to *(b)* British and *(b)* foreign vessels in each year since 1982 and in the first three months of 1993.

Mr. Jack: Full details of warnings issued before 1988 are not available. Formal oral warnings which have been issued and recorded in Scotland are being replaced by written warnings. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland informal oral warnings are given for extremely minor offences and not recorded. Details of warnings issued to United Kingdom and foreign registered vessels from 1988 are as follows:

Year	*United Kingdom*		*Foreign*	
	oral Scotland	*written*	*oral Scotland*	*written*
1988	30	99	16	24
1989	30	16	18	48
1990	54	83	8	34
1991	90	159	3	61
1992	48	161	22	48
1993	10	158	1	10

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many foreign fishing vessels were prosecuted as a result of actions by the United Kingdom's fishery protection force in each year from 1982 and in the first three months of 1993.

Mr. Jack: The number of foreign fishing vessels prosecuted as a result of actions by the United Kingdom's fishery protection force in each year from 1983 and in the first three months of 1993 is as follows. Complete figures are not available for 1982.

Prosecutions of foreign vessels

	Number
1983	14
1984	26
1985	29
1986	38
1987	43
1988	55
1989	53
1990	35
1991	45
1992	28
1993	7

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are taken to check for secret fish holds when foreign fishing vessels are boarded by Her Majesty's fishery protection vessels; in what circumstances the ships' plans are inspected on boarding; and how many vessels in each year since 1990 and in 1993 to date have been unable to provide these plans.

Mr. Jack: Fishery protection officers check for any indications of secret fish holds as a matter of routine. Fish

room plans are checked against actual dimensions where there is any suspicion of irregularities. At present records of vessels unable to produce fish room plans are not maintained.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what record is kept of oral and written warnings given by Her Majesty's fishery protection vessels to foreign vessels; whether such warnings are cited in subsequent prosecutions; and how many vessels and skippers given written warnings have subsequently been prosecuted for other fishing offences.

Mr. Jack: In the United Kingdom full records are kept of all written warnings and records of oral warnings are also kept in Scotland. Such warnings are cited in subsequent prosecutions wherever it is relevant and legally permissible to do so. Since 1991 after receiving a written warning one skipper of a foreign vessel has been prosecuted for a different offence.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what notification is given to *(a)* the EC Commission, *(b)* home Government and *(c)* EC fishing enforcement forces when foreign vessels have been successfully prosecuted for fishing offences in British waters; what control register of offenders is kept; and what report is made to the Department of Transport registration authorities when United Kingdom-registered foreign vessels are involved.

Mr. Jack: Upon completion of a court case against a foreign vessel the Commission and the home Government are notified by telex of the details of the case including the offence and the penalties imposed. This information is available to the EC inspectorate. Records are held of both offences and prosecutions.

No report is given to the Department of Transport in respect of fisheries offences.

Ammonium Ferric Hexacyanoferrate

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration she is currently giving to spraying parts of the United Kingdom still contaminated by radioactive fallout from the Chernobyl disaster with the chemical ammonium ferric hexacyanoferrate; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Technical studies to evaluate the potential of chemical treatments, including ammonium ferric hexacyanoferrate, for reducing radiocaesium in the vegetation of upland pasture are currently under way on two sites in Cumbria and Wales, as part of the Department's programme of post-Chernobyl research and development. In the light of the results of the studies, the practicability of using these treatments in the Cumbrian restricted area will be assessed.

Foreign Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many foreign fishing vessels were reported to his Department with a recommendation for prosecution in the first six months of 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993; and how many of these were prosecuted or are under consideration for prosecution.

Mr. Jack: The number of foreign fishing vessels recommended for prosecution in the first six months of 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993, and the number of those prosecuted is as follows:

Year (first six months only)	*Recommendations for Prosecution*	*Prosecutions*
1990	13	13
1991	18	18
1992	11	10
1993	6	6

Prosecutions of foreign vessels usually take place within three days of the recommendation, hence there are no cases of foreign vessels under consideration for prosecution.

Meat Imports

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are being taken to ensure that meat imported into the United Kingdom from outside the EC meets EC standards.

Mr. Soames: Such imports must comply with United Kingdom meat hygiene and animal health rules implementing EC directives and decisions, including requirements for veterinary certification and health marking. The meat may be imported only at specific border inspection posts where, by or under the supervision of an official veterinary surgeon, all consignments must receive a documentary check, with a proportion also receiving identity and physical checks.

United Kingdom Wine

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are being taken to promote United Kingdom-produced wine in overseas markets; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The Government promote exports of English and Welsh wine vigorously. The Prime Minister himself served English wine at a G7 summit. It was also served at various functions during the United Kingdom Presidency of the EC. Seven English wines were available at the British pavilion at the Spanish Expo '92 in Seville. In addition Food From Britain and its export arm, the British Food Export Council, are keen to promote English and Welsh wines both at home and abroad and they can provide expert resources to help the industry.

We are also sympathetic to the wish of the English Vineyards Association to improve the marketing of English wine by the introduction of a new scheme for regional wine, and for new names for the wines.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the amount of wine produced by United Kingdom vineyards in each year since 1987; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The annual production of wine produced from fresh grapes grown in the United Kingdom since 1987 is as follows:

Year	*Hectolitres*
1987	5,000
1988	4,110
1989	21,447

Year	Hectolitres
1990	14,442
1991	15,429
1992	26,428

North East Salmon Drift Net Fishery

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made towards the phasing out of the north-east salmon drift net fishery; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The National Rivers Authority recently made a new net limitation order which places further restrictions on the number of licences that could be issued for drift netting for salmon off the coasts of Yorkshire and Northumbria, and largely prohibited the reallocation of surrendered licences. The order took effect on 22 January. I understand that, to date, 124 drift net licences have been issued for the 1993 season under the new arrangements. This compares with 143 drift net licences issued in 1992. A further five licences have been offered to eligible applicants but have not yet been taken up. One application is still under consideration.

Beef Exports

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much domestically produced United Kingdom beef has been exported overseas in each year since 1987.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 8 July 1993]:* The information requested is set out in the table:

Year	'000 Tonnes
1987	176
1988	119
1989	138
1990	113
1991	121
1992	126

Source: Customs and Excise Trade Statistics

Food Exports

Mr. Booth: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives she is taking to stimulate food exports.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 8 July 1993]:* Ministers have held export seminars with some 140 companies to discuss what the Government can do to encourage their export performance. We are committed to supporting Food From Britain in its export promotion activities and are considering the report by Mr. Dennis Stevenson into FFB's work. In addition, we work closely with Government Departments in their efforts to improve industry's export performance; we undertake ministerial trade missions; and we support British efforts at overseas trade fairs.

Sea Defences

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are being taken to improve sea defences around Britain; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 8 July 1993]:* Responsibility for flood defence and coast protection policy in England lies with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and in Wales and Scotland with the respective Departments. Grant aid is available for capital schemes which meet technical, environmental and economic criteria and in 1992-93 grant of £45 million was paid by the three Departments towards the improvement of coastal defences in Great Britain.

Following a recent survey of sea defences against flooding in England and Wales, carried out by the National Rivers Authority, defences identified as requiring significant work have been attended to or are in the process of being restructured or repaired. The Ministry and the Welsh Office are currently undertaking surveys of coast protection defences against erosion in England and Wales and the results will be used in planning future investment in defences.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Tourist Resorts (Benefits)

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment his Department has made of the special problems faced by tourist resorts with regard to the numbers of claimants of DSS benefits.

Mr. Burt: Although the Government recognise that there will be a number of benefit recipients included among the many visitors to tourist resorts, they are not persuaded that it is desirable or practicable to restrict the movement of unemployed people. The free movement of people around the country is an essential feature of an efficient labour market.

In all parts of the country the Employment Service assesses whether or not unemployed people are entitled to the benefits they are claiming, in accordance with social security legislation. Benefit is paid only where the conditions of entitlement are satisfied.

The housing benefit scheme requires local authorites to refuse benefit wherever they feel that a tenancy has been created with the intention of taking advantage of the scheme. This provision is designed to give local authorities a wider power to apply in cases of such abuse whether by landlords, tenants or both in collusion.

Invalidity Pensions

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what considerations underlie the choice of 1 April 1992 as the date from which revised decisions on payment of invalidity pension will apply.

Mr. Scott: 1 April 1992 is the date of a decision by a social security commissioner (decision CS 27/91) concerning the rate of invalidity benefit payable to women on reaching state pension age, and is the earliest date from which similar cases may be reviewed by an adjudication officer.

Invalidity Benefit

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many payments have been made for increased invalidity benefit to men whose wives earn under £80·70 per week since 15 April; and how this new rate of benefit has been publicised.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

For most invalidity benefit recipients who have been receiving payment continuously from a date prior to 16 September 1985, payment of an adult dependency increase ceases altogether when the dependent's earnings are £80·70 or more per week. This amount increases at each uprating and is notified to every beneficiary by issue of a form with the first payment of the uprated amount.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to equalise women's entitlement to invalidity benefit.

Mr. Scott: At present we have no plans to do so. However, as the hon. Member is aware there is a current court case concerning the rate of invalidity benefit payable to women on reaching state pension age, the outcome of which is awaited.

Child Support

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance his Department issues to the Child Support Agency on the eligible expenses that self-employed fathers can offset against their income when an assessment is made.

Mr. Burt: The relevant guidance by the chief child support officer is contained in part 4 of the Child Support Adjudication Guide, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy not to include the income of the wife when the Child Support Agency assesses the contribution her husband must take towards maintaining the children of a previous marriage.

Mr. Burt: Assessment of child support maintenance is based on a parent's own income and essential expenditure. Details of a wife's income are needed for two aspects of the assessment, as follows:

(i.) to assess whether the wife can contribute towards the support of any child of the couple themselves; and

(ii.) to assess whether maintenance payable by the husband for the children of the previous marriage should be *reduced* below the assessed level to avoid his second family's resources falling below a prescrived level.

We have no plans to change this.

Pensioners

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what proportion of recently retired pensioner couples receive income of at least (i) £30 and (ii) £89·90 a week from *(a)* an occupational pension, *(b)* income from savings and *(c)* both occupational pension and income from savings;

(2) what proportion of pensioner couples receive income of at least (i) £30 and (ii) £89·90 a week from *(a)* an occupational pension, *(b)* income from savings and *(c)* both occupational pension and income from savings;

(3) what proportion of single pensioners receive income of at least (i) £20 and (ii) £56·10 a week from *(a)* an occupational pension, *(b)* income from savings and *(c)* both occupational pension and income from savings;

(4) what proportion of recently retired single pensioners receive income of at least (i) £20 and (ii) £56·10 a week from *(a)* an occupational pension, *(b)* income from savings and *(c)* both occupational pension and income from savings.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is in the tables.

Table 1—The proportion of pensioner couples with income from occupational pensions and savings in excess of (i) £30 per week and (ii) the level of the basic state pension (1989)

	Percentage with income from		
	Occupational pensions	*Savings*	*Occupational pensions and savings*
All pensioner couples			
Of at least £30 per week	39	24	54
Of at least £69·80 per week	20	12	32
Recently retired pensioner couples			
Of at least £30 per week	41	25	54
Of at least £69·80 per week	21	12	33

Table 2—The proportion of single pensioners with income from occupational pensions and savings of at least (i) £20 per week and (ii) the level of the basic state pension (1989)

	Percentage with income from		
	Occupational pensions	*Savings*	*Occupational pensions and savings*
All single pensioners			
Of at least £20 per week	24	17	33
Of at least £43·60 per week	15	9	21
Recently retired single pensioners			
Of at least £20 per week	29	21	41
Of at least £43·60 per week	19	13	24

Notes:

1. Pensioner units are defined single people over state pension age and couples in which the husband is over state pension age. Recently retired pensioner units are defined as single men aged 65-69, single women aged 60-64 and couples in which the husband is aged 65-69.

2. Figures are based on data from the Family Expenditure Survey of 1989, which is the latest year for which estimates are available. Amounts are in 1989 prices.

3. £43·60 per week was the standard rate of Category A pension payable for the greater part of 1989, and £69·80 per week was the amount payable to a couple entitled to full Category A and Category B pensions.

Private Care Homes

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the details of his Department's implementation of the decision announced by the social security commissioner on 14 October 1992 relating to the eligibility for income support in respect of older people transferred from hospitals to private nursing homes.

Mr. Burt: The chief adjudication officer and the Secretary of State have appealed to the Court of Appeal against the commissioner's decision CIS/23/92 and the case is expected to be heard shortly. In the meantime, payment of the benefit awarded in the decision has been suspended.

Housing Benefit

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to cut the housing benefit taper from 65 per cent.

Mr. Burt: We have no such plans.

Order Books

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is taking to make order books more secure.

Mr. Lilley: As a further important step in our campaign against fraud, I am introducing a new-style order book later this week. The new design will incorporate a number of significant new measures designed to prevent fraud and abuse, including complex features such as more secure watermarks, colour printing and other design properties which make illicit colour copying more difficult.

Benefits

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of males 60 years and over and below 65 years who receive benefit, other than unemployed benefit or those relating to ill health.

Mr. Burt: In May 1992, 127,000 males aged 60 to 64 were in receipt of income support or family credit.

Notes:

1. Sources:
   (i) Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry 1992.
   (ii) Family Credit Statistical Sample.
2. Information on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit is not available in the form requested.
3. The reply relates to income-related benefits only, excluding Disability Working Allowance.
4. Some of those included in the above figure may be in receipt of the Income Support disability premium.

Incomes

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the increase in real average income before and after housing costs, for each decile group from 50 per cent. upwards, in the upper half of the population between 1979 and the latest date available.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) on 8 July at columns *215-16*.

Benefits (Costs)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what work has been undertaken by the Government Actuary in relation to the projected cost of social security benefits up to 2000.

Mr. Scott: The figures in "The Growth of Social Security" include amounts based on projections made by the Government Actuary. The actuary also provides advice, comments and financial estimates pertaining to other aspects of the social security review.

Disability Allowances

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the effect on the backlog of processing claimants' applications for disability living and working allowances of the accidental cutting through of the cables operating at his Department's headquarters near Blackpool on 6 May.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from George Bardwell to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 9 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is Michael Bichard's responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. As he is out of Leeds on Benefits Agency business I am replying on his behalf to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking if he will make a statement on the effect on the backlog of processing claimants applications for disability and working allowances of the accidental cutting through the cables operating at his Department's headquarters near Blackpool on 6 May.

I understand that British Telecom engineers accidentally cut through telephone cables and affected some telephones at our offices at Warbreck House, Blackpool. The situation was rectified within a matter of hours though and I am not aware of any significant delay to claim processing because of it.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 13 July 1993

HEALTH

Hospital Doctors

Ms Primarolo: To answer the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 23 June, *Official Report*, column *177* if she will make a statement outlining the existing advocacy role of hospital doctors.

Dr. Mawhinney: The hospital doctor's role is to provide effective health care for each of the patients entrusted to his or her care taking account of available resources.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information is available to her Department about the numbers and circumstances of children who are indirectly affected by HIV and AIDS because their parents or carers are infected with the virus; and what assessment her Department has made of the extent of support likely to be required for the children if they cannot be cared for by their parent or parents;

(2) what guidance she has issued as to the information on which social services departments should base their plans for the support or provision of care for children who are indirectly affected by HIV or AIDS because of the illness of their parents or carers.

Mr. Sackville: So far as numbers of children indirectly affected by HIV are concerned, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 12 July 1993, at column *378*.

The Children Act 1989 and the guidance and regulations associated with it set out local authorities' duties towards children in need. For services for children both infected and affected by HIV or AIDS this is supplemented by "Children and HIV" which gives detailed guidance to local authorities to assist them in planning and providing services. The guidance encourages HIV awareness amongst service providers, and describes good practice.

The Children Act and associated guidance and regulations provide a policy framework through which local authorities, in collaboration with other agencies, can develop comprehensive plans for all children in need in their locality.

Copies of these documents will be placed in the Library.

Emergency Admissions

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of emergency admissions to hospitals in each health authority in England in 1990-91.

Mr. Sackville: The information from the hospital episodes statistics is not yet available. The collection of the management information on non-elective admissions in the general and acute specialties given in my reply to the hon. Member on 28 June at col. *352*, did not begin until April 1991.

GP Fund Holders

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will review the procedure where general practitioner fund holders extend their role by undertaking services such as physiotherapy currently provided by community hospitals so that these services are not put in jeopardy for the majority of service users leading to a knock on adverse effect on the other services provided at the local hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: General practitioner fundholders, like district health authorities, are responsible for obtaining high quality health care for their patients in the most effective way. The challenge for provider units is to develop services which meet the needs of purchasers and patients.

Census, Lambeth

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what supplementary inquiries and research and other work was carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys to supplement the census return in Lambeth and to obtain additional information about numbers and details of persons whose details ought to appear as part of the census.

Mr. Sackville: Census enumerators had the task of locating, contacting, and delivering census forms to all households and communal establishments in their areas. Census statistics have been derived principally from the completed forms. Where enumerators located households they believed to be present on census night, but were not able to contact people in them, the numbers and details of the people and households concerned have been estimated and included in the census statistics. Households identified by enumerators as absent on census night were asked to fill in a census form voluntarily on their return. For those who did not complete a form, numbers and details have been estimated and included in the census statistics.

A census validation survey was carried out shortly after the census to check on its quality and coverage. This survey compared information given on census forms with that obtained by experienced interviewers who re-visited a sample of addresses. The sample was not large enough, however, to provide information directly about individual authorities. A report on the survey's findings on coverage will be published later this year.

In preparing the Registrar General's mid-1991 population estimates, allowances were made for under-enumeration in the census, using results from the census validation survey and all other relevant sources. For individual local authorities these adjustments are inevitably less precise than at the national level.

Dental Treatment

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to issue clear advice to people requiring dental treatment of their entitlement to free treatment under the NHS; if she will instruct family health services authorities to provide up-to-date information about the dental services available locally; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Under their terms of service, dentists are required to display prominently at their practices a

notice supplied by the family health services authority—FHSA—indicating entitlement to exemption from and remission of national health service dental charges. Leaflets are available from family doctors and dentists and Benefits Agency offices explaining NHS dental treatment and how people may be entitled to free treatment or help with the cost. Copies of these leaflets will be placed in the Library.

FHSAs are responsible for maintaining up-to-date lists of the dentists providing NHS treatment in their localities. The list contains information about the days and hours the dentist is available at the practice, as well as the services offered.

Smoking

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by whom the review, proposed in The "The Health of the Nation" White Paper, of the possible legal control of the use of additives and emission of toxic substances from cigarettes was instituted; who is conducting the review; and which organisations and individuals have been invited to submit their views.

Mr. Sackville: The review will be established in due course.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards achieving the targets for reducing smoking prevalence to 20 per cent. of adults by 2000, and by 33 per cent. of 11 to 15-year-olds by 1994.

Mr. Sackville: The results of the biennial survey of adult smoking in 1990 gave levels of 31 per cent. for men and 29 per cent. for women and these were taken as the base for "The Health of the Nation" target. The results of the 1992 survey are not yet available.

The base figure for children's smoking—8 per cent.—is that reported in the 1988 Office of Population Censuses and Surveys biennial survey of smoking among secondary schoolchildren. The 1990 survey showed a level of 10 per cent. but the general trend will not be known until the results of the 1992 survey are available late this year.

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the expected reduction in the consumption of cigarettes as a result of the increase in excise duty announced in the Chancellor's last Budget; and what would be the expected aggregated reduction in consumption were the same increase in real terms to be repeated at each successive Budget up to and including 2000.

Mr. Sackville: The consumption of cigarettes would be expected to reduce by between 1 per cent. and 2 per cent. as a result of the March 1993 Budget increase in tobacco taxation, assuming no change in other factors. The aggregated reduction in consumption if the same increase were repeated in each Budget up to and including the year 2000 would be expected to be in the range 9 per cent. to 18 per cent.

Health Care Plans

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will issue guidelines to require that draft health care commissioning plans on which consultation with community health councils are held include *(a)* the present state of the service, *(b)* the proposed changes and *(c)* the effect of the proposed changes on the existing service and to require that all plans should be in plain English and in other languages where appropriate; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Current guidance, EL(93)10, a copy of which is available in the Library, already requires health authorities to undertake formal consultation when local health services are under review and it is recommended that they should ensure that black, Asian and other minority groups are enabled to play a full part in that process.

Mental Health Services

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has for collecting gender-specific information about use of mental health services for her review of information requirements in mental health services.

Mr. Bowis: Data collected on the use of services include information by gender when appropriate.

Contraceptives

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has a proposed timetable for the extension of the limited list to include contraceptives.

Mr. Sackville: The Advisory Committee on National Health Service Drugs has started to look at contraceptives and will be approaching manufacturers for information about individual products. We expect that they will complete this review by the end of this year.

Cosmetic Treatment

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the annual cost to the health service of (1) cosmetic treatment and surgery and (2) operations to remove tattoos; and how much is received from patients towards the cost of such treatments and surgery.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Community Care

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has any plans to revise the guidelines given to local authority social services departments concerning the escalation of unmet need resulting from the implementation of community care.

Mr. Bowis: No such guidlines have been issued.

Pharmaceutical Industry

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to improve consultation between her Department and the pharmaceutical industry.

Mr. Sackville: We established earlier this year a pharmaceutical industry strategy working group consisting of representatives of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) and senior officials from

the Department of Health, the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry with the terms of reference:

"To consider jointly the future development of the pharmaceutical industry in the UK, its contribution to the UK economy and its role in the provision of health care; and in particular to consider issues of common interest such as the provision of affordable health care and the encouragement of a strong pharmaceutical industry."

In addition, officials consult regularly with the ABPI and individual companies on specific issues of mutual interest.

Female GPs

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated percentage of female patients who have access to a female general practitioner; and what percentage of general practitioner partnerships have a female general practitioner.

Dr. Mawhinney: At 1 April 1992—the latest date for which the figures are available—approximately 68 per cent. of female patients in England were registered with general practitioners in partnerships which included a female general practitioner; 53 per cent. of general practitioner partnerships had at least one female partner.

Child Migrants Trust

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) of 26 April, *Official Report*, column *278*, if Her Majesty's Government will now make it their policy to provide additional funding for the Child Migrants Trust; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Funds for the year 1993-94 are fully allocated and include a grant for the Child Migrants Trust. Decisions about funding for future years will be taken when the Department knows what resources are available and what the competing demands for funds are.

Paediatric Services

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the units that provide training for paediatric nurses.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Health Education Authority

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how she intends to secure the continued value and effectiveness of the Health Education Authority; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The White Paper "The Health of the Nation"—Cm 1986—makes clear the important part to be played by the Health Education Authority (HEA) in achieving the targets for improvements in people's health set in that health strategy. It also emphasises that, complementing the HEA's national role, health authorities throughout England have a key responsibility for health promotion among their local populations. Last December, we approved the HEA's strategy for 1993 to 1998 to carry forward its role in "The Health of the Nation", which includes closer co-ordination with health authorities and other local agencies.

To help achieve these aims, and to ensure the continued effectiveness of the HEA, we have decided—with the agreement of its chairman, Sir Donald Maitland—to carry out a review with the following terms of reference:

"To consider the future role, responsibilities and functioning of the Health Education Authority, taking account of developments since it was established in 1987, notably:

- the new structure of the NHS;
- the 1992 White Paper "The Health of the Nation" and its programme for a long term health strategy;
- the development of Government policy on market testing and contracting out;
- the need for cost-effectiveness;

and to report to the Secretary of State for Health."

The review team will be led by Mr. John Lee—chairman, The Christie NHS Trust, Manchester and formerly a Minister in the Department of Employment.

The other members will be:

- Mrs. Terry Banks—former director of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys;
- Mr. Tonie Gibson—former newspaper editor and chairman of the Peterborough district health authority 1982 to 1992;
- Dr. Bob Haward—regional director of public health, Yorkshire regional health authority.

We expect the review to be completed in November.

Pharmacies

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she is taking to protect from closure small pharmacies in rural and suburban areas which deal with many fewer than 2,000 prescriptions per month.

Dr. Mawhinney: Discussions are continuing with the pharmacists' representatives about how best to restructure fees to encourage better services for patients and improve value for money. In these discussions we have made it clear that we remain committed to ensuring that patients in rural and suburban areas continue to enjoy reasonable access to a local pharmacy.

Homicides

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many homicides involved *(a)* shotguns and *(b)* other firearms in each year since 1979; and how many involved people under 16 years.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 7 July 1993]:* The information relating to registered deaths is shown in table 1.

For further information, the Coroners (Amendment) Rules 1977 now allow for death registration in cases where an inquest is adjourned because a person has been charged with an offence in connection with the death; these cases are known as accelerated registrations. The correct external cause of injury, for example, "Assault by firearms and explosives" cannot, however, except in those cases relating to transport accidents, be determined until any criminal proceedings are concluded. Consequently, all non-transport accelerated registrations are assigned to the external cause of injury code E988.8—injury by other specified means, undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted—until results of proceedings are known and the death can be reassigned to the correct external cause code—E code.

Homicides are one of the categories most affected by this legislation. Accordingly, for each of the years 1979-92 there are a number of deaths that are the result of the use

of a firearm but which as a consequence of the rules do not appear in table 1. Table 2 shows the number of deaths assigned—at the outcome of criminal proceedings—to a broad group of causes which includes "Assault by firearms and explosives". It is not, however, possible to specifically identify those deaths which were the consequence of the use of a firearm, or those deaths where the person was a child under the age of 16 years without incurring disproportionate cost.

Table 1
Numbers of registered deaths from homicides involving firearms (ICD E965) in England and Wales, 1979 to 1992

Year	Shotgun (E965·1)		Handguns (E965·0)		Hunting rifle (E965·2)		Military firearm (E965·3)		Other firearm (E965·4)		Total excluding shotguns		Total including shotguns	
	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s	All ages	Under 16s
1979	19	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	3	18	3	37	5
1980	6	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	13	0	19	0
1981	3	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	5	0	10	0	13	0
1982	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	2	16	2	26	2
1983	21	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	1	13	1	34	3
1984	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	4	31	4	43	4
1985	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	15	0	23	2
1986	17	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	28	7	29	7	46	7
1987	9	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	30	2	32	2	41	2
1988	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	16	0	28	0
1989	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	10	0	18	0
1990	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	2	17	2	27	2
1991	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	15	0	27	0
1992	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	5	24	5	34	5

Table 2. Causes to which accelerated registrations in injury by other specified means, undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted (ICD E988.8) were eventually assigned, 1980-90 England and Wales

Year	Other accidental deaths E880 to E928	Suicide and self-inflicted injury E950 to E959	Assault by firearms and explosives E965	Injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted E980 to E989
1980	1	—	1	2
1981	1	—	10	—
1982	3	—	12	—
1983	3	—	9	—
1984	1	—	14	—
1985	—	—	12	—
1986	1	—	9	—
1987	2	1	19	—
1988	3	—	14	—
1989	—	—	8	1
1990	1	—	9	—

Figures for 1979, 1991 and 1992 are not readily available.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients had waited for treatment for over a year in the North Western region *(a)* in March 1991 and *(b)* in the latest month for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville *[pursuant to his reply, 4 May 1993, c. 41]:* I regret that there was an error in my previous reply. The last sentence should read

"in England over the same period, the number waiting over a year fell by 55 per cent. to 72,446—the lowest figure ever recorded".

ENVIRONMENT

Limehouse Link Road

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who funded the dance which took place in celebration of the opening of the Limehouse link road on 17 May in the Canary Wharf tower; and what was the full cost of this event.

Sir George Young: The London Docklands development corporation provided a reception in the Canary Wharf tower for staff involved in the Limehouse link project who were not able to attend the opening ceremony. The total cost of the reception was approximately £3,500.

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the full cost, including security arrangements, of the opening ceremony for the Limehouse link road on 17 May.

Sir George Young: A total of £64,000. The main costs were for the hire of a marquee, catering, toilets, stands, the parade, plaques and presentation plates.

Construction Industry

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he is providing to the task force on deregulation in the construction industry; and what assessment he has made of the effect of removing building regulations on reducing carbon dioxide emissions, improving energy conservation and ensuring health and safety in buildings.

Mr. Baldry: Officials in my Department have met members of the task force on deregulation in the construction industry, and have provided them with details of the Building Regulations 1991 and the proposals to amend parts L and F. All proposed changes to the Building Regulations are fully assessed before implementation.

Urban Development Grants

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessments urban development corporations are required to make of the competence of the companies to which they give grants.

Mr. Baldry: Urban development corporations are required to assess the ability of companies to carry through the project concerned; their financial viability; and their track record in undertaking similar projects.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines are issued to board members of urban development corporations governing conflict of interest.

Mr. Baldry: Board members are issued with a code of conduct on appointment, which includes guidance on how to deal with conflicts of interest and what interests should be declared and recorded in the corporation's register of interests.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what rules or guidelines are applied to the tendering process of urban development corporations.

Mr. Baldry: Urban development corporations are required to follow best public sector practice, which is that contracts should be placed on a competitive basis and the lowest tender accepted, subject only to certain clearly defined exceptions where this would not secure best value for money.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to review the operation of the Merseyside development corporation.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) to his previous question on Thursday 13 May 1993 at column *529*.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much each urban development corporation has spent, since its inception, on consultations.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 16 November 1992 at column *48*. Updated expenditure on consultants' reports to 31 March 1993, where available, is in the table:

UDC	*£ million*
Birmingham Heartlands	0·1
Black Country	[1]2·9
Bristol	0·7
Central Manchester	[2]—
Leeds	[2]—
London Docklands	[2]—
Merseyside	3·2
Plymouth	Nil
Sheffield	0·6
Teesside	4·9
Trafford Park	[2]—
Tyne and Wear	4·0

[1] To 31 March 1992.
[2] Not available.

"Climate Change"

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) of 15 June, *Official Report*, column *538*, how many of the submissions he received on the discussion document "Climate Change" were from *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* organisations and *(c)* members of the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Out of the 254 responses now received to our discussion document, 31 were from Scotland. Twenty-four of these were from organisations and seven from members of the public.

Albert Dock, Liverpool

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what income has accrued to the Merseyside development corporation from the Albert Dock Company.

Mr. Baldry: In the period covering 1987-88 to 1992-93 a total income of £2,022,659 has accrued to the development corporation from the Albert Dock Company in respect of rents, service charges and sales of flats.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what planning permission was sought by the Merseyside development corporation to alter the facade, roofline and approach to the Atlantic pavilion at the Albert dock.

Mr. Baldry: MDC did not seek planning permission itself to carry out recent alterations to the facade, roofline and approach to Atlantic pavilion at the Albert dock, since urban development corporations are themselves the planning authorities within their designated areas. Agents acting on behalf of the developers, Linenhall Properties Ltd., sought and received planning permission from MDC.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contracts the Merseyside development corporation entered into with the Arrowcroft Company.

Mr. Baldry: The development corporation entered into only one contract—building agreement—with the Arrowcroft Company in September 1983.

This contract was for the phased conversion and refurbishment of the majority of Albert dock, giving rise to a total of 11 leases.

Dipsticks

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will oppose the provisions of the EC directive on vapour recovery, stage 1, which call for the ending of dipsticks as the principal method of measuring quantities of petrol in storage and road tankers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The proposed EC directive will introduce a system of petrol vapour recovery which is not compatible with the use of dipsticks because they cause emissions of vapour. It is therefore appropriate for the dipstick to be phased out as a means of measurement on road tankers. However, the Government have secured an agreement which allows existing road tankers to continue using dipsticks, and allows a satisfactory period to agree an alternative standard measuring system for new tankers.

PSA Building Management Scotland

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrrangements will be made for maintenance of redundancy and pension arrangements of the PSA Building Management Scotland when the sale of the organisation is completed; and if the Department will be responsible for any redundancy costs incurred by Serco in relation to staff previously employed by the Property Services Agency.

Mr. Baldry: Staff severance entitlements transfer on sale under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and are protected thereafter by employment law. A replacement pension scheme which is broadly comparable in value to the principal civil service pension scheme, will be established. The group stands behind its subsidiaries. The Department will meet the costs of redundancies, should they occur, in the five years after sale on an agreed basis up to a specified limit.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what long-term commitment has been made by Serco, in respect of long-term commitment to maintain a separate Property Services Agency building management organisation based in Scotland.

Mr. Baldry: Serco's objective in acquiring BM Scotland is to expand its business based in Scotland as a separate Scottish company.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whaat estimate Serco has given of the number of jobs that may be lost in PSA Building Management Scotland as a result of the proposed sale of the organisation.

Mr. Baldry: Serco does not expect significant jobs loss as a result of the proposed sale. Future jobs for BM staff will of course depend on the ability of the business to compete successfully for contracts as they are re-tendered.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the purchasers of the PSA Building Management business will be required to continue to provide a design capacity.

Mr. Baldry: The PSA Building Management businesses each have a range of contracts which require a design input. The purchaser will take over the obligation to service those contracts.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the number of employees of the PSA Building Management Scotland who would need to opt to transfer to the purchasing company to enable the contract to be completed.

Mr. Baldry: I hope that a very large proportion of staff will transfer with the business on sale, but the sale does not need a particular number to choose to transfer for the sale to proceed to completion.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the purchase price offered for PSA Building Management Scotland by the management buy-out.

Mr. Baldry: No. Such information is commercially confidential.

Council Tax

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received suggesting *(a)* that there should be a council tax band or bands below band A and *(b)* that there should be a council tax band or bands above band H; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has received some representations, but we are not persuaded that there is a case for changing the present arrangements.

Caravan Sites

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites established under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 he has visited in an official capacity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Since his appointment on 27 May my right hon. Friend has visited no gipsy caravan sites established by local authorities under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 in his official capacity.

Darwin Initiative

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be able to make an announcement on the Darwin initiative; and what the role will be of the United Kingdom systematics institutions in the initiative.

Mr. Yeo: On 5 July my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Environment, announced the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on the Darwin Initiative and published a copy of its report; copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. We are now inviting applications from British institutions and organisations, including our systematics institutions, for funding to carry out projects under the Darwin initiative. There is £1 million available this year for projects which meet the objectives of the initiative.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the forecast European regional development fund receipts for 1993-94 and the allocation for 1993-94 for the local authority other services block schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Total forecast receipts from the European regional development fund paid through the agency of my Department in 1993-94 are £221 million. The allocation of ERDF funds to other services block projects will depend on how much has been spent by authorities and claimed from the European Community through my Department by the end of the year. It is not possible to forecast the final figure at this stage. From April 1993, the Government are providing public expenditure cover, automatically and in full, for forecast ERDF receipts.

Renovation Grant System

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the findings of the Planning, Industrial and Economic Development Advisers—PIEDA—report into the new renovation grant system; and if he will place copies in the Library.

Mr. Baldry: The report "Monitoring the New Renovation Grant System" by PIEDA was published on Monday 5 July. Copies have been placed in the Library.

"Monitoring the Fitness Standard"

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the findings of the Warwick university report "Monitoring the Fitness Standard"; and if he will place copies in the Library.

Mr. Baldry: The report will be published next month. Copies will be placed in the Library.

PSA Building Management

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now give details of the severance sharing agreements with purchasers of the PSA Building Managment businesses.

Mr. Curry: Each of the sales of the five PSA Building Management businesses include arrangements under which the Secretary of State will contribute towards the costs of redundancies up to an agreed value during the five years from completion of the sale.

The amounts concerned for BM South and West, BM South East, BM Scotland and Noreast Building Management are as follows:

	£ million
BM South and West	25·0
BM South East	30·0
BM Scotland	15·0
Noreast BM	29·5

The amount which the Secretary of State will contribute towards the cost of redundancies in the five years after sale in BM Manchester depends upon the result of the staff choice exercise which is currently under way, and will fall in the range of £26·0 to £37·2 million.

The amounts are subject to a pro rata adjustment to reflect changes in the aggregate redundancy entitlements of staff up to completion.

Sellafield MOX Plant

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what considerations led to the timing of his direction of 7 July to Copeland borough council not to grant planning permission to the Sellafield mixed oxide plant at the meeting of the council's planning committee on that day; when his Department first knew about the application; and if he will make a statement;

(2) under what statutory powers, and for what reasons, his officials directed Copeland borough council not to grant planning permission for the Sellafield mixed oxide plant;

(3) when he expects to be able to reach a decision on the application by British Nuclear Fuels plc for planning permission to construct a mixed oxide plant at Sellafield.

Mr. Yeo: On 23 June my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State received a request from British Nuclear Fuels plc for a direction that environment assessment of its proposal for a MOX plant at Sellafield was not needed. Although BNFL subsequently withdrew that application the Secretary of State decided that he ought to reach his own view. To provide time to consider the arguments Copeland council was directed, under the provisions of article 14(1) of the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988, not to grant permission on 7 July when they considered the application.

We will conclude our consideration of this matter as soon as possible. I will write to the hon. Member.

Local Government, Cumbria

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the Local Government Commission's consideration of local government reorganisation in Cumbria; and when he expects to receive its recommendations.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to my hon. Friend the member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) on 4 February at column 244. The review of Cumbria is scheduled to start on 20 September 1993 and end on 4 December 1994.

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the names and background details of the lead commissioners for the Local Government Commission's consideration of local government reorganisation in Cumbria; and if he will make a statement on the published timetable for the commission's work.

Mr. Baldry: The Local Government Commission announced on 2 June that the lead commissioners for its review of Cumbria and Lancashire will be Mrs. Ann Levick and David Ansbro. The commission's press release gave brief biographical details for each commissioner and I have placed a copy in the House Library.

We are keeping the commission's work programme under review.

Birmingham City Council

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has yet considered Birmingham city council's response to the notice served on the authority on 24 April under section 19(A) of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has given careful consideration to the response which Birmingham city

council has made to the notice served on the authority on 24 April 1993, and has today given the authority a direction under section 19B of the 1980 Act. The effect of the direction is that the council is required to retender in stages 12 housing repair contracts currently carried out by its own direct labour organisation. If the council wishes to carry out this work after 1 October 1994 then it needs to satisfy my right hon. Friend at each stage that it has fulfilled the competition requirements as laid down in the legislation.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to allow new development in rural mid-Kent as a result of the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Curry: Existing strategic planning policy for Kent seeks to restrict the development of fresh land in the countryside and to give protection to areas of outstanding natural beauty. I fully endorse that policy. Much of the rural area between Maidstone and the Medway towns forms part of the Kent downs area of outstanding natural beauty; elsewhere other conservation policies apply. The current third review of the Kent structure plan specifically recognises the importance of maintaining the separation of the built-up areas of Maidstone and the Medway towns by proposing the designation of a strategic gap, within which large scale development will be restricted. The draft regional planning guidance for the south east, published on 24 March, anticipates growth associated with the rail link being focused in Ashford, and east Kent, and especially in the east Thames corridor.

Fire Services, Merseyside

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority, following its consideration of the report of Her Majesty's inspector of fire services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* We have received from the Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority a copy of its resolution commenting on the report of Her Majesty's inspector of fire services and on the authority's finances. We are carefully considering the authority's comments, but we remain satisfied that its 1993-94 standard spending assessment, calculated in accordance with the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1993-94 approved by the House on 3 February 1993, is fair and reasonable.

Local Government Finance

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to bring forward from 1 August each year the deadline for spending returns from local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* We have no plans to change the 1 August deadline for the return of data relating to revenue and capital outturn expenditure.

TRANSPORT

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the terms and conditions of employment, including basis of remuneration and hours of work of the chairman-designate of Railtrack, the Rail Franchising Director-designate and the Rail Regulator-designate.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend has appointed Mr. Robert Horton as a part-time member of the British Railways board and as chairman-designate of Railtrack, under the general terms and conditions applying to BR board part-time members. His time commitment is, on average three days a week and his salary is £120,000 per annum.

Mr. Swift and Mr. Salmon are part-time special advisers to my right hon. Friend. Their terms are those of civil service appointments and their remuneration, in accordance with the conventions, is a matter of confidence between them and the Department. My right hon. Friend has announced his intention, subject to the Railways Bill passing through Parliament to Royal Assent, to appoint them to the posts respectively of rail regulator and director of passenger rail franchising. In that event the level of their salaries will be in the public domain.

Road Closures, City of London

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he had with the City of London corporation on the closure of roads on security grounds; and what discussions were held with London regional Transport regarding the impact of road closures on public transport.

Mr. Norris: The City authorities consulted the Department informally about the experimental scheme before they announced it. We understand they also gave advanced warning of the road closures to London Buses Ltd.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what work is being undertaken by either his Department or Union Railways with a view to the construction of a tunnel between Stratford and St. Pancras or King's Cross, as part of the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Freeman: Union Railways is undertaking substantial development work for both of the alternative routes shown in its March 1993 report, including possible options for both routes, in association with its study of the St. Pancras and King's Cross terminus options.

River Avon (Navigation)

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the statute or statutes under which there is a right of navigation of the River Avon in Bristol for any vessel which has paid harbour duties.

Mr. Norris: In general, there is a public right of navigation on tidal rivers. Section 33 of the Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847, relating to free access for the public to harbour, dock and pier on payment of

rates, is applied to shipping using the Port of Bristol by the relevant special Acts and subsequent orders relating to the port.

British Rail (Speed Restrictions)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has regarding track mileage on which British Rail has introduced temporary speed restrictions due to lack of funds for maintenance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Detailed information of this nature is not held by the Department.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to establish the scope for a joint venture with the private sector to renew the infrastructure of the west coast main line.

Mr. Freeman: The Government today appointed Hambros Bank Ltd. to advise on the scope for such a joint venture. The study marks a new departure in our efforts to involve private finance in railway projects. Up to now the Government have invited the private sector to come forward with proposals which have then been considered on their merits. With this study the Department is taking the initiative. Hambros has been given a remit to develop an outline proposal or proposals which will be attractive to the private sector and fall within the Government's published guidelines for joint ventures. These mean that control of the venture will rest with the private sector who will also be expected to take on genuine risk in return for an appropriate share of revenues. Consortia will be invited to bid for the role of joint venture partner on these terms.

The Government are determined to pave the way for private sector funding on railway projects. Equipment on the west coast main line is reaching the end of its economic life. We are hopeful that private sector funding will enable us to bring forward modernisation of one of the premier railway routes in the country.

Maintenance Staff

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the average hours worked per week by British Railways Board track and signal maintenance staff during the latest period for which figures are available.

Mr. Freeman: During the week ending 3 July 1993 track maintenance staff, excluding those who were absent through sickness or other reason for all or part of the week, worked an average of 52·1 hours. Signalling and telecommunications maintenance staff, during the week ended 24 April 1993, excluding those who were absent through sickness or other reason for all or part of the week, worked an average of 47·4 hours.

Search and Rescue

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects local coastal search and rescue committees to convene their first meetings.

Mr. Norris: In the autumn.

Shipping Standards

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is considering any plans to adopt standards for shipping in the United Kingdom; and what account he is taking of whether such standards are compatible with the framework set by the International Maritime Organisation.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* Safety standards for shipping are under continuous review, particularly at the International Maritime Organisation. The standards applying to United Kingdom ships are based upon those developed internationally unless there is just cause to do otherwise, such as the initiative being taken with our European neighbours to establish adequate survivability standards for roll-on-roll-off passenger ferries built before 1990.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Synthesis Evaluation Study

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the full evaluation report for each of the projects on which the Overseas Development Administration's ATP synthesis evaluation study, EV490 of November 1991, was based.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The ATP synthesis study was based primarily on three evaluation studies conducted as a series during 1990 and summarised in appendices B, C and D of that report. Copies of those studies have now been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Evaluation material on three projects in Botswana, Bangladesh and Burma were included in the "Power Synthesis Report" which is already in the Libraries of the House. A further study of scattered diesels, in Indonesia was undertaken jointly with the World bank which, in line with its usual practice, has not agreed to its release. The fifth report—"Iocom Telephone Cable Project in India"—contains comercially-sensitive material and has not been released.

Indonesia

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list United Kingdom bilateral development assistance to Indonesia for the last five years including projects and their nature, value, location and the names of United Kingdom companies involved.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Commitments of United Kingdom bilateral assistance to Indonesia for the period from 1 April 1988 to date have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

International Finance Corporation

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of British companies that have secured contracts for International Finance Corporation-funded projects over the last five years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: International Finance Corporation —IFC—loans go directly to private sector companies in

developing countries. It is these companies that are responsible for awarding contracts to suppliers of goods and services. The IFC is not party to these contracts so is not able therefore to give details of contract awards for any individual country.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will supply the details of dividends the United Kingdom has received from International Finance Corporation investments since the end of the financial year 1991.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Member Governments of the International Finance Corporation do not receive dividends from the corporation's investments. Earnings are wholly retained and recycled for new activity.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mr. Charilaos Costa

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General when Mr. Charilaos Costa left the United Kingdom; what request has been made for his extradition; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: Mr. Charilaos Costa left the United Kingdom in March 1991 and went to the Republic of Cyprus. No application has been made for his extradition because Mr. Costa is a Greek Cypriot and the Republic of Cyprus will not extradite its own nationals.

Mr. Costa left the jurisdiction before he could be charged. However, three warrants exist for his arrest if he were to return.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to lay before Parliament and to publish the annual report of the Crown Prosecution Service for the year 1992-93.

The Attorney-General: The annual report for the Crown prosecution service for 1992-93 was laid before Parliament at 11 am today and then published. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what authority will carry out the checks proposed under article 3 of the recommendation of the Ministers responsible for immigration at their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 and 2 June on checks and expulsions of third-country nationals residing or working without authorisation; what computer facilities will be provided to the authority; what are the cost implications of such checks and such computer facilities; and if he will place a copy of the guidelines to be issued to the authority in the Library;

(2) what authority *(a)* was responsible for and *(b)* carried out the drafting of the recommendation of the Ministers responsible for immigration at their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 and 2 June on checks and expulsions of third-country nationals residing or working without authorisation;

(3) what plans Ministers responsible for immigration in the member states of the European Community have to harmonise their rules relating to the interpretation of public policy and national security as grounds for expulsion;

(4) what abuse is intended to be addressed by article 4, indent 3 of the recommendation of the Ministers responsible for immigration at their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 and 2 June on checks and expulsions of third-country nationals residing or working without authorisation;

(5) what steps the Government plan to take to implement article 2 of the recommendation of the Ministers responsible for immigration at their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 and 2 June on checks and expulsions of third-country nationals residing or working without authorisation;

(6) what consideration has been given to the cost implications of taking measures to implement article 1 of the recommendation of the Ministers responsible for immigration at their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 and 2 June on checks and expulsions of third-country nationals residing or working without authorisation;

(7) if he will make a statement on the effect of the recommendation of the Ministers responsible for immigration at their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 and 2 June on checks and expulsions of third-country nationals residing or working without authorisation, on the current pattern of checks on persons admitted to be reunited with their families;

(8) what measures have been taken to implement article 1 of the recommendation of the Ministers responsible for immigration at their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 and 2 June on checks and expulsions of third-country nationals residing or working without authorisation;

(9) what measures the Government plan to take or continue to take to ensure compliance with article 4 of the recommendation of the Ministers responsible for immigration at their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 and 2 June on checks and expulsions of third-country nationals residing or working without authorisation.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The recommendation concerning checks on and expulsion of third-country nationals residing or working without authorisation, which was approved by EC Immigration Ministers at their meeting in Copenhagen on 1 June 1993, seeks to ensure that effective procedures are in place to prevent people from entering or remaining unlawfully in member states, or from working there without authority; and to remove those found to have done so unless there are compelling reasons for letting them remain. It was prepared in the ad hoc group on immigration and its sub group on expulsion, and builds on a recommendation of expulsion practices which was endorsed by EC Immigration Ministers at their meeting in London on 30 November 1992.

The recommendation identifies the circumstances in which it may be appropriate to make checks, but does not have binding legal effect. It specifically states:

"checks and controls on the residence and employment of third country nationals shall be decided upon and carried out by those authorities which are empowered to do so under national legislation".

The recommendation is broadly consistent with existing United Kingdom law and practice and no changes

are currently planned as a result of the recommendation, which does not therefore have any immediate cost implications for the United Kingdom.

There are no plans for work to harmonise the interpretation of public policy and national security in this context. The main abuse at which the third indent of paragraph 4 of the recommendation is directed is marriages of convenience.

Anti-abortionists

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concering *(a)* the entry into the United Kingdom of overseas citizens concerned with disrupting access to abortion clinics and *(b)* the particular policing implications of maintaining undisturbed access to such clinics.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Representations on both matters have been received from some 30 Members of Parliament and a smaller number of private organisations and individuals. My right hon. and learned Friend may direct exclusion if a person's presence would not be conducive to the public good. Enforcement of the Public Order Act 1986 as it relates to behaviour which may cause harassment or fear of violence is the responsibility of chief officers of police.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has held with police forces about the steps taken to ensure that women are not prevented from seeking legal abortions, and that clinic staff are not intimidated.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) on 9 July 1993 at column *296*.

Tobacco (Illegal Importation)

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been relating to the illegal sale of duty-paid tobacco products illegally imported from other states in the European Community and connected offences; what was the outcome of such prosecutions; and what was the level of penalty imposed.

Mr. Maclean: Court proceedings data for 1993 will not be available centrally until the autumn of 1995. However Her Majesty's Customs and Excise have advised that there were 275 tobacco offences detected under section 170 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 within the period January to May 1993.

Police (Expenditure)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, in real terms and as a proportion of gross domestic product, the expenditure on police forces in England and Wales for each year since 1979.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information is in the following table:

Year	*Total expenditure on the police*	
	Real terms £ million at 1991-92 prices	*Proportion of GDP Per cent.*
1978-79	3,099	0·66
1979-80	3,426	0·71
1980-81	3,455	0·74
1981-82	3,810	0·82
1982-83	3,932	0·83
1983-84	4,070	0·83
1984-85	4,452	0·89
1985-86	4,172	0·80
1986-87	4,346	0·80
1987-88	4,542	0·79
1988-89	4,690	0·79
1989-90	4,986	0·82
1990-91	5,129	0·87
1991-92	5,408	0·93
1992-93	5,664	[1]0·98

[1] Estimate.

Overseas Visitors

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many Jamaican citizens were initially refused leave to enter the United Kingdom as not being genuine visitors in 1987 and in each subsequent calendar year to date;

(2) how many Jamaican citizens were initially refused leave to enter the United Kingdom as not being genuine visitors between January and June, inclusive, in 1993 and in the same period of 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information is in the table.

Jamaican citizens refused leave to enter, and removed from, the United Kingdom

	Main reason for refusal	
	Not a genuine visitor[1]	*Other reasons*[2]
1987	212	57
1988	324	100
1989	692	111
1990	492	88
1991	338	54
1992	344	65
1991 January to June	175	29
1992 January to June	174	24
1993 January to March[3]	96	18

[1] Persons refused under paragraph 22 of the immigration rules.
[2] Some may have sought entry as a visitor but been refused mainly for a reason other than not being a genuine visitor.
[3] Data for April to June 1993 are not yet available.

Failed Prosecutions

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the oral answer of the Attorney-General to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) of 10 November 1992, *Official Report*, columns 746-47, in how many cases ex-gratia payments have been made by the Government to people who claim to have suffered losses as a result of a prosecution which subsequently failed or was withdrawn.

Mr. Maclean: None, in the particular categories specified by the hon. Member.

Prisoners (Suicide)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of installation of horizontal bars in prisons on the likelihood of prisoners attempting suicide by hanging.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 12 July 1993

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about what assessment had been made of the suicide risk posed by horizontal bars in prison design.

It is the responsibility of prison governors to keep accommodation under review. Where unsafe features are identified consideration will be given to remedial measures, taking into account the resources available for refurbishment and minor works programmes and other priorities. We also have to balance the need to minimise the risk of suicide as far as we reasonably can against the importance of preserving a decent and humane living environment for prisoners.

Design standards for new prisons are set out in the Prison Design Briefing System (PDBS). PDBS makes provision for vertical bars in prisoner's living accommodation. For health care centres and segregation units at PDBS specifies additional anti-suicide features.

PDBS standards are kept under review in the light of new research and operation experience, including analysis of all prison suicides. A new anti-suicide cell window design is being tested which aims to make it even more difficult for prisoners to attach ligatures to any part of the window or bars.

We are not aware of any recent case in which a prisoner has been able to commit suicide by attaching a ligature to horizontal bars. If, however, you have any specific concerns about the use of horizontal bars in a particular establishment I should be grateful if you would draw them to my attention and I will arrange for the matter to be investigated.

Mark Jarvis

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the downgrading from category A to C and the subsequent home leave granted to Mark Jarvis, recently sentenced for manslaughter and originally in Winson Green prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 12 July 1993.

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Mark Jarvis's security category and his home leave.

When Mr. Jarvis was convicted of rape, armed robbery and abduction of a child in 1985 and sentenced to 12 years imprisonment, consideration was given to placing him in category A: this is reserved for those prisoners whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public, police or the security of the state. While Mr. Jarvis was not regarded as presenting such a threat, he was at that stage clearly one for whom escape should be made very difficult and he was classed as a category B prisoner. On reaching 21 he was reclassified as an adult and in view of the gradual improvement in his behaviour and the signs of his maturity he was downgraded to category C. This category is for prisoners who, while they cannot be trusted in open conditions, are judged to have neither the resources nor will to make a determined escape bid.

Shortly after this his behaviour deteriorated and he was upgraded to category B and moved to a more secure prison. In 1990 his behaviour improved to the point at which it was considered that he should be again downgraded to category C and he remained in that category until he was charged with murder in September last year. He was upgraded to category B and, following his conviction for manslaughter he was transferred to Long Lartin prison.

In May 1992 Mr. Jarvis became eligible for home leave and he applied to stay with his sister and her family. Home leave is designed to help prisoners adjust to life outside prison and should be restricted to those who pose no risk to the community and whose behaviour in prison has been such as to earn this privilege. In Mr. Jarvis's case, his earlier poor record and the seriousness of his offences would be factors against home leave being granted, but reports on his behaviour in Birmingham were excellent and were considered as strong factors in favour of his application. It was also taken into account that he was nearing the end of a long sentence and that his return to the community was imminent. While bearing all this in mind the home leave board considered that it was still too early to grant home leave and the decision was deferred for further reports. These reinforced the view that he was ready for temporary release and that the address at which he intended to stay was suitable.

Mr. Jarvis was released on licence on 14 August last year for four days but failed to return to prison at the end of his home leave. The police were notified that he was unlawfully at large. In the early hours of 2 September, a taxi driver was stabbed to death and Mr. Jarvis was later arrested and charged with murder. He was returned to Birmingham prison on 22 September and an inquiry was conducted into the granting of home leave. Two governors reviewed the papers and concluded that the decision to grant home leave was not unreasonable. Subsequently that decision has been reviewed by the area manager and he has reached the same view.

Clearly, the consequences of the decision to grant home leave to Mr. Jarvis were deeply regrettable and tragic; our sympathy is very much with Mr. Ashiq Hussain's family and friends. The papers on this case have been reported to a Working Party whose task is to review the operation of home leave. With the benefit of hindsight, it may well be that too much emphasis was put on Mr. Jarvis's behaviour in prison and too little on his poor record outside. Under new instructions issued to Governors in October last year, their need to assess the risk in releasing prisoners is reinforced by a more structured approach. Greater emphasis is placed on circumstances outside prison. Had Mr. Jarvis's application been considered after these instructions were issued, it is probable that it would not have been granted.

Mr. Jarvis was tried for murder at Birmingham Crown Court and was convicted of manslaughter on 1 July; he was sentenced to five years imprisonment the following day.

Unsound Convictions

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many citizens convicted of murder and imprisoned have been released on appeal or review as their convictions have been judged unsafe and unsound in each calendar year from 1985.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 8 July 1993]:* The information readily available centrally is in the table.

Appeals against conviction only or conviction and sentence for murder or life imprisonment, heard by the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division).

England and Wales			*Number of persons*
Year	*Appeals*	*Conviction quashed*[1]	*Retrial ordered*
Murder[2]			
1990	32	2	—
1991	32	10	1
Life imprisonment			
1985	16	3	—
1986	15	1	2

Year	Appeals	Conviction quashed[1]	Retrial ordered
1987	14	3	—
1988	20	3	1
1989	30	7	1
1990	34	2	—
1991	39	11	1

[1] Excludes case where the conviction was quashed on some counts but confirmed on others, or a conviction for a lesser offence was substituted.
[2] Information for early years is not available.

Sunday Trading

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish his plans to reform Sunday trading law in England and Wales.

Mr. Howard *[pursuant to his reply, 8 July 1993 c. 207]:* I have placed in the Library a copy of a draft Bill together with a covering text explaining the models for reform. I hope this will provide hon. Members with an opportunity to consider carefully the options for reform well in advance of being required to choose between them. We aim to introduce the Bill early next Session.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have taken place on breaches of the Sunday trading laws over the last 12-month period for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[pursuant to his reply, 24 June 1993, c. 253]:* The number of prosecutions brought in 1991 was in fact 388, not 522 as I previously stated, of which 86 were brought to successful conclusions. I apologise for any difficulty which this mistake may have caused.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Charters

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to make a further statement on new charters.

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 28 June 1993 at column *654*. I have nothing further to add to this statement at this time, but will of course keep him and the House informed of any new charters.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

PA Management Consultants

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 16 June, *Official Report*, columns *605-6*, if he will place in the Library the reports by PA Management Consultants on *(a)* United States biotechnology, *(b)* the feasibility study—"Factory of the Future", *(c)* the update of the report on manufacturing into the 1990s, *(d)* emerging generic technologies, *(e)* the future of Warren Spring Laboratory and *(f)* the Warren Spring investigation.

Mr. Eggar: It is not my intention to publish all of the reports in question. The reports which I have arranged to be placed in the Library are *(a)* United States biotechnology and *(c)* the update on the report on manufacturing into the 1990's which is due for publication in July. Work has only recently begun on *(b)* the feasibility study—Factory of the Future. The form of the report to be published on *(d)* emerging generic technologies, has yet to be decided although a related study "Research Foresight and the Exploitation of the Science Base" published in March 1993 is available from HMSO. With regard to the studies on the Warren Spring Laboratory a copy of the report by PA consultancy has been placed in the Library.

Engineering Companies

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance his Department provides to British engineering companies to sell their products abroad.

Mr. Needham: My Department, jointly with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, provides a wide range of high quality advice and support to exporters which is available to all sectors of United Kingdom industry.

European Council

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the European Council meeting on 2 July; and what progress was made at that meeting with the proposal to accord to Merseyside objective 1 status.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) on 6 July at columns 105-6.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations he has had with his Japanese counterpart on preparations being undertaken in Japan for the receipt of *(a)* low-level, *(b)* intermediate level and *(c)* high-level radioactive waste to be returned after reprocessing at Sellafield.

Mr. Eggar: In the first instance, these are matters for British Nuclear Fuels plc and its customers in line with the contracts between them. These arrangements are supported by the existing intergovernmental letters between the United Kingdom and Japan. Since 1976, BNFL's contracts for the reprocessing of overseas spent fuel have contained options for the return of wastes. The Government intend that these options will be exercised and wastes returned.

THORP

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether his Department was represented at the meeting hosted by the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, on 15 June at 1 Parliament street, on the thermal oxide reprocessing plant.

Mr. Eggar: No.

Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations he has had with the International Atomic Energy Agency in regard to the establishment of an international or regional plutonium store at Sellafield.

Mr. Eggar: An informal exchange of views about the possibility of greater international involvement in the storage of plutonium took place in Vienna in December 1992 under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Those present agreed that the meeting had been useful in identifying the issues involved in this area and that further discussions should be held.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what amounts of plutonium are expected to be reprocessed from the final loading of spent fuel extracted from the prototype fast reactor at AEA Technology's Dounreay nuclear establishment when the reactor is shut down in 1994; what information is received from the operator by Her Mjesty's Government in regard to safeguards obligations to *(a)* EURATOM and *(b)* the International Atomic Energy Agency covering civil nuclear materials at Dounreay; and if he will make a statement on plutonium storage at Dounreay.

Mr. Eggar: The plutonium content of the final fuel loading when the prototype fast reactor is shut down depends on the operational programme. Plutonium arisings from the fast reactor fuel reprocessing plant at Dounreay are transferred to BNFL, Sellafield for long term storage. EURATOM will have a continuing obligation to safegard the plutonium and routine reports of all inventory changes will continue to be sent to the IAEA.

Dounreay (Decommissioning)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has received from AEA Technology in regard to the planning timetable for the decommissioning of the Dounreay shaft; and if he has received any request for financial assistance in conducting this decommissioning exercise.

Mr. Eggar: Disposals of radioactive waste to the Dounreay shaft were authorised by the Scottish Office. There is no requirement or timetable for its decommissioning. Studies are however being carried out by the AEA to determine whether any further work should be carried out on this facility. These studies are funded by the Department under the decommissioning and radioactive waste management support programme.

Gas

Mr. Devlin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of (i) the proportion of the firm contract and tariff market over 2,500 therms which is currently supplied by independent shippers, (ii) the total cost savings made by industry as a result of switching to shippers of gas other than British Gas in each of the last three years for which figures are available and (iii) the average reduction in gas bills achieved by these concerns which have switched to a shipper other than British Gas.

Mr. Eggar: By the end of 1992 OFGAS estimates that independent shippers had captured around 20 per cent. of the traditional contract market—above 25,000 therms.

The Department does not collect price information from independent shippers. However, the latest annual report of the Gas Consumers Council suggests that gas costs to all but the largest consumers have been falling, particularly since the opening to competition of the 2,500-25,000 therm bracket last autumn. The latest estimate in July 1993 suggests a reduction of 10 per cent. in price to approximately 13 per cent. of the market in this bracket.

Catering Ware Exports

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to bring about a reduction of catering ware duty of 35 per cent. on goods exported to the United States of America; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: In the current GATT Uruguay round market access negotiations, the Government continue to press, through the European Commission which negotiates on behalf of the European Community, for a substantial reduction in the United States 35 per cent. duty on catering ware. Good progress was made in talks in Tokyo on 6 July, at which the EC, United States, Japan and Canada produced an agreed report containing elements of a deal on market access including the objective of reaching 50 per cent. reductions in tariff rates of 15 per cent. and above, subject to agreed exceptions and effective market opening by other participants.

Textiles and Clothing

Sir David Steel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will continue to press for the reduction of United States tariff peaks on textiles and clothing in the GATT Uruguay round; and if he will make a statement on progress made by Her Majesty's Government in the negotiations.

Mr. Needham: In the current GATT Uruguay round market access negotiations, the Government continue to press, through the European Commission which negotiates on behalf of the European Community, for substantial reductions in peak United States textile and clothing tariffs. Good progress was made in talks in Tokyo on 6 July, at which the EC, United States, Japan and Canada produced an agreed report containing elements of a deal on market access including the objective of reaching 50 per cent. reductions in tariff rates of 15 per cent. and above, subject to agreed exceptions and effective market opening by other participants.

Post Office

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Post Office's plans for its present site at King Edward street, EC1; and what are the current terms of their occupancy.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am told by the Post Office that the King Edward building site currently houses inland sorting; deliveries for EC 1-4 postal districts; international sorting; a counter and callers' office. The Post Office has plans to move inland sorting to the Mount Pleasant sorting office and is also considering proposals for a similar move of delivery work.

The building is owned by the Post Office on a freehold basis.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list *(a)* all measures taken by his Department in the last 12 months to prevent nuclear proliferation, *(b)* the

number of personnel in his Department working to prevent nuclear proliferation and *(c)* his Department's total expenditure on control of nuclear proliferation in the last year.

Mr. Eggar: The Department of Trade and Industry works with other Departments to implement Government policy on nuclear non-proliferation. Over the past 12 months, my officials participated in the European political co-operation working group on nuclear non-proliferation, the nuclear suppliers group and the Zangger committee.

Coal

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the average level of Government subsidy per tonne of deep-mined coal in each year since 1987 for *(a)* each of the United Kingdom coal fields, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Scotland and *(e)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: Government grants to the coal industry are not provided on an individual coal field or regional basis. Grant aid made available to the coal industry since 1987 is set out in the table.

Grants to British Coal[1] and payments under the Redundant Mineworkers Payments Scheme[2]

(£ million)

Financial year	*Deficit and Deficiency Grant*	*Social and Restructuring Grant*	*RMPS(b)*	*Total*
1987-88	200	477	295	972
1988-89	0	297	168	465
1989-90	6,153	1,090	126	7,369
1990-91	0	141	93	234
1991-92	0	457	61	518
1992-93[3]	0	614	43	657

[1] Grants to British Coal are at outturn prices, on an accruals basis, taken from British Coal's annual report and accounts.
[2] Redundant mineworkers payments scheme. Figures exclude administration costs.
[3] 1992-93 figures provisional.

In addition to grant aid, the coal industry benefited by about £1 billion a year over the last three years from the financial advantage resulting from the premium over market prices which the electricity generators were paid for their coal supplies from British Coal.

Foreign Languages

Mr. Beith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has about the availability of subsidies to industry for the purpose of staff training in foreign languages or the publication of marketing and promotional material in foreign languages in each EC country.

Mr. Needham: My Department's policy is to increase language awareness through encouraging the learning of languages, the development of language training and to signpost to those offering training, translation and interpreting services. The Government do not subsidise language training or translation costs for business purposes, although we do support a number of language initiatives to provide business with practical solutions.

Energy Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), 6 July. *Official Report*, columns 106-7, what were the voting figures for each decision taken at the European Community's Council of Energy Ministers held on 25 June.

Mr. Eggar: No formal votes were taken at the Council of Energy Ministers on 25 June.

European Community Funding

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out the distribution in the United Kingdom for 1993, by each assisted region of (1) each of the Community initiatives under the European structural funds, and (2) schemes under objectives 2 and 5(b) of the European structural funds in terms of *(a)* allocation of grant in ecu and in pound sterling at current exchange rates in total and sub-divided between European regional development fund, European structural fund and other structural funds, *(b)* the value of grant for approval in ecu and pound sterling at current exchange rates and *(c)* the amount spent on each programme in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The structural funds are implemented through multi-annual programmes and in the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Defence Industry (Reduction)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on progress towards obtaining access to EC intervention funds for British warship yards.

Mr. Sainsbury: I discussed the question with Vice President Van Miert on 8 July. Officials are continuing to progress the case.

Laboratory of the Government Chemist

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what targets he has set the Laboratory of the Government Chemist for 1993-94.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Laboratory of the Government Chemist's primary target will continue to be to recover its full costs from income for customer work. This is a demanding target: in addition to the fact that the laboratory is now required to operate in an increasingly competitive market, it also expects to reduce its controllable costs by 2 per cent. this year.

I have also set it the following secondary targets for 1993-94:

- to increase the rate of completion of reports on analysis of/research into samples by the date agreed with customers from 88 per cent. in the first quarter to over 90 per cent. in the last quarter;
- to achieve more than 85 per cent. of contract research milestones within the time scale agreed with the customer;
- to maintain accreditation from the national measurement accreditation service—NAMAS—for the existing categories of work and obtain NAMAS accreditation for at least one further category of work by April 1994; and
- to acquire laboratory-wide accreditation to BS 5750—ISO 9001—by April 1994.

In addition, I have set the chief executive of the agency the personal target of replying within 10 working days to letters from hon. Members delegated to him for reply.

Postal Charges

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what revenue is generated by users of the recorded, registered and special delivery services of the Post Office; and if he can estimate the share of this revenue attributable to business use.

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand from the Post Office that the total revenue generated by its recorded, registered and special delivery services in the financial year to 28 March 1993 was £50 million. The estimated share attributable to business use is in the range of 75 per cent. to 80 per cent.

Miners (Redundancies)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much redundancy pay has been paid to miners employed by the NCB and British Coal for each of the years beginning in 1979 until the latest available date, giving the number of miners.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* Redundancy payments made by the NCB and latterly British Coal are a matter for British Coal. Benefits paid and the number of beneficiaries under the redundant mineworkers payments scheme between 1979-80 and 1992-93 are set out in the table:

Benefits and number of beneficiaries under the redundant mineworkers payment scheme

Financial year	*Payments £ million*	*Number of new beneficiaries qualifying each year*
1979-80	15	1,700
1980-81	15	3,200
1981-82	48	10,500
1982-83	80	8,500
1983-84	190	20,400
1984-85	200	8,050
1985-86	563	35,900
1986-87	610	33,950
1987-88	295	0
1988-89	168	0
1989-90	126	0
1990-91	93	0
1991-92	61	0
1992-93	43	0

(a) Payment figures in the above table exclude administration costs.
(b) Includes ex-employees of small mine licensees.
(c) The Redundant Mineworkers Payments scheme closed to new entrants at the end of 1986-87.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much redundancy money has been paid out to miners since 1979 in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland, giving the number of miners in each case.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* Redundancy payments made by the NCB and latterly British Coal are a matter for British Coal. Payments under the redundant mineworkers payment scheme are not readily available on a regional basis.

Cellphones

Ms Lynne: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what account is taken of the effect of cellphones on hearing aid wearers when agreeing to license them.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* Studies by the Radiocommunications Agency show that the new generation digital mobile telephones may cause interference to hearing aids. The Wireless Telegraphy Act licences for operators of these systems require them to minimise transmitter power and so reduce the potential for interference. In addition my Department is encouraging manufacturers to improve the immunity of hearing aids.

Konver Programme

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade following the Council of Minister's meeting on 2 July, if he will make a statement on the Government's position regarding the European Community Konver programme for defence-dependent areas.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* The conclusions reached at the Foreign Affairs Council on 2 and 3 July on the regulations on the future of European structural funds, if confirmed by the Council on 19 and 20 July, will enable member states to make available to areas not designated for objective 1, 2 or 5(b) a limited part of the European regional development fund contribution to the Community initiative Konver. The Government intend to make use of this new flexibility in the United Kingdom's 1993 Konver programme.

The future choice of Community initiatives was not discussed. It will be considered at a future meeting of the Council.

Public Houses

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what individual exemptions have been given under article 85(3) of the treaty of Rome to Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd; and what notices, as required under article 19(3) of EC Regulation 17/62, have been issued in respect of that company's lease agreements.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* I am advised that no individual exemptions under article 85 of the treaty of Rome have been given to Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd, nor has any notice been issued under article 19(3) of EC Regulation 17/62 in respect of the company's lease arrangements.

In my answer to the hon. Member on 15 June, *Official Report*, column *497*, I said that the United Kingdom Government did not keep a record of individual exemptions under article 85 of the treaty of Rome and that such information could be obtained about the brewing

industry only at disproportionate cost. I regret that this information was not wholly accurate as information about EC Commission decisions on competition matters is held centrally by the Office of Fair Trading. However this information does not separately identify decisions constituting exemptions from article 85 of the treaty of Rome, nor does it separately identify decisions made in respect of particular business sectors.

It would not, therefore, be possible to provide a complete record of exemptions granted in relation to the brewing industry except at disproportionate cost, as stated in the answer I gave to the hon. Member previously. This is also the case for notices under article 19(3) of EC Regulation 17/62 in relation to the brewing industry as a whole.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 5 July, *Official Report*, column *35*, what sales outlets other than public houses were included in the figures given for on-trade beer sales.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 12 July 1993]*: The figures include on-sales in pubs, restaurants, café-bars and pub hotels.

EDUCATION

Performing Arts

13. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether he will review the impact of local education authority policies on students wishing to study the performing arts.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has no current plans to hold such a review.

Grant-maintained Schools

14. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many different levels of funding exist for grant maintained schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: All grants for self-governing schools are calculated under the Education GM Finance Regulations 1993. Different levels of funding are paid under various grant headings depending on the size and circumstances of the school.

29. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools have had ballots to go grant-maintained so far this year; and how many were successful.

Mr. Robin Squire: A total of 409 schools have held parental ballots on self-governing (GM) status so far this year. Three hundred and sixteen of those schools have voted in favour of GM status.

25. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has recently made to, or received from, schools in Hampshire which are seeking, or have obtained, grant-maintained status.

Mr. Robin Squire: We continue to receive a steady flow of inquiries from schools in Hampshire which are interested in applying for self-governing status. We also receive representations from time to time from the 16 Hampshire schools which are already grant-maintained, from the four schools which have been approved to become grant-maintained, and from the nine whose applications for self-governing status are currently under consideration by my right hon. Friend.

The Department has been running a series of regional conferences to provide basic information on "Going GM". Those attending have included 81 heads and governors from 46 Hampshire schools.

18. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals he has to make it easier for parents to obtain grant-maintained status for schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: Our present Education Bill will streamline the processes involved in a school becoming grant-maintained. Its provisions include: a shorter timetable for balloting and the publication of proposals; annual consideration of grant-maintained status by governing bodies; extra powers for the Secretary of State to void a ballot if there is interference by third parties; modest payments to governing bodies for costs incurred in acquiring grant-maintained status; and limitations on LEA expenditure aimed at influencing the outcome of ballots.

Experience suggests that, taken together, these changes will help eliminate many of the difficulties which can be encountered in acquiring grant-maintained status.

Teacher Training

15. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on recent changes in teacher training.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government's teacher training reforms are designed to ensure that all new teachers have the knowledge and skills they need to raise standards in the classroom. My right hon. Friend announced last summer important changes to his requirements for the training of secondary teachers, with more time to be spent in schools, and schools themselves playing a central role in course design and delivery. He is now consulting on similar proposals for the reform of training for primary teachers.

28. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to ensure that student teachers spend more time training in the classroom.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans).

Community Education

16. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is his policy on the development of community education.

Mr. Boswell: The Government's policy is to maintain and develop opportunities for adults to participate in further education, and to raise levels of attainment, within the framework set by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

Comma and Apostrophe

17. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether he has plans for greater emphasis in schools to be given to teaching the correct use of the comma and apostrophe.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has recently published proposals for revisions to national curriculum English which give greater emphasis to the teaching of punctuation, including the correct use of the comma and apostrophe.

Truancy

19. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment his Department has made of the accuracy of truancy figures he plans to publish in his proposed truancy tables.

Mr. Forth: It is for individual schools in the first instance to satisfy themselves as to the accuracy of their returns. The Department has also specified a series of wide-ranging computerised tests which the contractor will apply to each return.

Dearing Inquiry

20. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a further statement on the Dearing inquiry into the national curriculum.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend looks forward to receiving Sir Ron Dearing's advice this month, which will lead to streamlined assessment arrangements in 1994. Sir Ron will also advise before the end of this year on the curriculum and assessment framework for future years.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he expects the report of Sir Ron Dearing on the curriculum to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend expects to receive initial advice from Sir Ron Dearing later this month on national curriculum assessment arrangements in 1994. Sir Ron Dearing has announced that he will publish his report. Sir Ron Dearing will make further recommendations towards the end of the year on the curriculum and assessment framework more generally.

People's College, Nottingham

21. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the capital allocation to the People's college, Nottingham, for the current financial year.

Mr. Boswell: The Further Education Funding Council's capital allocation to the college for 1993-94 is £568,000. This includes £250,000 which the college expects to spend on fees and initial site investigations for a major new project.

Student Funding

22. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make it his policy to introduce a more generous system of funding for students in further and higher education.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has no plans to make the support arrangements more generous than they already are by international standards.

Eleven plus Examination

23. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals he has for the reintroduction of the 11-plus examination.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has no plans to re-introduce the 11-plus examination. National curriculum tests for 11 year olds in English, mathematics and science will be the subject of a voluntary national pilot in 1994.

School Leaving Age

24. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the school leaving age.

Mr. Forth: The Education Bill provides for the Secretary of State to specify a single school leaving date each year. This will not affect the ages at which pupils leave school.

Teachers' Salaries

26. **Mr. Bates** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average teacher's salary in England.

Mr. Robin Squire: The 1992 new earnings survey recorded the average earnings of all school teachers in England and Wales, including head and deputy teachers, as £20,498.

Nursery Education

27. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to meet representatives of the National Campaign for Nursery Education to discuss the campaign.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Key Stage Testing

30. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the future of testing at key stages of the national curriculum.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has asked Sir Ron Dearing to conduct a review of the national Curriculum and assessment framework. He looks forward to receiving Sir Ron's recommendations on future assessment arrangements before the end of this month.

Nursery Places

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will give the number of nursery places in each of the last five years for *(a)* children under three years and *(b)* from three years to compulsory school age; and what are the equivalent figures for each EC country.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on the number of nursery places is not collected centrally but the numbers of pupils in nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in England in each of the last five years and for each age group are shown in the table.

Comparable information on the numbers of nursery pupils in each EC country is not available.

Table 1
Pupils maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in England in January of each year (1988 to 1992)

Year	Pupils ages at previous 31 August	
	Pupils aged 2	Pupils aged 3 and 4[1]
1988	27,310	257,232
1989	25,299	270,285
1990	26,508	280,466
1991	27,763	290,141
1992	27,225	302,510

[1] Excludes pupils who became 5 years of age by 1 January—ie those of compulsory school age.

Special Schools

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many young people are currently resident in special schools; and what is the estimated annual cost.

Mr. Forth: The latest figures are for January 1992. A total of 11,762 pupils were then resident in maintained and non-maintained special schools in England. The total of pupils with special needs resident in independent schools is not collected centrally.

The annual cost of residential placements in special schools is not collected centrally.

Physics Teachers

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is his most recent assessment on the shortage of physics teachers in schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: There is no overall shortage of physics teachers. Provisional figures for January 1993 show only nine physics secondary teacher vacancies reported for maintained and self-governing schools in England. The 1992 secondary school staffing survey found that only 4 per cent. of physics tuition was delivered by teachers without a post-A level qualification in the subject.

PRIME MINISTER

Serbia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) of 5 July, *Official Report*, column *15*, on actions by the Serbian Government, if he will list *(a)* the actions taken by that Government which Her Majesty's Government considers to have fulfilled the requirements of the London conference and *(b)* the ways in which they have failed to co-operate satisfactorily with the international community's peace efforts.

The Prime Minister: The Serbian leadership bears a heavy burden of responsibility for the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, and has not met the fundamental requirements contained in the statement of principles of the London conference to end hostilities and the acquisition of territory by force, to engage in serious negotiation with the other parties, to respect the rights and basic needs of civilians, and to meet the obligations of all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 13 July.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

World Summit for Children

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the steps taken by his Government to achieve the targets established at the world summit for children.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom response to the declaration and plan of action agreed at the world summit for children is published as Cm. 1984, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Child Migrants Scheme

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set up an inquiry into the child migrants scheme.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so. Such schemes date back to the second half of the 19th century and were conducted under duly enacted legislation. They were ended in 1967.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Annunciator Service

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee what proposals there are for the modernisation of the House annunciator service.

Mr. Gary Waller: The character generation equipment of the annunciator system is to be updated during the summer recess, following the agreement of the Information Committee to a proposal by the Editor of the *Official Report*. The new system will display the same information as at present when the House is sitting. Before 1 pm on sitting Mondays to Thursdays, the screens will display information on the forthcoming proceedings of the House. The information will be available additionally in teletext form at other times on television sets within the parliamentary estate equipped to receive it.

There will be a demonstration of the new screen displays on Thursday 22 July in a Committee Room of the House.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will set out the terms of reference for his Department's inquiry into removing unnecessary regulations in the tourism industry.

Mr. Sproat: The inquiry will identify first those regulations which place needless and excessive burdens on the tourism industry, and secondly the action required to free business from the harmful effect of those regulations. It will also determine what action is necessary to ensure that the interests of the tourism industry are taken fully into account before regulations are put in place in future.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures are being taken by his Department to ease the burden of regulation on the tourist industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: I refer to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) on 14 June 1993 at column *619*.

Media Products

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the value earned by the United Kingdom from the export of British media products.

Mr. Brooke: Information on exports of media products is not held centrally.

WALES

Anabolic Steroids

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures are being taken in Wales to inform young people of the dangers of anabolic steroids; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are a number of initiatives, both at a local and national level, within Wales informing young people and others of the dangers of using anabolic steroids.

In 1990 the Welsh Committee on Drug Misuse identified an increasing problem related to the use of anabolic steroids and initiated action to bring the problem to the attention of practitioners. This resulted in pioneering research and pilot prevention programmes being undertaken in West Glamorgan.

Most activity is now undertaken through local health and education authorities. In addition the Sports Council for Wales has recently launched an initiative warning about the use of banned drugs in sport, and this includes anabolic steroids. Part of this initiative will be targeted specifically at schools.

For those individuals who are already involved in steroid misuse, there is advice available on the dangers and on safer practices, including the availability of clean needles and syringes for those who inject their drugs.

Food Technology

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the National Curriculum Council for Wales recommendation that food technology should be an option rather than mandatory at key stage 3.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have received the views of the Curriculum Council for Wales on the proposals for a revised technology order which were issued last December. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and I have announced that the timetable for implementation of a revised curriculum in technology should be delayed by a year. This will permit the outcome of the review of the national curriculum and assessment arrangements to be taken into account in the revision of the order. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there will be further consultations before any changes are made.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the recent report by the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales entitled, "Wales 2012—the United Kingdom's National Sustainability" report and its role and relevance to Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales' views as set out in its report Wales 2012 will be taken into account, along with others received during the consultation process, in the preparation of the United Kingdom's report to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development.

Community Hospitals

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the community hospitals which were located in each local authority area in the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: As there is no agreed definition of community hospital the information given as follows relates to those hospitals classified as such by the health authorities in question. Other hospitals in the counties have been included to give a complete picture.

	Hospital open		
	1980	*1985*	*1992*
Clwyd			
Community hospitals			
Catherine Gladstone Maternity	Yes	Yes	No
Chatsworth House	Yes	No	No
Chirk and District	Yes	Yes	Yes
Colwyn Bay Maternity	Yes	No	No
Colwyn Bay Community	Yes	Yes	Yes
Deeside Community	No	No	Yes
Denbigh Infirmary	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dobshill	Yes	Yes	Yes
Flint Cottage	Yes	Yes	Yes
Holywell Cottage	Yes	Yes	Yes
Llangollen	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lluesty	Yes	Yes	Yes
Meadowslea	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mold	Yes	Yes	Yes
Penley	Yes	Yes	Yes
Prestatyn Community	No	No	Yes
Royal Alexandra	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ruthin	Yes	Yes	Yes
Trevalyn Manor	Yes	Yes	Yes
Other hospitals			
Abergele	Yes	Yes	Yes
Broughton	Yes	Yes	Yes
Coed Du	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gwynfa	Yes	Yes	Yes
H. M. Stanley	Yes	Yes	Yes
Llangwyfan	Yes	No	No
Maelor General	Yes	Yes	[1]Yes
Wrexham War Memorial	Yes	Yes	
North Wales	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pool Park	Yes	Yes	No
Ysbyty Glan Clwyd	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gwynedd			
Community hospitals			
Bronygarth	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bryn Beryl	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bryn y Neuadd	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brynhseio	Yes	Yes	Yes
Caernarvon Eye and Cottage	Yes	Yes	No
Cefni	Yes	Yes	No
Conway	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dollgellau and District	Yes	Yes	Yes

	Hospital open		
	1980	1985	1992
Druid	Yes	Yes	Yes
Eryri	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ffestiniog Memorial	Yes	Yes	Yes
Galltysil	Yes	No	No
Garth Angharad	Yes	Yes	Yes
Groesynyd	Yes	Yes	No
Llwyn View	Yes	Yes	Yes
Madoc Memorial	Yes	Yes	No
Minffordd	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stanley Sailors	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tywyn and District	Yes	Yes	Yes
Valley	Yes	Yes	Yes
Other hospitals			
Caernarvonshire and Anglesey General	Yes	No	No
Llandudno General	Yes	Yes	Yes
St. David's	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ysbyty Gwynedd	No	Yes	Yes

[1] From 14 June 1986 these two hospitals merged to become Ysbyty.

Breast and Cervical Cancer

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many women died of *(a)* breast cancer and *(b)* cervical cancer in each health authority area in Wales in 1992; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1986.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of deaths of female residents of each health authority in Wales where the underlying cause was (a) breast cancer and (b) cervical cancer for each year since 1986 are given in the following tables.

Malignant neoplasm of the female breast (ICD 174)

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Clwyd	132	107	141	136	110	118	119
E. Dyfed	64	79	82	70	66	75	81
Pembrokeshire	34	35	34	22	23	33	35
Gwent	85	128	139	134	134	99	137
Gwynedd	69	74	72	87	73	89	62
Mid Glamorgan	163	133	149	150	129	118	136
Powys	27	29	26	46	40	36	34
South Glamorgan	109	127	99	107	94	98	114
West Glamorgan	91	98	102	104	103	103	106

Malignant neoplasm of the cervix uteri (ICD 180)

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Clwyd	19	16	25	10	22	23	15
E. Dyfed	13	5	12	11	12	14	13
Pembrokeshire	10	4	4	3	4	8	3
Gwent	25	15	17	21	16	21	15
Gwynedd	11	16	8	13	7	3	8
Mid Glamorgan	24	28	25	22	24	27	24
Powys	4	4	6	10	8	8	6
South Glamorgan	19	19	10	9	15	10	9
West Glamorgan	14	25	19	22	16	19	14

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.
International Classification of Diseases (9th revision).

Health Authority Costs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the expenditure of the district health authorities in Wales was taken up in administrative costs in the last year for which figures are available; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1985.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In 1991-92 the percentage share of total revenue expenditure that each health authority spends on administration was as follows:

Expenditure on administration as a percentage of total revenue expenditure

Health authority	Per cent.
Clwyd	1·6
East Dyfed	2·7
Gwent	0·9
Gwynedd	2·1
Mid Glamorgan	1·1
Pembrokeshire	1·1
Powys	3·4
South Glamorgan	3·1
West Glamorgan	1·3

Source: Health authorities annual accounts.
Notes:
1. Expenditure on administration is taken to be that covering authority administration and purchasing expenses.
2. 1991-92 is the latest year for which accounts information is currently available. It is not possible to provide figures for previous years on a consistent basis because of changes to the format of accounts as a consequence of the national health service reforms.

PGU Engineering

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether assistance has been offered by his Department to PGU Engineering of Letchworth.

Mr. Redwood: To comment on the Department's relationship with this, or any other individual company, would be a breach of commercial confidentiality.

EC Funding

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to ensure that no finance allocated to Wales by the EC Commission will be lost by delays in processing paperwork in his office relating to such grant applications from Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Projects to take up the whole of the resources allocated to the Welsh structural funds programmes for the calendar years 1992 and 1993 have been identified by the relevant monitoring committees, and formal project approvals are now accelerating. I am confident that all the available structural funds grants will be committed to projects by the end of the year.

Tourism

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that tourism in Wales will continue to be eligible for grant aid under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 that such grants will continue to be administered by the Wales tourist board; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We have no plans to review current arrangements.

Disabled People (Planning)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement outlining the discussions that have taken place between his Department and the Wales Council for the Disabled concerning the participation of disabled people in planning.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Following discussions last year the Welsh Office funded the Wales Council for the Disabled to undertake a participation in planning project, the purpose being to compare consultation strategies and to develop guidelines on good consultative practice in the county social care planning process. The Wales Council for the Disabled is expected to present a full report on this project in the autumn.

Development Board for Rural Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total budget of the Development Board for Rural Wales in *(a)* 1990-91, *(b)* 1991-92 and *(c)* 1992-93.

Mr. Redwood: The DBRW's gross expenditure for these years are as follows:

	£ million
(a) 1990-91	19·591
(b) 1991-92	[2]21·520
(c) 1992-93[1]	[2]25·076

Gross expenditure includes grant in aid and other payments.
[1] Estimated.
[2] Includes premature redemption of NLF debt.

Wales Tourist Board

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total budget of the Wales tourist board in 1991-92 and 1992-93; and how much money was allocated to its north Wales office during both years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The WTB's gross expenditure for 1991-92 and 1992-93 was £12·946 million and £15·287 million respectively. Gross expenditure includes grant in aid and other receipts.

No funds are directly allocated to the north Wales office.

Valleys Initiative

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest figures for total expenditure on the valleys initiative for each year between 1988-89 and 1992-93.

Mr. Redwood: Total public expenditure for each of the five financial years of the first programme for the valleys (1988-93) was:

	£ million
1988-89	139·330
1989-90	137·440
1990-91	148·810
1991-92	171·033
1992-93	[1]176·270
Total	[1]772·883

Note.—Figures exclude housing programmes.
[1] Estimated outturn based on the 1992-93 provision.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the conclusions of the evaluation of the valleys initiative conducted by Victor Hausner Associates; and when it will be published.

Mr. Redwood: I have not yet received the final report of the evaluation study. I expect to publish it in due course.

Disabled Children

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many claims have been made for severe disablement allowance by pupils *(a)* in special schools and *(b)* integrated into mainstream schools in Wales in each year since 1987; and how many claims were successful in each instance.

Mr. Scott: I have been asked to reply.

I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorism

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* wounded by terrorist attacks in Northern Ireland in each year since 1969.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The available information is set out in the table.

	Terrorist-related deaths[1]	Injuries[2]
1969	6	765
1970	20	811
1971	131	2,592
1972	401	4,876
1973	219	2,651
1974	203	2,398
1975	241	2,474
1976	283	2,729
1977	105	1,387
1978	71	985
1979	112	875
1980	70	801
1981	84	1,350
1982	85	525
1983	66	510
1984	53	866
1985	49	916
1986	55	1,450
1987	84	1,130
1988	87	1,047
1989	58	959
1990	66	906
1991	88	962
1992	75	1,066
[3]1993	31	310

[1]Figures show all persons killed by terrorist actions and therefore include, for example, people killed in sectarian incidents, those killed while handling explosives and those killed in public order situations. They exclude those killed by the police or armed forces.

[2]Figures show all injuries due to the security situation in Northern Ireland and therefore include, for example, injuries resulting from the actions of the security forces.

[3]to 31 May.

Fishing Licences

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many concessionary fishing licences have been issued to disabled anglers and anglers with severe mobility problems in Northern Ireland by his Department in each of the last five years; what is the full cost of each licence in each year, and the cost at the concessionary rate; how many similar concessionary licences or permits have been issued by the Fisheries conservancy board and the Foyle fisheries commission in the same years; and what was the full and concessionary cost of such licences or permits.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Concessionary permits were first introduced in 1992 and 40 were issued at a cost of £25·90 as compared with £41·70 for a general season permit. In 1993, to date, 75 have been issued at a cost of £20·00 as compared with £42·75 for a general season permit. The Fisheries conservancy board and Foyle fisheries commission do not have the statutory authority to issue licences at concessionary rates.

Fisheries Review

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the names of the persons who are carrying out the review of the Foyle fisheries commission, indicating the nature of the expertise of the persons concerned, when the review began, when the report will be published, and the persons and bodies consulted by the review team.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The management review of the Foyle fisheries commission is being undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team of consultants from the Belfast and Dublin offices of KPMG Management Consulting. The team assigned to the project incorporates a wide range of expertise including business management, financial management, human resource management, corporate finance, strategic marketing, environmental management, pension funding and aquatic science.

The review commenced in early February 1993 and the report is expected to be finalised in August 1993. As the report will deal largely with a management review it is not envisaged that its text will be released into the public domain. However, should its recommendations lead to changes which would be of public interest, these will be brought to public attention. Those consulted by the review team included the appropriate Departments of Government in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the Foyle fisheries commission, the advisory council for the Foyle area, and representatives of angling, draft net fishing, drift net fishing and shellfishing interests.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Colombia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what specific infringements of human rights he intends to raise with the President of Colombia during his forthcoming visit.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We expect wide-ranging discussions including human rights. But it would not be right to specify points in advance of President Gaviria's visit.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from, or on behalf of, civic groups and local government in Colombia about the environmental and social impact of BP's exploration in the Cusiana oil field; and what response he has made.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have received no such representations.

North Korea

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has recently received from his United States counterpart in regard to the United States Administration's current policies towards the military nuclear programme in North Korea.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are in close and frequent contact with the Government of the United States over the problem of North Korea's failure to comply with its obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The United States is actively seeking a lasting solution to the problem by which North Korea would reaffirm permanantly her commitment to the non-proliferation treaty, and abide by her safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Bilateral talks between the Governments of the United States and North Korea are set to resume on 14 July in Geneva.

Research Projects

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 1 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *86*, how many research projects in universities have been signed or funded by the Government communication headquarters since that date; which universities were involved; what was the title of each project; and how much each was worth.

Mr. Hurd: There have been no further research projects signed or funded by GCHQ since 1 December 1992.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long a person applying for entry clearance for settlement at the British post in *(a)* Manila, *(b)* Accra, *(c)* Lagos, *(d)* Kingston, *(e)* Nicosia, *(f)* Cairo, *(g)* Bangkok, *(h)* Rabat and *(i)* each post in each country of the Indian sub-continent on 31 March or the latest convenient date could expect to wait for (i) interview, (ii) referral of the case to the Home Office and the requested information being received by the post, (iii) decisions and (iv) an explanatory statement prepared by the post in the event of an appeal against a refusal to be dispatched to the immigration appellate authorities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As at 31 March the timings required at (i) (ii) and (iv) are set out for posts *(a)* to *(h)*.

The information requested at (iii) is not available. Times vary according to the circumstances of individual cases. Many decisions are made on the day of interview.

Post	*(i)*	*(ii)*	*(iv)*
Manila	4 weeks	2-3 months	1-3 months
Accra	4 days	2 months	3 months
Lagos	2 days	4 months	3 months
Kingston	6 weeks	2-3 months	1 week
Nicosia	1 day	6 weeks	1 month
Cairo	1 day	5 days	2 months
Bangkok	6 weeks	2-3 months	3 months
Rabat	Visa operation centralised in Casablanca from 1 March 1993		

(i) As at 31 March the timings required for each post in each country of the Indian Sub-Continent for settlement interviews (in months) were:

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
Islamabad	3 months	3 months	6 months	9 months
Karachi	No queues	—	—	—
Dhaka (end of May)	3 months	7 months	8 months	10 months
New Delhi	1 day	4 months	7 months	10 months
Bombay	1 day	4 months	7 months	9 months
Madras	1 day	7 weeks	5 weeks	Nil
Calcutta	No queues	—	—	—

Settlement queues are organised as follows:

Q1 Persons with a claim to the right of abode, dependent relatives over 70 years, special compassionate cases.
Q2 All spouses and all children under 18 years.
Q3 Fiance(e)s and others applying for the first time.
Q4 Re applicants.

Visit visa applications are dealt with within 24 hours except in Islamabad where, due to seasonally high demand, applicants requiring a full interview can expect to wait 5-7 days.

(ii) If referred to the Home Office, inquiries concerning applications may take from 1-12 months depending on individual circumstances.

(iii) Decisions after first interview are taken within 24 hours in the majority of cases in Indian Sub Continent posts.

(iv) Despatch times of explanatory statements are:

	Settlement	*Non-settlement*
Islamabad	12 weeks	4 weeks
Karachi	Figures not available at this time	
Dhaka	12 weeks	4 weeks
New Delhi	12 weeks	4 weeks
Bombay	12 weeks	4 weeks
Madras	Figures not available at this time	
Calcutta	4 weeks	4 weeks

Yugoslavia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the size of the population of Gladovici on 13 March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communications he has received from the United Nations on the financial viability of the placing of monitors along the border between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina; if it remains Her Majesty's Government's policy to support the placing of these monitors; why no action has been taken to place them since the United Nations Security Council resolution on 16 November 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations estimate that the cost of United Nations observation, reporting, searching and—if necessary—denying access to traffic crossing the borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina would be $69 million for the first six months.

The President of the Security Council wrote to the Secretary General on 7 July requesting him to contact member states to establish whether they will make available the required personnel.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 19 February 1992 to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham), *Official Report*, column *185*, what progress the Croatian Government have made in fulfilling their obligations to minority rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Croatia has made some progress in its approach to minorities, although we consider that its performance should continue to be closely monitored. We remain concerned that efforts to resolve the dispute in the

United Nations protected areas and implement the Vance plan for Croatia are blocked, and we urge the parties to return to negotiations.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the text of the United Nations personnel report into the bombing of Gladovici on 13 March at 16:15 hours GMT; when that report was received by Her Majesty's Government; what representations were made to Her Majesty's Government by foreign Governments regarding this incident, the Secretary General of the United Nations or the President of the Security Council; and on what day they were received.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The only document we have seen from the United Nations about the bombing of Gladovici was UN note verbale s-24900-Add 27 of 16 March, a copy of which was placed, at the request of the hon. Member, in the House of Commons Library on 23 June 1993. We received no representations on this incident from foreign governments, or from the United Nations. The Bosnian Serb leader, Dr. Karadzic, wrote to the Prime Minister on 31 March about several matters including enforcement of the no-fly zone.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply of 19 February 1992 to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) *Official Report*, column *185*, what changes there have been in Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Croatia since February 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As my right hon. Friend explained to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West, (Mr. Bellingham) on 19 February 1992 at column *185*, all aspects of our policy towards Croatia are under constant review. We are becoming increasingly concerned about Croatia's failure to co-operate fully in efforts to secure peace in the former Yugoslavia and, as Heads of Government made clear at the Tokyo economic summit on 7 to 9 July, stronger measures cannot be excluded.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence Her Majesty's Government have received indicating Croatian violations of UN Security Council resolution 713; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglass Hogg: The United Nations sanctions committee is responsible for evaluating and investigating evidence of possible breaches of the arms embargo on the former Yugoslavia. Where necessary, the committee refers cases to the United Nations Security Council. It did so in September 1992 in respect of a possible violation of UN Security Council resolution 713 involving Croatia. The matter is now with the Security Council.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby, (Mr. Wareing), of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *654*, what UN reports he received on the final destination of these aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby, (Mr. Wareing) on 8 July 1993, at column *239*. There have been no reports as to the final destination of the aircraft.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he received from either the Bosnian-Serb authorities or the authorities in Belgrade regarding UNSC no-fly zone enforcement resolutions as a result of the bombing of Gladovici in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Bosnian Serb leader, Dr. Karadzic, wrote to the Prime Minister on 31 March 1993 about several matters including enforcement of the no-fly zone.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if during his visit to Japan for the G7 summit he discussed nuclear testing with his American, French and Russian counterparts.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This issue was raised briefly in discussion with the United States Secretary of State in Tokyo. It was not discussed there with either the French or the Russian Foreign Minister.

Entry Clearance Appeals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many explanatory statements related to entry clearance appeals were awaiting typing at each post in the Indian subcontinent, in Manila, Kingston, Bangkok, Lagos and Accra on the latest available date; how many staff are employed both full time and part time to type statements; and when he expects backlogs to be cleared.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is given in the following table (as at 31 March):

(a) Number of explanatory statements awaiting typing.
(b) Staff whose duties include typing explanatory statements (staff also employed on other typing duties shown in brackets).

Post	*(a)*	*(b)*	
Islamabad	149	9	(1)
Karachi	Figures not available at this time		
Dhaka	410	5	(3)
New Delhi	157	4	—
Bombay	50	(9)	—
Madras	Figures not available at this time		
Calcutta	11	(1)	—
Manila	37	2	—
Kingston	0	1	—
Bangkok	0	(1)	—
Lagos	10	2	(1)
Accra	0	1	—

The posts in Islamabad, Dhaka and New Delhi estimate that they should clear the backlog in two to three months after the busy summer period.

Ukraine

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of Ukraine following the decision on 2 July in the Ukrainian Parliament to claim ownership of all nuclear weapons on Ukrainian territory.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have noted the statement, which also repeated Ukraine's commitment to a non-nuclear future. We shall continue to work with our allies to bring about Ukraine's earliest possible ratification of START I and accession to the non-proliferation treaty as a non-nuclear weapon state.

Settlement Queues

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* children were waiting in each queue at each post in the Indian subcontinent on 31 March or the latest convenient date.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The number of men, women and children waiting in the settlement queues for interviews in the Indian Sub-Continent Posts at 31 March was:

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
Islamabad				
Men	25	497	89	680
Women	57	478	70	84
Children	0	193	0	0
TOTAL	82	1,933	159	764
Karachi	Figures not available			
Dhaka	Breakdown not available			
New Delhi				
Men	0	76	70	61
Women	0	256	97	29
Children	0	35	2	10
TOTAL	0	367	169	100
Bombay				
Men	4	77	67	113
Women	26	302	91	37
Children	45	24	22	6
TOTAL	75	403	180	156
Madras				
Men	7	8	0	0
Women	2	15	3	0
Children	0	4	0	0
TOTAL	9	27	3	0
Calcutta	No queues in Calcutta			
GRAND TOTAL	166	2,756	514	1,020

Queue 1. Persons with a claim to the right of abode. Dependent relatives over 70 years old. Special compassionate cases.
Queue 2. All spouses and all children over 18 years.
Queue 3. Fiancee(s) and others applying for the first time for settlement.
Queue 4. Reapplicants.
There are no queues for visit applications other than in Islamabad, where due to seasonally high demand, applicant requiring a full interview can expect to wait five to seven days.

Iraq

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received on the reasons for the United Nations' inspection team in Iraq withdrawing from Baghdad on 5 July; and if the matter has been raised in the United Nations Security Council subsequently.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations inspection team withdrew from Iraq on 5 July because of Iraq's refusal to allow installation of surveillance cameras at two missile test stands. The matter has been discussed at informal meetings of the United Nations Security Council ambassadors.

Canada (Logging)

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make representations to the Government of British Columbia to reverse the decision to make a substantial proportion of the remaining unlogged area of the Clayoquot sound region available for logging.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The recent decision on land use in the Clayoquot sound area of Vancouver island was for the Government of British Columbia to make. The Canadian Government and British Columbia authorities are well aware of public concern in the United Kingdom about logging in the Clayoquot sound region.

Sudan

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the steps taken by the Government to help secure a peaceful settlement of conflicts in Sudan, and to safeguard human rights.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have consistently urged all the parties to the civil war in Sudan to settle their differences by peaceful means, most recently during the EC Troika mission to Sudan on 18 to 22 June, in which the United Kingdom was represented. We were a prime mover in securing the appointment by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva of a special rapporteur to investigate the human rights situation on a public basis throughout Sudan.

Departmental Replies

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's current practice regarding replies sent to hon. Members of the House; under what circumstances replies are sent by officials; how it is decided whether a reply concerning constituency cases is sent by a Minister or an official; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Our present practice is for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to reply to letters from right hon. Members and for other Ministers to reply to hon. Members.

The exception is correspondence on visa and immigration issues dealt with by officials of the migration and visa correspondence unit. They seek to reply to all inquiries within three weeks and achieve this target in 84 per cent. of all cases. The services which the unit offers are explained in a booklet sent to all Members last year. It has been revised and will be reissued this week. The unit replies to 94 per cent. of letters received from hon. Members. Ministers reply in the remaining 6 per cent. of cases.

Royal Family

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *240*, what items of expenditure were covered by *(a)* the cost of the Prince and Princess of Wales's visit to Nepal and *(b)* the cost of the Princess Royal's visit to India.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Items of expenditure paid by the Department have been in the following categories:

(a) for the Princess of Wales' visit to Nepal—hotel expenses; and miscellaneous (including insurance and reconnaissance visits partly for security purposes).

(b) for the Princess Royal's visit to India—travel; hotel expenses; official presents and donations; bank, postal, telephone and telegraph charges; and miscellaneous.

Hong Kong

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who has the power of appointment of *(a)* the Hong Kong Registrar of Companies, *(b)* the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, *(c)* the Inland Revenue Commissioner for Hong Kong, and *(d)* the Financial Secretary of the Hong Kong Legislative Council.

Mr. Goodlad *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* The Registrar of Companies and the Commissioner of Inland Revenue are appointed by the Secretary for the civil service. The chief executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority is appointed by the Financial Secretary. The Financial Secretary is appointed by the Governor.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give *(a)* the name of the present Financial Secretary of the Hong Kong Legislative Council and indicate whether he is an appointed or a directly elected member and *(b)* the names of the members of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority together with the banks and other financial institutions they are associated with.

Mr. Goodlad *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* The present Financial Secretary is Mr. Hamish MacLeod. He is an ex-Officio member of the Legislative Council appointed by the Governor. The Hong Kong Monetary Authority is part of the Hong Kong Government. The chief executive is Mr. Joseph Yam. He is not associated with any banks or financial institutions.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Secret Fish Holds

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many Spanish vessels, British and Spanish registered, have been found by United Kingdom to have secret fish holds in each year since 1991; and how many have been prosecuted.

Mr. Jack: There have been no prosecutions, but legislation is being brought forward shortly to provide for the prosecution of the owners or skippers of vessels over 17 m which fail to carry plans of their rooms. Three vessels, two Spanish-owned but British registered and one Spanish registered, have been found to have secret fish rooms since 1991.

Fish Conservation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate has been made of the cost to date of setting up the machinery for the implementation of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992; and what is *(a)* the number and location of jobs created, *(b)* the number of vessels so far registered and *(c)* the number of appeals initiated.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 12 July 1993.

Seals

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food how many reports regarding incidental catches of seals by fishermen the fisheries officers in England and Wales have received to date under the scheme set up to monitor the extent of this interaction.

Mr. Jack: There have been no reports of incidental catches of seals under this scheme for England and Wales.

Pregnant Ewes

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement on the screening of pregnant lowland ewes to ascertain the number of lambs each is carrying.

Mr. Jack: My Department does not run any such screening programme, but screening is available from various commercial organisations for a fee. We understand that those who make use of it find it valuable as a means of determining appropriate feeding regimes for their breeding ewes.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Environmental Initiatives

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what matters in regard to the financing of environmental initiatives were introduced by the United Kingdom at the G7 heads of state economic meeting in Tokyo.

Mr. Nelson: The environment, and in particular the follow up UNCED, was one of the issues discussed in Tokyo. The G7 agreed to work to ensure that the global environment facility functions as the financial mechanism to provide funding for the incremental costs of implementing the global environment conventions signed at Rio.

Government Departments (Expenditure)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of placing in the House of Commons Library each year for the inspection of hon. Members a microfiche copy of a computer printout of each Government Department's expenditure analysed *(a)* by account code and *(b)* by item charged.

Mr. Portillo: Information on which to base such costings is not held centrally, and could not be assembled without disproportionate cost. The detailed management of operational accounts is a matter for individual Departments.

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the changes made to his Department's definition of unemployment since May 1979, with the dates upon which the changes were made.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 26 October 1992 at column *496*.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to encourage better skills training; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government's strategy is to encourage effective investment in skills by employers and individuals, by stimulating a strong market in training, by encouraging standard setting and by offering training to young people and long term unemployed people. Britain's workforce is becoming more skilled. Over 2·5 million more people in the workforce now have a qualification than five years ago.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the latest available figures for the numbers of people on Government training schemes in North Derbyshire.

Miss Widdecombe: As at 18 June 1993 there were 1,070 people participating in training for work and 1,708 people in training on youth training in the area covered by the North Derbyshire training and enterprise council.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the estimated total amount spent by the Government on training since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: The estimated total spend on training—including vocational education and enterprise—in Great Britain since 1979, in cash prices, is £23·8 billion and, at 1992-93 prices, is £31·6 billion.

Vocational Courses (Allowances)

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to the statement of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), 16 March, *Official Report*, column 193, if he will list, by training and enterprise council area, how many educational allowances for vocational courses have been granted to the long-term unemployed since 16 March.

Miss Widdecombe: None. Education allowances will be paid under the learning for work initiative which starts in mid August in Scotland and in September in England and Wales.

Gas Appliance Installers

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unqualified gas appliance installers have been prosecuted in the last year that figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available in the form requested.

In 1991-92, 93 informations were laid under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1984 and the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) (Amendment) Regulations 1990. These resulted in 86 convictions.

Wages Councils

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the new earnings survey will continue to provide comparable figures for at least five years on those sectors previously covered by wages councils.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 8 July 1993]*: The new earnings survey obtains information on the earnings of employees covered by wages councils by asking employers to report the relevant wages councils. This practice will clearly cease when there are no wages councils. The extent to which information on earnings for selected occupations, industries and age groups can be used as a replacement, will be investigated before next April.

SCOTLAND

Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effect of his proposals for the reform of local government in Scotland on the preservation of the role of the Strathclyde passenger transport executive; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend recognises the important role of Strathclyde passenger transport executive in transport provision. He has taken this into account in the examination of how the functions of local authorities can best be carried out under the various options for local government reform. The Government's proposals wil refleet fully the consideration given to the executive's role.

Optical Appliances Vouchers

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total number of optical appliances vouchers redeemed in Scotland in each year since 1986; and what was the total cost of the optical appliances voucher scheme in Scotland each year since 1986.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested on optical appliances vouchers in Scotland is in the table. The information is for vouchers issued through the general ophthalmic services.

Optical vouchers and repair/replacement vouchers redeemed in Scotland

Year	*Number of vouchers redeemed*[1]	*Cost of redeeming vouchers £ million*
1986-87	[2]—	3·718
1987-88	350,479	6·332
1988-89	317,645	6·747
1989-90	315,266	6·990
1990-91	337,073	8·566
1991-92	410,935	10·596
1992-93	431,956	[3]—

[1] Analysis is made from payments made by health boards in Scotland to ophthalmic medical practitioners (OMPs) and ophthalmic opticians (OOs).

[2] Information on the current collection basis for 1986-87 is not centrally available.

[3] Not yet available

Child Care Policy

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish his White Paper on child care policy and law.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intends to publish a White Paper on child care policy and law in due course.

Children's Rights

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what contribution he has made to the United Kingdom's first report to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child.

Mr. Stewart: The Government's first report on the United Nations convention on the rights of the child is due to be submitted in January 1994. The Scottish Office will contribute to the report, ensuring that it reflects the situation in Scotland where that is different from the rest of the United Kingdom.

Students

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from colleges and universities of further and higher education about the adequacy of student incomes; and what was the substance of those representations.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* In the past 18 months or so, my right hon. Friend has received representations about student income from only one educational institution, a university, which argued that students faced financial hardship due to the lack of vacation employment and the withdrawal of entitlement to social security benefits.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent research he has commissioned on *(a)* the adequacy of student income, *(b)* the level of student debt and *(c)* whether students are leaving courses prematurely because of financial need; and what were his findings.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* My hon. Friend, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, announced on Wednesday 21 October 1992 the commissioning of a United Kingdom-wide survey of student income and expenditure initiated jointly by the Education Departments. We hope that the results, which should be available later this year, will bring our knowledge of student income and indebtedness up to date.

There is no evidence to suggest that the proportion of Scottish domiciled award-holding students who leave their courses prematurely is increasing.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what current information he has on *(a)* the adequacy of student housing, *(b)* the extent to which students income meets their housing needs and *(c)* levels of student debt.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* Detailed information on student housing and its cost is not held centrally.

The survey of student income and expenditure announced by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education on 21 October 1992 will provide certain information on housing costs and student debt.

Refuge Hostels

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will commission research into what happens in the immediate aftermath to those women and children who leave refuge hostels.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* Research has recently been completed on domestic violence and the effect on children and families. No further research is planned on the specific issue of women and children who leave refuge hostels.

Police Arrests (Forms)

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the maximum and minimum number of forms which must be completed by a police officer making an arrest followed by *(a)* release and *(b)* detention; and what, on average, is the time taken to complete these formalities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* The minimum number of forms which must be completed by an officer making an arrest is two, rising possibly to 20 in exceptional circumstances. On average, the time taken to complete this process is about 60 minutes. Some police forces are introducing automated systems which will reduce the need to complete successive forms manually.

Women's Aid

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much grant has been awarded to Scottish Women's Aid in each of the years since it first applied for grant.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* The total grants paid from 1978-79 are as follows:

	£
1978-79	7,740
1979-80	9,433
1980-81	13,329
1981-82	19,466
1982-83	31,395
1983-84	38,871
1984-85	58,865
1985-86	72,141
1986-87	84,829
1987-88	93,630
1988-89	99,860
1989-90	106,931
1990-91	98,000
1991-92	109,911
1992-93	121,282
1993-94	[1]115,092

[1] Grant offered.

Information for the years 1975-76 to 1977-78 is not readily available.

Racial Harassment

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to criminalise racial harassment and to make racial harassment an aggravation of existing crimes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* The Government have no plans to introduce a new offence of racial harassment. Aggravating factors such as racial harassment can be taken into account for sentencing purposes.

Conservation Areas

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the sites in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* the rest of Scotland which will be placed on a list of special areas of conservation under the European Community's Directive 92/43/EEC in the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* The Government have not yet proposed any sites for designation as special areas of conservation (SACs) under Directive 92/43/EEC. The country nature conservation agencies and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee are at present undertaking the scientific analysis necessary for the preparation of the United Kingdom's national list from which areas to be designated as SACs will be selected.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many sites in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole have been or are to be, designated as special protection areas under the European Community's Directive 70/400/EEC on the conservation of wild birds; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) on 16 June 1993.

Wetlands

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all those wetlands, Ramsar sites, under the European Parliament Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (1971) in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* the rest of Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* The information requested is set out in the table:

Site name	*Region*
Bridgend Flats (Islay)	Strathclyde[1]
Cairngorm Lochs	Grampian and Highland
Claish Moss	Highland
Eilean Na Muice Duibhe (Duich Moss-Islay)	Strathclyde[1]
Fala Flow	Lothian[1]
Feur Lochain (Islay)	Strathclyde[1]
Glac Na Criche (Islay)	Strathclyde[1]
Gladhouse Reservoir	Lothian[1]
Gruinart Flats (Islay)	Strathclyde[1]
Hoselaw Loch	Borders[1]
Loch An Duin	Western Isles
Loch Druidibeg, Loch A'Machair and Loch Stilligar	Western Isles[1]
Loch Eye	Highland[1]
Loch Ken and Dee Marshes	Dumfries and Galloway[1]
Loch Leven	Tayside
Loch of Lintrathen	Tayside[1]
Loch Lomond	Strathclyde and Central
Loch of Skene	Grampian[1]
Loch Spynie	Grampian[1]
Rannock Moor	Tayside
Silver Flowe	Dumfries and Galloway
South Tayside Goose Roosts	Tayside[1]
Upper Solway Flats and Marshes	Dumfries and Galloway[1]

[1] Also designated as a special protection area under the EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC).

DEFENCE

Fast Jet Aircraft

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the required *(a)* vertical and *(b)* horizontal avoidance distances for camouflaged fast jet aircraft of activities notified under the civil aircraft notification procedure.

Mr. Hanley: Civil pilots can if they wish, notify low level aerial activity under the civil aircraft notification procedure specifying the location and horizontal dimensions of the area in which they will be operating, together with the maximum height of their activities. Commercial activity accepted for notification attracts temporary avoidance status, in which case pilots of military fixed wing aircraft flying in excess of 140 knots are required to avoid the specified area laterally or if overflying it to do so at a minimum height of 300 ft above the maximum specified in the notification. Recreational and other aerial activity does not normally attract avoidance status but when details are provided they are passed to military air crew who will take account of such activities in planning their sorties.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 October 1992, *Official Report*, column *159*, if he is yet able to give an analysis of the noise generated by the F-15E aircraft at low level.

Mr. Hanley: For technical reasons, the F-15E aircraft involved in the trial last September were unable to achieve all of the planned runs over the test site and firm conclusions could not be drawn from the limited data produced. A further trial which was arranged earlier this year had to be abandoned due to adverse weather conditions but has been re-arranged for later this month.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the nature of the sortie, *(b)* the recorded height, *(c)* the recorded speed and *(d)* the home base of the military jet aircraft that overflew the village of Clayton, south Yorkshire on 30 June at approximately (i) 22:00 hours, (ii) 22:04 hours, (iii) 22:08 hours, (iv) 22:12 hours, (v) 22:15 hours, (vi) 22:19 hours, (vii) 22:23 hours (viii) 22:23 hours, (ix) 22:35 hours; and what notification was given to the pilots of the aircraft of two low-speed non-jet aircraft in the area between approximately 22:20 hours and 22:35 hours.

Mr. Hanley: A number of Tornado aircraft from RAF Cottesmore conducted routine low-level training in the area at about the times stated on 30 June. We have no reason to believe any of the military aircraft flew below the permitted height of 1,000 ft. No military non-jet aircraft were booked to low fly in the area at the time, and no notification was received under the civil aircraft notification procedure or by other means of any civil aircraft activity.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the limit on the number of aircraft permitted to operate simultaneously in low-flying area 17 includes any civil aircraft known to be operating in the area at less than 2,000 ft above sea level.

Mr. Hanley: The limit placed by the Ministry of Defence on the number of aircraft permitted to fly in low-flying area 17 at any one time applies only to military aircraft flying below 2,000 ft.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given by his Department to the printing of pipeline routes on military low-flying charts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The national air traffic services have set in hand a review of the civil aircraft notification procedure —CANP. The review will include consideration of whether helicopters conducting pipe and power line inspections should be included in the CANP system and of the possibility of printing pipeline routes on military low-flying charts.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what capacity the ALFENS system will have to provide warning to military pilots of pipeline and power line aerial survey activity.

Mr. Hanley: ALFENS will provide information to military pilots on civil air activity notified under the national air traffic services'—NATS—civil aircraft notification procedure—CANP. Pipe and power line aerial survey activity is excluded from CANP at present but a review is in hand by NATS to consider whether it may be included in future.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list *(a)* the nature of the sortie, *(b)* the recorded height, *(c)* the recorded speed and *(d)* the home base of the military jet aircraft that overflew the village of Clayton, south Yorkshire on 1 July between the approximate times of 22:04 hours and 22:45 hours;

(2) if he will list *(a)* the nature of the sortie, *(b)* the recorded height, *(c)* the recorded speed and *(d)* the home base of the military jet aircraft that overflew the village of Clayton, south Yorkshire on 29 June at approximately (i) 22.01 hours, (ii) 22.09 hours, (iii) 22.17 hours, (iv) 22.20 hours, (v) 22.25 hours, (vi) 22.29 hours and (vii) 22.46 hours.

Mr. Hanley: A number of aircraft from RAF Cottesmore were conducting routine low-level training sorties in the area at about the times stated on 29 June and 1 July. We have no reason to believe any of the aircraft flew below the permitted height of 1,000 feet on either of these dates.

Army Discharges

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by rank and by year for the last five years the number of Army personnel who were discharged under section 69 of the Army Act 1955; and what percentage this represents for discharges by year.

Mr. Hanley: No discharges from the Army are effected under the Army Act 1955. Officers hold their commissions at the pleasure of the Sovereign, who may take action if the officer is sentenced to dismissal. Soldiers are discharged under Queen's regulations.

The table shows the number of discharges and resignations following convictions under section 69 of the Army Act 1955. The annual figures are also expressed as a percentage of the total exits from the regular Army.

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Private	12	9	8	7	18
Lance Corporal	4	2	1	1	2
Corporal	1	1	0	4	2
Sergeant	2	0	2	1	1
Staff Sergeant	2	2	0	1	0
Warrant Officer II	1	0	2	0	0
Warrant Officer I	0	0	0	0	0
Subaltern	1	3	2	0	0
Captain	0	1	1	1	0
Major	0	1	1	0	0
Lieutenant Colonel	0	0	0	0	0
Colonel	0	0	0	0	0
Brigadier	0	0	0	0	0
General	0	0	0	0	0
All Ranks	23	19	17	15	23
Percentage of all Army exits	0·10	0·08	0·07	0·08	0·10

Air Crash, North Sea

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 October 1992, *Official Report*, column *159*, if he is yet able to give the hon. Member a copy of the military aircraft accident summary in respect of the air crash in the North sea on 9 July 1992.

Mr. Hanley: The board of inquiry is not expected to be completed for some time. My noble Friend the

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member as soon as a summary of the findings is available.

Toxic Pollution Syndrome

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel have been monitored or treated for symptoms of combined toxic pollution syndrome following deployment during Operation Granby in 1991; and in which hospitals.

Mr. Hanley: The term "combined toxic pollution syndrome" is not recognised in the United Kingdom as a clinical condition. No such figures therefore exist.

Mine Counter-measure Vessels

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the 50 military tasks ascribed to the United Kingdom forces, and identified in his White Paper, Cm 2270, require a mine counter-measure vessel component; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Of the 50 military tasks identified in the White Paper, Cm 2270, 10 require a mine counter-measure vessel component.

Cruise Missiles

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the studies for a United Kingdom requirement for land attack cruise missiles for the Royal Navy are to include options for dual-capable systems.

Mr. Hanley: No. The scope of the study is restricted to conventional options.

Nuclear Testing

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will seek assistance from the United States in the development of alternative testing technologies to those of underground nuclear testing.

Mr. Aitken: Under the United States-United Kingdom 1958 agreement, we co-operate closely with the United States on a wide range of nuclear matters, including alternative testing technologies.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of the non-proliferation benefits arising from President Clinton's extension of the nuclear testing moratorium.

Mr. Aitken: President Clinton has made clear that the extension of the United States moratorium on nuclear testing is intended to promote a comprehensive test ban. Our view is that a comprehensive test ban would not in itself prevent a proliferator from producing and deploying a crude nuclear weapon and from obtaining the materials with which to do this. But associated measures for verification and inspection, if sufficiently rigorous and applicable to the states concerned, might constrain potential proliferators.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the development of a new sub-strategic nuclear warhead can be completed *(a)* without further nuclear tests and *(b)* without further improvements to alternative and non-nuclear methods of developing nuclear weapons.

Mr. Aitken: Yes.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if it is his policy not to conduct any further nuclear tests unless another state does so first;

(2) what is his policy on seeking an alternative site at which to conduct United Kingdom nuclear tests;

(3) what is his policy on conducting any further nuclear tests prior to the non-proliferation treaty extension conference in 1995.

Mr. Aitken: We have no plans to conduct nuclear tests anywhere other than at the Nevada test site. There is, of course, no possibility of our conducting further tests at Nevada during the United States moratorium on nuclear testing, which President Clinton has recently extended until October 1994, unless another state tests meanwhile. We would need to consider in the light of the circumstances at the time whether to avail ourselves of any further opportunities to conduct nuclear tests.

Desert Storm Syndrome

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what liaison has taken place with the French authorities relating to Desert Storm syndrome.

Mr. Hanley: A request for information on this alleged condition has been made through our Defence attache in Paris to the relevant French authorities. The initial response from the French authorities is that they are unaware of any cases of French service personnel who served in the Gulf exhibiting any unexplained symptoms associated with the alleged condition known as Desert Storm syndrome. Such liaison will continue.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations he has received from *(a)* service personnel, *(b)* their families and *(c)* civilian general practitioners relating to Desert Storm syndrome; and if he will publish those representations he has received from civilian general practitioners relating to Desert Storm syndrome which do not contain confidential information.

Mr. Hanley: My Department has received one representation from a serving member of the United Kingdom armed forces and four from, or on behalf of, ex-service personnel who served in the Gulf conflict concerning symptoms which they believe might be connected to the alleged Desert Storm syndrome. No such representations have yet been received that have been made by families of United Kingdom service personnel or by civilian general practitioners.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his staff are currently involved in examining information relating to Desert Storm syndrome.

Mr. Hanley: Staff in a number of areas in my Department have been involved in examining information on the alleged Desert Storm syndrome. None have been specifically allocated to the task, however, and all are undertaking this work as part of their normal duties.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 7 July, *Official Report*, column *203*, on what date he began liaising with the United States authorities on the question of Desert Storm syndrome.

Mr. Hanley: General liaison on medical matters is maintained continuously but the specific official contact between the Defence medical services and the US authorities on this alleged syndrome took place on 17 June 1993.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has concerning the effect of atmospheric pollution on the health of those personnel involved in Operation Granby.

Mr. Hanley: The United Kingdom service personnel whose respiratory function was most at risk during Operation Granby were those Royal Engineers personnel engaged in clear-up operations near the oil fires. Their respiratory function was measured before they left the United Kingdom and at two-weekly intervals during their assignment in Kuwait. No adverse affects were suffered and no change in respiratory function was seen.

Naval Dockyards

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the job totals he expects for 1995 and 2000 in naval base staff at Rosyth and Devonport.

Mr. Hanley: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will explain the cost adjustment figure of £0·9 million for Rosyth in annex A of his consultative document on future arrangements for ship refitting in the royal dockyards.

Mr. Aitken: An adjustment was applied to the two estimates provided by Babcock Thorn Ltd. for its Rosyth proposals, which were expressed in January 1993 prices, to uprate them to March 1993 prices. This brought them in line with the estimate provided by Devonport Management Ltd., so that a like-for-like comparison of the proposals could be undertaken.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of the £134·3 million figure of capital costs for Rosyth and £120·6 million for Devonport in annex A of his consultative document on future arrangements for ship refitting in the Royal dockyards.

Mr. Aitken: The detailed composition of the proposals put forward by the companies are commercially confidential. However, as part of the overall assessment, the MOD's specialist advisers reviewed the Bills of Quantities submitted by the companies in support of their proposals, and we are confident that the proposals are realistic.

Married Quarters

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Ministry of Defence married quarters were empty for the last date for which figures were available; if he will break down the figure by number of bedrooms; and how many had been empty for over one year.

Mr. Hanley: As at 31 March 1993, there were 9,166 vacant married quarters. Of these, 2,153 were either undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation, 2,493 were already allocated to service families who were due to move in shortly and 870 were being held for agreed deployment or deployments under study. A total of 1,265 of these married quarters have been vacant for over one year. Information on the number of bedrooms is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Ministry of Defence married quarters outside secure perimeters are occupied by *(a)* civilians who have not served in the forces and *(b)* ex-service personnel; and what is his policy towards the residence in Ministry of Defence married quarters outside secure perimeters by civilians who have not served in the forces.

Mr. Hanley: It is my Department's policy that married quarters should be reserved for use by service personnel and their families. In certain circumstances, however, civilian employees of the Ministry of Defence or service-sponsored organisations may also occupy married quarters under licence. Any married quarters which are surplus to long term requirements are sold wherever possible, but my Department does try to lease any properties to local authorities and housing associations where there is no short service requirement.

Records of civilian occupants of married quarters are not kept in a form which distinguishes between properties inside or outside secure perimeters and between civilians who have previously served in the forces and those who have not.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the estimated cost of rent forgone for the empty Ministry of Defence married quarters in Stillington street, London SW1 over the past four years; what was the cost of providing *(a)* caretaking and *(b)* security in this time; and when he expects the works to be complete.

Mr. Hanley: The refurbishment contract for the married quarters in Stillington street is expected to complete in April 1994. The estimated cost of rent foregone in the past four years is £200,000. Details of the cost of providing caretaking and security are not readily available and my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards the leasing of empty Ministry of Defence married quarters to housing associations; what contact his Department has had with housing associations regarding the management of Ministry of Defence estates; how many empty Ministry of Defence married quarters have been leased to housing associations in the last year; and how many empty Ministry of Defence married quarters he proposes to lease to housing associations this year.

Mr. Hanley: Empty married quarters, which are temporarily surplus to requirements but for which there is a long-term service need are, wherever possible, offered for leasing to local authorities. In most cases the local authority will take on the lease, but if it does not wish or is unable to do so, it may nominate a housing association to act in its place. My Department will willingly deal with either organisation.

Two housing associations have assisted us in developing our plans for the future management of service

married quarters. No empty properties have been leased to housing associations in the last year, but over 900 properties are currently on lease to local authorities or other organisations. Leases of 87 properties to a housing association and 31 to a local authority are under negotiation. Further properties will be offered for leasing if they become available.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Ministry of Defence married quarters are surplus to operational requirements at the last date for which figures are available.

Mr. Hanley: As at 31 March 1993, 2,069 service married quarters were surplus to operational requirements. A total of 2,015 of these properties were in the process of being sold.

Irish Regiments

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many part-time members of the UDR/RIR there were as at 1 June in each year since the UDR was established; and how many recruits joined the regiment each year.

Mr. Hanley: I will write to the hon. Member.

Battlefield Artillery Target Engagement System

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to order further quantities of BATES equipment for the Royal Artillery; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: I am pleased to announce that I have approved the placing of an order worth some £60 million with Marconi Radar and Control Systems for additional production of the battlefield artillery target engagement system, known as BATES, which will allow automated control of artillery up to corps level.

The further equipment now on order will be delivered up to 1996 and will act as a "force multiplier" for the Army's major artillery systems, MLRS and AS90, and link them to surveillance and targeting systems.

The award of this contract will safeguard 200 jobs at the Marconi sites at Hillend—Fife, Scotland—where most manufacture will take place, and Frimley in Surrey.

RAF Support Command

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which local travel-to-work area each RAF base in Support Command lies; and what the latest unemployment figures are for each such travel-to-work area.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. A list of the relevant travel-to-work areas (TTWAs), and the RAF Support Command stations they cover follows:

TTWA	*RAF Support Command station*
Aylesbury and Wycombe	RAF Halton
Barnstaple and Ilfracombe	RAF Chivenor
Bedford	RAF Cardington
Cardiff	RAF St. Athlan
Chippenham	RAF Rudloe Manor
Doncaster	RAF Finningley
Flint and Rhyl	RAF Sealand
Gloucester	RAF Innsworth
	RAF Quedgeley
Guildford and Aldershot	RAF Oakhanger
Heathrow	RAF Headley Court
	RAF Uxbridge
Hereford and Leominster	RAF Hereford
Hitchin and Letchworth	RAF Henlow
Holyhead	RAF Valley
Huntingdon and St. Neots	RAF Brampton
Lincoln	RAF Digby
	RAF Scampton
	RAF Swinderby
Melton Mowbray	RAF North Luffenham
Norwich	RAF Swanton Morley
Nottingham	RAF Newton
Newark	RAF Syerston
Newbury	RAF Thatcham
Richmondshire	RAF Carlisle
Salisbury	RAF Chilmark
Shrewsbury	RAF Shawbury
Sleaford	RAF College Cranwell
Slough	RAF Bracknell
Stafford	RAF Stafford
Watford and Luton	RAF Stanbridge
Weston-super-Mare	RAF Locking
Wolverhampton	RAF Cosford
York	RAF Church Fenton
	RAF Linton-on-Ouse

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many men with wives entitled to category B retirement pensions deferred their retirement in each year since 1988; what was the average amount of their basic retirement pension without the inclusion of increments; and what was the average amount after the addition of such increments;

(2) how many married women entitled to category B retirement pensions have not received increments to those pensions although their husbands have deferred retirement and earned increments to their own retirement pensions; what are their estimated numbers in each year since 1988; and what is the average amount of additional pension received in those years by their husbands as a consequence of deferring retirement.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which, following the decision of the Social Security Commissioner in 1992 (CP/64/1988), married women entitled to a category B retirement pension will be entitled to increments to that pension when their husbands defer retirement beyond their 65th birthday.

Mr. Hague: A married woman can earn increments to her category B retirement pension when her husband defers his category A retirement pension beyond his 65th birthday provided she is not, at the same time, receiving one of a specified list of "excluding" benefits and her husband is not receiving an increase of such a benefit for her. On 12 June 1992 the Court of Appeal upheld an earlier decision of the social security commissioner that graduated retirement benefit (GRB) was not an excluded benefit. Therefore the receipt by a married woman of GRB did not prevent her earning increments. Arrangements have been made to adjust pension rates and pay arrears in affected cases. The regulations were changed on 5 August 1992 and from that date GRB is an excluding benefit.

Research Projects

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list each research project his Department currently funds with *(a)* the institution in which it is based, *(b)* the funds provided by his Department, *(c)* the number of staff involved and *(d)* the start and end date.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 5 July 1993]:* The table lists projects which are currently being funded or part-funded by the Department, together with the organisation conducting the work. There are currently 18 research staff in the Department.

Project title	*Contractor*	*Project cost (£)*	*Start date*	*Due end date*
Contributions Agency Customer Satisfaction Survey 1993	British Market Research Bureau International	151,000	June 1993	March 1994
Incomes and Living Standards of the Elderly in a Comparative Perspective	Social Policy Research Unit University of York	79,000	November 1992	December 1993
Benefit Agency National Customer Survey 1992	Public Attitude Surveys Ltd.	187,000	April 1992	August 1993
Pilot study of Ethnicity and the Income Support Claiming Procedure	Commission for Racial Equality	5,000	October 1992	April 1994
Evaluation of Disability Working Allowance	Policy Studies Institute	265,000	February 1993	December 1995
Invalidity Benefit Surveys	Social and Community Planning Research	240,000	August 1991	July 1993
General Practitioners and Invalidity Benefit	Social and Community Planning Research	31,000	October 1992	July 1993
Lung Cancer Risk in Pottery Workers	London Chest Hospital/Centre for Occupational Health, University of Manchester	51,000	October 1992	November 1993
Statutory Sick Pay	Centre for Research in Social Policy, University of Loughborough	104,000	June 1992	July 1993
Simplified Appeals Submissions	Policy Studies Institute	46,000	November 1992	July 1993
Management of Information Resources	Policy Studies Institute	79,000	February 1992	July 1993
Research into Hard-to-Place Residents of Resettlement Units: Phase II	University of Newcastle	47,000	October 1990	July 1993
Health Care Needs of and Services for Resettlement Unit Customers	Policy Studies Institute	50,000	September 1992	July 1993
The Effects of Benefit on Housing Decisions	Centre for Housing Policy, University of York	67,000	November 1992	October 1993
Direct Payments from Benefit	Social Policy Research Unit, University of York	128,000	June 1992	February 1994
Effects of Changes in Circumstances	Social Policy Research Unit, University of York	210,000	June 1992	February 1994
International Comparisons of Housing Benefit	Centre for Housing Policy, University of York	11,000	February 1993	July 1993
Family Credit Follow Up	Policy Studies Institute	71,000	November 1992	December 1993

Project title	*Contractor*	*Project cost (£)*	*Start date*	*Due end date*
National Child Development Study—5th Stage	Social Statistics Unit, City University	[1]175,000	June 1989	July 1993
National Child Development Study Analysis —Wave 5 data only	Policy Studies Institute	45,000	April 1992	August 1993
Family Credit and the Self Employed	Social Policy Research Unit, University of York	134,000	March 1991	July 1993
British Household Panel Study	Economic and Social Research Council, University of Essex	[2]125,000	April 1990	March 1995
Comparison of Child Support in the European Community	University of York	91,532	May 1992	July 1993
Persons Abroad Legislation	Brunel University	70,000	July 1991	July 1993
Employers Attitudes to Family Credit	Institute for Manpower Studies, University of Sussex	116,000	March 1993	April 1994
2nd Lone Parent Survey	Policy Studies Institute	123,000	November 1992	December 1993
British Social Attitude Survey	Social and Community Planning Research	[3]60,000	January 1991	December 1994
Relate Information Database—Follow Up	D. Shapiro/M. Barkham	2,500	March 1993	December 1993
Benefit Information Needs of Lone Parents	Centre for Research in Social Policy, University of Loughborough	36,000	May 1993	October 1993
Evaluation of the Newcastle In-Work Benefits Initiative	Business and Community Planning Research	[4]10,000	March 1993	November 1993
Survey of First Time Customers	Social Policy Research Unit, University of York	111,000	May 1993	March 1994
Developing Local Office Customer Satisfaction Surveys—Pilot Work	Public Attitude Surveys Ltd.	11,000	June 1993	August 1993
Family Credit/Benefit News Campaign Evaluation	Research Surveys of Great Britain	34,000	April 1993	August 1993

[1] DSS contribution to larger study.
[2] £25,000 per annum for five years—uprated by Treasury inflator. DSS contribution to larger study.
[3] Over three years (1991-94 (not 1992)) DSS contribution to larger study.
[4] DSS contribution—this is a collaborative project with Newcastle city challenge and the Employment Service.

War Pensions (Karen People)

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on behalf of the Karen people of Burma regarding the non-payment of war pensions to ex-service men who fought for Britain.

Mr. Hague: None. If the hon. Member has a particular case—or cases—in mind, perhaps he could write to me supplying the relevant details.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will define the circumstances in which a recipient of housing benefit is entitled to a special personal allowance as a result of being legally married to more than one partner, as specified in the "Guide to Housing Benefit and Community Charge Benefit", booklet RR2.

Mr. Burt: A recipient of housing benefit is entitled to a special personal allowance if he is a member of a valid polygamous marriage and has more than one of his partners sharing his household.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the annual cost of reducing the housing benefit taper from 65 per cent. to 50 per cent.

Mr. Burt: The cost is estimated to be £500 million per annum.*

Note:

* This estimate is based on data drawn from the 1989-90-91 Family Expenditure Surveys and modelled at 1993-94 prices and benefit levels.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients of housing benefit receive a special personal allowance as a result of being legally married to more than one partner as specified in the "Guide to Housing Benefit and Community Charge Benefit", booklet RR2.

Mr. Burt: The information is not available.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will explain the basis on which students are excluded from housing benefit; and what provision is made to enable students unable to find paid employment during the vacations to pay the continued costs of housing.

Mr. Burt: In general it is the educational maintenance system which is designed to provide support for students, not the social security system, and we have no plans to change this. Housing benefit is available during the summer vacation and also throughout the course to vulnerable students such as lone parents, those who are disabled, and those with dependent children. In addition non-student partners can claim on behalf of the couple if they satisfy the normal qualifying conditions. The Government have increased the full-year support available from the education grant and from student loans by nearly 40 per cent. compared with the support available from the grant alone in 1989. Students in particular financial need may seek help from the access funds.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will break down the figure for those persons in receipt of invalidity benefit in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Benefits Agency district by the nature of the disability.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each year since the inception of the scheme the number of people of retirement age who have continued to draw invalidity benefit.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 25 June at column *323* for information about the numbers of invalidity benefit claimants over state pension age.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what saving in expenditure by his Department would have resulted from abolishing the earnings-related additional pension for all new invalidity benefit claims for the year 1992-93; and what savings he estimates would be made in 1994-95.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the table.

Year	*Estimated savings £ million*
1992-93	75
1994-95	365

Note: Estimates are expressed in cash terms and take account of associated changes in income-related benefit expenditure.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the growth in invalidity benefit payments since 1978-79 is explained by demographic change.

Mr. Scott: Information is not available in the form requested.

However, around 2 per cent. of the growth in the invalidity benefit caseload during the period May 1979 to March 1992 can be accounted for by changes in the size and structure (ie age and sex profile) of the population of Great Britain.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many males and females in receipt of invalidity benefit in the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Benefits Agency district are aged *(a)* under 30, *(b)* 31 to 44, *(c)* 45 to 55 and *(d)* over 55 years.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many males and females in the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Benefits Agency district were in receipt of invalidity benefit for each year since 1987.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency that the information is not available in the form requested, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Polish Forces (Pensions)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people are currently in receipt of payments under the pensions (Polish forces) scheme.

(2) if he will list for each of the last five years *(a)* the number of applications made to his Department for pensions under the pensions (Polish forces) scheme and *(b)* the number of such applications which were successful;

(3) what is the annual cost to public funds of payments made under the pensions (Polish forces) scheme.

Mr. Hague: At 30 June 1993 there were 2,221 people in receipt of payments under the pensions (Polish forces) scheme.

The number of applications for pensions under the scheme was as follows:

Year	
1988	85 applications
1989	103 applications
1990	126 applications
1991	142 applications
1992	614 applications

Information on the number of successful applications and on the annual cost of payments under the scheme is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Volunteers

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to implement the increase in the notice period for a volunteer receiving benefits from 24 hours to 48 hours.

Mr. Burt: The amending regulation to increase the notice period for unemployed volunteers to 48 hours will come into effect in the middle of August.

Benefit Abuse

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to reduce abuse of social security by people from abroad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Yesterday I laid before Parliament, regulations to prevent certain persons from abroad being able to claim income support under the income support urgent case rules. They will come into force on 2 August. Most persons from abroad are admitted to the country on condition that they do not become a charge on public funds. This means that they should not receive income support. At present a minority of these people abuse the conditions of their leave to remain here which these changes will prevent. I expect to save about £17 million a year in benefit on the 10,000 persons annually who abuse the present system. Asylum seekers are not affected by this change and will continue to receive benefit while their applications for asylum are being processed by the Home Office.

Mortgage Support

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to limit the availability of income support mortgage interest on very high mortgages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Yesterday I laid before Parliament regulations which will limit to £150,000 the amount of loan capital on which income support will pay interest. This change will come into force on 2 August. The regulations also provide for the limit to be reduced to £125,000 from 11 April 1994, and provide protection for existing claimants. Together with these regulations is a report by the Social Security Advisory Committee, CM(2272). These new arrangements are based on our view that people with mortgages, regardless of their loan commitment, should make arrangements to provide for themselves in times of difficulty. The limits will be kept under review in the future.

Social Fund

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish his annual report on the social fund and the social fund commissioner's annual report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Today my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State laid before Parliament his annual report for 1992-93 (Cm. 2274). Copies have been placed in the Library. The report records that, for the first time, the annual total gross expenditure on all social fund payments exceeded £400 million—a doubling of expenditure since the first full year of the scheme. This includes nearly 1·8 million non-repayable grants and interest-free loans worth more than £314 million; and maternity, funeral and cold weather payments worth £87 million.

Now that the fund has been operating for a number of years, we are reaching a position where we can begin to assess with some confidence how it is working. As the annual report says, we have taken note of the research by York university's social policy research unit (SPRU), along with a number of other reports and our own close monitoring of the fund. We have seen no evidence so far to alter our belief that the basic principles of the discretionary scheme are right. Indeed, there is much in the latest report to confirm that the fund is working very effectively as intended in support of the wider pattern of social security benefits. Against this backdrop and in the light of the SPRU and Social Security Advisory Committee reports, we will be continuing to evaluate the effectiveness of the fund and to introduce operational improvements as required.

For the current year, we have increased the net discretionary budget by £5 million. This has enabled us to raise the gross budget by £44 million since April last year. Overall, since the discretionary fund began, the gross budget has increased by some 70 per cent. This substantial growth in funding demonstrates our continuing commitment in this traditionally difficult area of social security provision.

The social fund commissioner's annual report has also been published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

Putney Royal Hospital

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what correspondence the Minister for Disabled People has had about removing the inscription, "Royal Hospital for Incurables", from the facade of Putney Royal hospital; what action he has taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: While I have seen copies of some correspondence about this matter, I have not been involved directly since this is primarily a matter between the hospital and the planning department of the London borough of Wandsworth.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will instruct the Child Support Agency to collect data on the numbers of parents who use the agency on a voluntary as well as a compulsory basis.

Mr. Burt: I am informed by Mrs. Ros Hepplewhite, the agency's chief executive, that the agency already collects data on the number of applications received from parents who are not in receipt of benefit and who choose whether they wish to use the agency's services.

As the agency has, however, been operational for only three months reliable figures are not yet available for publication.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases, in the last 12 months the Child Support Agency has been involved with the use of DNA genetic fingerprinting methods to establish the paternity of a child during the pursuance of a maintenance claim; and if he will separately distinguish England and Wales.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Mrs. Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Mrs. R. Hepplewhite to Mr. Gareth Wardell, dated 12 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Child Support Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of cases in the last 12 months in which the Agency has been involved with the use of DNA genetic fingerprinting in order to establish paternity.

The Agency is not directly involved in the process of DNA testing but may in disputed cases apply to the courts for a declaration of paternity. In such cases the Agency supplies conventional evidence in support of its application and the question of DNA testing will not normally arise except at the suggestion of the court and with the agreement of all parties. Where the Agency meets the cost of those fees it will seek recovery from any court costs awarded in its favour.

Figures for the period 1 April 1992-31 March 1993 are not yet available, but in the year ending March 1992, DNA testing was an issue in less than 1 per cent. of the 1,000 cases in which the Department made application to the courts for a declaration of paternity. I am afraid that I do not have a breakdown of figures between England and Wales.

I hope you will find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the maximum number of

assessments which the Child Support Agency can carry out on an individual in any year for which a fee of £44 is charged;

(2) what has been the total income of the Child Support Agency from assessment fees collected since its establishment.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Mrs. Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Mrs. R. Hepplewhite to Mr. Gareth Wardell, dated 12 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Child Support Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the income collected by the Agency in assessment fees and the number of maintenance assessments provided for the sum of £44.

The Agency has to date collected a total of £13,000 in fees, but figures are not yet available as to fees charged for assessment and fees charged for collection.

The annual assessment fee is payable on the date the first maintenance application is made, and at yearly intervals thereafter. There is no restriction placed on the number of assessments carried out in any given year and no additional sum will be levied over the annual fee.

I hope you will find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Care Benefits

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disability living allowance mobility component claimants have successfully claimed care components after their 66th birthday.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 12 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many disability living allowance mobility component claimants have successfully claimed care components after their 66th birthday.

Up to 28 February 1993 the total number of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) mobility component recipients that have successfully claimed the care component on or after their 66th birthday is 7,420. A more up to date figure is not available as numbers are only collated quarterly and information about the last quarter is not yet to hand.

The figure provided excludes any DLA mobility component recipient over the age of 66 who may have received the care component subsequent to either a review of the original decision or upon appeal. Statistics for these two types of occurrence are not available.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report*. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Disability

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will include, when notifying claimants of their entitlement to disability living allowance and attendance allowance, information about the entitlement to extras such as income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Ms Ann Coffey dated 12 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking if he will include, when notifying claimants of their entitlement to DLA and AA, information about the entitlement to extras such as income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit.

When a customer is advised of their entitlement to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) they also receive a copy of form DLA 95. This form advises them of their possible title to other benefits. Amongst other benefits outlined in the DLA 95 are Income Support, Housing Benefit and Community Charge Benefit.

Similarly, a customer receiving an award notification for Attendance Allowance (AA) will also receive form DS 668. This provides equivalent information to that contained in the DLA 95.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications he has received for ex gratia payments resulting from delays in *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* attendance allowance and *(c)* mobility allowance; how many claims were successful; and what total ex gratia payments have been made for each benefit.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 12 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many applications he has received for ex gratia payments resulting from delays in *(a)* Disability Living Allowance (DLA), *(b)* Attendance Allowance (AA) and *(c)* Mobility Allowance (Moba); how many claims were successful; and what total ex gratia payments have been made for each benefit.

The information requested is not recorded in the format required. I am therefore not able to give you a breakdown by benefit. I can confirm, however, that for the period 9 July 1992 to 7 July 1993 out of 480 applications for ex gratia payments received, in respect of all three benefits, 208 were subsequently withdrawn, 96 were refused and 176 were successful. The total amount paid comes to some £9,200.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report*. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Maintenance Allowance

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what plans he has to change the process of maintenance allowance assessments to ensure that

mothers who are out of work and wishing to receive an assessment do not have to wait longer than mothers who are in work.

Mr. Burt *[pursuant to his reply, 6 July 1993, column 125]:* The following information was incorrect:

The Child Support Agency is introducing the new child support maintenance arrangements from scratch and it would have been unrealistic to take on cases over a four-year period.

The Correct information is as follows:

The Child Support Agency is introducing the new child support maintenance arrangements from scratch and it would have been unrealistic to take on all cases immediately. Take-on will therefore be phased over a four-year period.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 14 July 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Tranquillisers

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received about the time limit for bringing actions applicable to those seeking to make claims arising from the ingestion of benzodiazepine tranquillisers.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A number of representations I have received on the subject have touched on the question of time limits, among other issues. Time limits are, of course, a matter for the court.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what recent representations he has received on the progress of the benzodiazepine tranquillisers claims;

(2) what recent representations he has received on the decisions of the Legal Aid Board in relation to the availability of legal aid in pursuit of claims arising from the use of benzodiazepine tranquillisers.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have received 70 some representations in the last three months, encompassing various aspects of this litigation.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether he intends to meet the Legal Aid Advisory Committee on the question of *(a)* class actions and *(b)* claims arising out of the use of benzodiazepine tranquillisers.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor and I are always interested to hear the views of the Legal Aid Advisory Committee on matters which it wished to draw to our attention. The Legal Aid Advisory Committee, however, has no role in respect of the handling of individual cases or groups of cases, which is entirely a matter for the Legal Aid Board.

Multiple Claims

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether the Lord Chancellor has referred to the Supreme Court rules committee the question of procedures for the handling of multiple claims.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has not referred to the Supreme Court rules committee the question of procedures for the handling of multiple claims. However, the Supreme Court procedure committee has considered this issue and in May 1991 published a "Guide for Use in Group Actions". Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Legal Aid

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will give a breakdown of the legal aid bill under the different categories of work categories for which information is kept including a separate total for divorce and matrimonial expenditure; and if he will give comparable figures for *(a)* 10 and *(b)* 15 years ago.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Net expenditure in each main category of work was as follows:

	1977-78 £ million	*1982-83 £ million*	*1992-93 £ million*
All Civil	24	68	463
Criminal Higher	22	52	220
Criminal Magistrates'	20	55	197
Green Form	6	31	119
ABWOR[1]	n/a	8	22
Duty Solicitor Schemes[2]	n/a	n/a	72
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	72	214	1,093

It is not possible to give separate net expenditure figures for civil non-matrimonial and civil matrimonial. It is, however, possible to give separate figures in respect of gross expenditure, which are as follows:

	1977-78 £ million	*1982-83 £ million*	*1992-93 £ million*
Non-matrimonial	10	38	353
Matrimonial	24	50	183

(All figures have been rounded to nearest £ million)

[1] Assistance by way of representation. The scheme was introduced in April 1980.

[2] The duty solicitor magistrates courts scheme and police station scheme were introduced in June 1984 and January 1986 respectively.

TRANSPORT

Relief Roads (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to consult the public in respect of the proposed Greater Manchester western and northern relief road, section M62 to M66.

Mr. Key: In September.

Jubilee Line

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the current position in respect of the loan by the European investment bank for the construction of the Jubilee line.

Mr. Norris: I understand that arrangements for the European investment bank to fund the initial payment by the O and Y company towards its contribution to the cost of the Jubilee line extension are in place, ready to operate once my right hon. Friend can approve the funding agreement and give the go-ahead to construction.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 July, *Official Report*, columns *158-59*, on the east London river crossing, what are the implications of his announcement for the line

order, the compulsory purchase orders and the exchange land certificate in relation to the proposed crossing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The extent to which the existing line order will need to be varied or revoked will depend on the new proposals which we shall bring forward in due course. We shall not take any action to implement the present compulsory purchase orders, which will cease to be valid in November 1994. The exchange land certificate will accordingly become redundant.

Road Accidents

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the rate for personal injury accidents per million vehicle kilometres for England and Wales, for each year from 1985 to 1992 for *(a)* motorways, *(b)* dual carriageways, *(c)* trunk roads and *(d)* minor roads.

Mr. Key: Personal injury accident rates for motorways and trunk roads in England and Wales are shown in the table. Accident rates for dual carriageways in England and Wales are not available. Figures for minor roads are shown for 1989 to 1991, but are not readily available for England and Wales for earlier years. Figures for trunk and minor roads are not yet available for 1992.

Personal injury accidents per million vehicle kilometres, by road type
England and Wales
1985-1992

Rates per million vehicle kilometres

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*[4]1992*
England								
Motorway[1]	0·122	0·127	0·110	0·104	0·108	0·109	0·104	0·111
Trunk[2]	0·379	0·443	0·323	0·400	0·377	0·366	0·321	—
Minor[3]	—	—	—	—	0·859	0·858	0·800	—
Wales								
Motorway[1]	0·117	0·104	0·096	0·109	0·110	0·116	0·103	0·092
Trunk[2]	0·368	0·394	0·392	0·360	0·355	0·354	0·334	—
Minor[3]	—	—	—	—	0·537	0·608	0·467	—

[1] Motorways plus A(M) roads. These are mostly trunk roads but include a few principal roads for which county councils are the highway authority.
[2] Trunk roads. Roads comprising the national network of through routes for which the Secretary of State is the highway authority, but excluding motorways which have been classified separately.
[3] Minor roads. B, C and unclassified roads.
[4] Traffic data for 1992 are provisional.

9 Accident rates per 100 million vehicle kilometres: by road class, region[1] and severity: 1989-1991 average

Rate per 100 million vehicle kilometres

		A roads					
		Built up		*Non built up*		*All A roads*	*All main roads*
	Motorways	*Trunk*	*Principal*	*Trunk*	*Principal*		
Northern							
Fatal	0·5	1·2	1·8	1·0	1·2	1·3	1·3
Fatal or serious	2·1	9·3	17·5	4·9	8·4	10·1	9·4
All severities	15·1	70·3	92·3	20·7	35·0	48·5	45·8
Yorkshire and Humberside							
Fatal	0·2	2·3	1·5	1·2	1·9	1·5	1·2
Fatal or serious	2·0	18·3	18·7	8·6	13·3	14·4	11·3
All severities	8·9	83·5	90·2	24·8	42·2	59·0	46·6
East Midlands							
Fatal	0·3	1·8	1·6	1·6	1·9	1·7	1·5
Fatal or serious	2·9	18·0	18·2	8·3	12·9	12·8	10·9
All severities	12·6	90·2	98·5	28·6	44·8	55·0	47·0
Eastern							
Fatal	0·3	1·6	1·2	1·0	1·5	1·2	1·0
Fatal or serious	2·2	18·5	16·4	6·2	10·9	10·5	8·3
All severities	11·9	86·2	87·7	21·7	39·7	45·2	36·2
South East							
Fatal	0·3	1·4	1·0	0·8	1·4	1·1	0·9
Fatal or serious	2·3	14·6	15·4	5·0	10·0	10·3	8·0
All severities	10·3	74·8	81·8	19·6	38·8	47·7	37·0
London							
Fatal	0·3	2·0	1·9	0·9	1·4	1·7	1·6
Fatal or serious	4·3	24·6	36·8	7·9	9·9	29·6	27·9
All severities	29·9	131·5	197·3	34·0	38·9	157·2	148·5

Rate per 100 million vehicle kilometres

	Motorways	*A roads*				*All A roads*	*All main roads*
		Built up		*Non built up*			
		Trunk	*Principal*	*Trunk*	*Principal*		
South West							
Fatal	0·3	0·9	1·0	0·9	1·5	1·2	1·0
Fatal or serious	1·8	10·2	13·0	5·6	10·6	9·8	8·2
All severities	7·5	54·8	63·0	18·2	36·0	39·3	32·8
West Midlands							
Fatal	0·2	1·7	1·5	1·1	1·6	1·4	1·0
Fatal or serious	1·6	15·0	18·1	8·4	10·7	13·5	9·4
All severities	8·3	71·8	86·2	29·9	38·8	58·6	41·3
North West							
Fatal	0·4	2·1	1·6	1·4	1·5	1·5	1·1
Fatal or serious	1·9	16·7	16·1	7·7	8·8	12·8	9·0
All severities	11·4	99·6	106·5	31·4	38·3	75·8	53·2
England							
Fatal	0·3	1·8	1·4	1·1	1·5	1·4	1·1
Fatal or serious	2·1	19·0	19·9	6·7	10·7	13·4	10·5
All severities	10·7	98·9	107·1	24·0	39·1	63·2	49·9
Wales							
Fatal	0·2	1·0	1·3	1·3	1·6	1·4	1·2
Fatal or serious	1·9	13·9	15·3	9·2	11·5	11·9	10·4
All severities	10·6	70·4	90·7	31·2	42·0	53·3	46·9
Scotland[2]							
Fatal	0·4	1·5	1·6	1·7	1·7	1·7	1·5
Fatal or serious	2·9	20·8	24·7	10·3	13·4	15·5	13·7
All severities	10·0	72·6	95·7	27·6	37·9	50·8	44·8
Great Britain[2]							
Fatal	0·3	1·7	1·4	1·2	1·6	1·4	1·1
Fatal or serious	2·1	18·8	20·1	7·2	11·0	13·5	10·8
All severities	10·7	94·9	105·6	24·9	39·1	61·5	49·4

[1] Traffic data and casualty data in this breakdown are not available for Northern Ireland.
[2] Two accidents in Scotland, originally recorded as A road accidents, have been re-allocated as motorway accidents. There were five casualties in these accidents.

M6

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list his estimates for traffic levels on each link of the M6 between junctions four and 11 for the years up until 2011, with and without the proposed Birmingham northern relief road.

Mr. Key: The environmental statement for the toll road proposals published in June indicates that in 1996 and 2011 predicted flows—vehicles per day—on M6 could be about:

	Junction 10A-11	*Junction 8-9*	*Junction 6-7*	*East of Junction 4*
1996				
with BNRR	73,900	132,500	116,000	81,100
without BNRR	106,000	150,000	134,200	110,300
2011				
with BNRR	102,500	146,200	131,700	117,300
without BNRR	145,500	180,700	167,600	161,800

A copy of the environmental statement will be placed in the House Library.

Passengers Charter

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when it is proposed that the provisions of the passengers charter should apply to services operated in conjunction with passenger transport authorities.

Mr. Freeman: It is for each passenger transport authority to consider whether and when to introduce a passengers charter for the rail services they specify and which are provided by British Rail on contract. I understand that the West Midlands PTA has authorised its PTE to introduce such a charter on 9 August, and that Merseyside PTE is well advanced with its preparation of a charter.

Seat Belts

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has of the number of lives saved every year by the use of rear seat belts in cars.

Mr. Key: An estimated 140 lives were saved in 1992 by the use of rear seat belts.

Road Safety

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made by his Department in technological methods of advancing road safety with particular reference to devices to prevent vehicles driving too close to each other; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Department's research programme aims to assess the safety related aspects of systems emerging from the European vehicle industry-led research programme, Prometheus, including autonomous intelligent cruise control (AICC). This system is intended to enhance driver convenience and comfort by automatically adjusting vehicle speed and following distance.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Hoax Fire Calls

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond), of 19 June 1992, *Official Report*, columns *701-2*, if he will publish a table showing the hoax fire calls for 1991 and 1992 on a similar basis to that given for 1987 to 1990.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information for 1991 is shown in the following table; 1992 information is not yet available.

Percentage of total fire calls attended by local authority fire brigades which the brigades believed to be malicious false alarms 1991

	Per cent.
United Kingdom	17·2
England	17·3
England—non-metropolitan	14·2
Avon	13·9
Bedfordshire	11·1
Berkshire	13·8
Buckinghamshire	12·9
Cambridgeshire	14·1
Cheshire	11·9
Cleveland	33·4
Cornwall	7·3
Cumbria	13·4
Derbyshire	15·6
Devon	14·7
Dorset	12·3
Durham	24·4
East Sussex	11·3
Essex	15·5
Gloucestershire	14·5
Hampshire	7·1
Hereford and Worcestershire	14·0
Hertfordshire	10·4
Humberside	20·0
Isle of Wight	8·4
Kent	15·7
Lancashire	17·5
Leicestershire	17·8
Lincolnshire	14·9
Norfolk	8·8
North Yorkshire	7·6
Northamptonshire	9·2
Northumberland	13·4
Nottinghamshire	11·3
Oxfordshire	12·3
Shropshire	14·7
Somerset	12·2
Staffordshire	15·7
Suffolk	7·3
Surrey	10·6
Warwickshire	9·0
West Sussex	8·2
Wiltshire	11·1
England—Metropolitan	20·1
Greater Manchester	22·6
Merseyside	16·5
South Yorkshire	20·2
Tyne and Wear	22·8
West Midlands	22·5
West Yorkshire	18·8
Greater London	20·2
Wales	17·6
Clwyd	13·4
Dyfed	14·7
Gwent	23·4
Gwynedd	7·9
Mid Glamorgan	19·4
Powys	8·9
South Glamorgan	19·5
West Glamorgan	19·5
Northern Ireland	13·1
Scotland	17·8
Strathclyde	20·3
Highlands and Islands	8·0
Grampian	9·6
Tayside	13·4
Lothian and Borders	18·6
Fife	17·5
Central	14·6
Dumfries and Galloway	13·3

Drug Seizures

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the figures for drug seizures and offenders in the Birmingham metropolitan area for each month of 1993 up to the latest date available.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not yet available. Information on seizures of controlled drugs in the United Kingdom and offenders dealt with during 1992 will be included in the annual Home Office statistical bulletin to be published in the autumn, a copy of which will be placed in the Library.

Crime Statistics

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the percentage change *(a)* in the reported incidence in each category of crime and *(b)* in total for the Metropolitan police area between 1 April 1992 and 31 March 1993.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not yet available.

Private Security Firms

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the number of residents' associations and similar bodies which have hired private security firms to protect their property in the Metropolitan police area.

Mr. Charles Wardell: Information of this kind is not held centrally.

Directorate of Telecommunications

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will set out his objectives in the privatising of DTELS.

Mr. Howard: The key objectives are:

1. To maximise sale proceeds consistent with preserving the best prospects for effective competition in the market for telecommunications support services for the emergency services.

2. To obtain reassurance that the purchaser should have the capacity to meet transferred liabilities and obligations.

Criminal Justice

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has yet received a copy of the first annual summary of activities from the Criminal Justice Consultative Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I received an advance copy of the first summary of activities for the Criminal Justice Consultative Council from Lord Justice Farquharson on 25 June. It outlines the many important issues considered by the council during 1992, following its inception in January of that year, and includes a list of topics which council intends to include in its forthcoming agenda. The report also provides a brief summary of the activities of the area criminal justice liaison committees in the six months since they first met.

The summary is being published today.

Asylum and Immigration Appeals

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 will be brought into force.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Some provisions came into effect when the Bill received Royal Assent on 1 July. My right hon. and learned Friend has made a commencement order bringing all the remaining provisions of the Act into force on 26 July.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is available to the Government on persons residing or working illegally in the United Kingdom; and from what sources the information is drawn.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information about illegal entrants, overstayers and those working in breach of their immigration conditions may be available from records held by the immigration and nationality department. Those responsible for the enforcement of the immigration law also receive information from the police, for other Government Departments and agencies, and from members of the public.

City of London (Road Closures)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the wider London impact of the road closures effected by the City of London corporation on security grounds.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Traffic congestion in Lower Thames street has extended beyond normal peak times. There has been no significant impact elsewhere.

Immigration (Carriers' Liability)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many notices under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 have been issued *(a)* in total since 1987 and *(b)* in each quarter since January; how much money has accrued as a result, how many such notices have been contested by airlines or shipping companies; and with what results.

Mr. Charles Wardle: As at 31 May 1993, 51,279 notices had been issued to carriers since the Act came into force, and total receipts stood at £25·06 million. The number of notices issued in each quarter since January 1992 was as follows:

Quarter ending	*Numbers of notices*
31 March 1992	1,954
30 June 1992	1,605
30 September 1992	2,355
31 December 1992	2,197
31 March 1993	1,608

A total of £7.91 million was received in payments during this period. Representations to local immigration service inspectors were made by carriers in 3,304 cases, and further representations to headquarters were made in 612 cases. A total of 1,296 charges were waived locally and 116 by headquarters during the same period.

Animal Experiments

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times Home Office animals inspectors have visited the university of Glasgow since the Animals (Science Procedures) Act 1986 was passed; and what action, if any, arose from such inspections.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Between 1 January 1989 and 12 July 1993, 294 visits were made to the university of Glasgow. Each visit is likely to have involved visits to several individual university departments. Prior to 1989, departmental visits were counted separately: 232 such visits were made in the period 1 January 1987 to 31 December 1988.

It is not the practice to give information about the findings and resultant actions, if any, arising from routine visits of inspection.

Humana Charity

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will request the Charity Commission to undertake an investigation into the Humana Charity, No. 297489, in respect *(a)* of its donations to the International Emergency Centre and *(b)* of its links with the Danish TVIND-DAPP organisation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Charity Commissioners are already investigating the activities of Humana in the light of matters identified during routine monitoring. The investigation will include any links which Humana may have with other charitable or non-charitable organisations.

John Matthews

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it took to return clothes and possessions to John Matthews after he left court on Tuesday 6 July; how long John Matthews was in custody; and if he will estimate the total cost of holding and transporting John Matthews.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At Paddington Green police station on 6 July Mr. Matthews refused to give his written authority to hand his property to his chosen nominee. The police are currently awaiting Mr. Matthews' authority to do so.

Mr. Matthews was in custody from 27 April 1993 until his court appearance on 6 July. The estimated cost of holding and transporting him is £37,116.

Overseas Visitors

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many overseas visitors were initially refused leave to enter and removed from the United Kingdom in 1987 and in each subsequent calendar year to date; and what were their nationalities.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The total numbers of non-EC passengers by nationality who were refused leave to enter, and removed from, the United Kingdom in 1987-91 are published in table 1 of the annual Home Office Command Papers "Control of Immigration: Statistics, United Kingdom"—Cm. 415, 726, 1124, 1571 and 2063 for each of the five years respectively—copies of which are held in the Library. Corresponding information for 1992 is given in table A. Information on EC nationals refused and removed in 1987-92 is given in table B. It is not possible from the information available centrally to ascertain how many of those refused leave to enter, and removed from, the United Kingdom had sought entry as visitors.

Table A
Non-EC nationals refused leave to enter, and removed from, the United Kingdom in 1992

Geographical region and nationality[1]	*Number of persons*
All nationalities excluding EC	14,722
Western Europe (excluding EC)	1,163
Austria	70
Cyprus	78
Finland	53
Malta	13
Norway	40
Sweden	122
Switzerland	67
Turkey	228
Former Yugoslavia	492
Eastern Europe	1,576
Bulgaria	28
Czechoslovakia	302
Hungary	145
Poland	855
Romania	86
Former USSR	160
Americas	2,886
Argentina	65
Barbados	34
Brazil	518
Canada	125
Chile	42
Colombia	397
Cuba	4
Guyana	60
Jamaica	409
Mexico	83
Peru	108
Trinidad and Tobago	61
United States of America	933
Uruguay	16
Venezuela	31
Africa	3,443
Algeria	233
Egypt	23
Ethiopia	36
Ghana	401
Kenya	210
Libya	19
Mauritius	157
Morocco	99
Nigeria	1,070
Sierra Leone	316
Somalia	50
South Africa	430
Sudan	12
Tanzania	107
Tunisia	31
Uganda	38
Zambia	73
Zimbabwe	138
Indian sub-continent	1,058
Bangladesh	390
India	324
Pakistan	344
Middle East	563
Iran	175
Iraq	19
Israel	125
Jordan	22
Kuwait	7
Lebanon	175
Saudi Arabia	18
Syria	22
Remainder of Asia	991
China	53
Indonesia	12
Japan	138
Malaysia	346
Philippines	114
Singapore	46
Sri Lanka	108
Thailand	43
Hong Kong[2]	131
Australasia	392
Australia	236
New Zealand	156
Others	2,650
British Overseas citizens	22
Other countries not elsewhere specified	1,453
Stateless	1,175

[1] Or claimed nationality where the nationality is in doubt.
[2] British Dependent Territories citizens and British Nationals (Overseas) only.

Table B
EC nationals[1] refused leave to enter, and removed from, the United Kingdom, 1987-92

Number of persons

Nationality	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
European Community	1,453	1,654	367	145	88	229
Belgium	36	28	2	6	3	16
Denmark	12	5	7	6	4	5
France	158	134	49	34	18	111
Germany[2]	91	66	20	11	13	1
Greece	57	13	4	1	—	3
Italy	91	56	12	3	4	23
Luxembourg	1	—	1	—	—	—
Netherlands	124	70	18	25	9	23
Portugal	472	767	134	49	32	44
Spain	411	515	120	10	5	3

[1] Passengerss who are, or claim to be, EC nationals.
[2] Excluding nationals of the German Democratic Republic prior to the unification of Germany on 3 October 1990.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action on malnutrition and infant mortality in Iraq he has taken since the meeting in the Foreign Office between the Under-Secretary responsible for the middle east and the hon. Member for Linlithgow on 22 June.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since the meeting referred to, £1 million has been transferred through the United Nations escrow account to the World Food Programme (WFP) for purchasing part of the crop in the north of Iraq to help feed the Kurds. We have also agreed to finance a programme of water and sanitation work in schools in the south to be carried out by CARE. However, responsibility for the condition of the people in Iraq rests with Saddam Hussein. If the Iraqi Government would accept the conditions set out under United Nations Security Council resolutions 706 and 712, it could sell its oil and provide $1·6 billion worth of humanitarian aid for its people.

Aid (Africa)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to increase aid to (i) Angola, (ii) Mozambique and (iii) Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have committed £0·8 million of humanitarian aid to Angola this year and plan to increase this to £2 million if the security situation permits safe access for aid organisations. Three thousand tons of bilateral food aid has also been allocated. We will consider providing further assistance depending on the situation.

We spent over £31 million in Mozambique in 1992-93. We also expect to spend significant sums this year but with a higher proportion of rehabilitation and longer term development activities than last year when the greater need was for drought relief.

We plan to commit £10 million to bilateral projects in Ethiopia over the next two years, and £1 million to Eritrea.

We shall continue to provide major contributions to these countries through our share of the development programmes of the multilateral agencies. In addition the EC Development Council on 25 May, agreed a resolution calling for the Community to implement an urgent rehabilitation programme of at least 100 mecu, drawn mainly from the European development fund, for certain African countries including Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for further humanitarian relief to Sarajevo to address the severe shortage and possible disappearance of water supplies to the city.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees continues to make every effort to secure the passage of humanitarian supplies into Sarajevo, including fuel, in order to operate the pumps which are essential for the local water supply system.

We are playing a major part in both the road-based relief convoys into Sarajevo and the airlift. But the continuing hostilities are inhibiting the passage of humanitarian supplies and we urge all of the parties to the conflict to allow these supplies to pass without hindrance or delay.

Colombia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the activities funded from United Kingdom expenditure in Colombia and the amounts spent.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Current technical co-operation commitments in Colombia funded by Overseas Development Administration are as follows:

- a project in support of biological control of the pests of coffee plants—£0·833 million.
- advice and training support in the post-harvest handling of fruit—£0·842 million.
- completion of a programme of training in mines safety —£0·332 million.
- support to teacher training in English language education —£0·456 million
- sponsorship of post-basic training in the United Kingdom —around £0·5 million per annum.

Technical co-operation spending in Colombia amounted to £1·149 million in 1990-91 and £1·292 million in 1991-92.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the destination, dates and purposes of each overseas visit undertaken by the Minister for Overseas Development since April 1992.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* The information requested is contained in the tables.

Lady Chalker's overseas travel 1992

When	*Number of working days out of the office*	*Where*	*Reason*
April			
Monday 13 to Tuesday 14	1½	Budapest	1st AGM of EBRD
May			
Sunday 3 to Tuesday 5	2	Brussels	EC Formal Development Council, Joint EC Development/Environment Council, Bilaterals with EC Commissioners
Friday 22 to Sunday 24	3	Lisbon	Conference on Humanitarian aid to FSU
June			
Monday 1	1	Geneva	UN/SADCC Conference
Saturday 6 to Saturday 13	7	Rio de Janeiro	UNCED
Sunday 14 to Monday 15	1	New York	UNICEF Executive Board
July			
Sunday 5 to Tuesday 7	2	New York	UN ECOSOC High Level meeting
Wednesday 8 to Thursday 9	2	Washington	IBRD, IMF, IADB and State Department Bilaterals
Wednesday 15	½	Brussels	European Parliament Development Committee
Tuesday 28 to Wednesday 29	1½	Geneva	UNHCR Conference on ex-Yugoslavia
August			
Thursday 20 to Saturday 22	2	Wolfsberg, Switzerland	ICRC High Level Meeting
September			
Saturday 12 to Sunday 13	2	Kenya	EC Troika visit to Kenya and Somalia, Heads of Mission Conference in Zambia. Bilateral and drought relief visit to Zambia and Zimbabwe
Monday 14	1	Somalia	
Tuesday 15 to Thursday 17	3	Zambia	
Friday 18	1	Zimbabwe	
Saturday 19	1	South Africa	British-South African Conference, Durban and bilaterals with South African politicians
Sunday 20	1	Mozambique	Bilaterals and drought relief
Tuesday 29	1	Luexembourg	EC/ACP Joint Assembly
Wednesday 30 to Friday 2 (October)	1½	Former Yugoslavia	Bilaterals and to see humanitarian relief work
October			
Monday 5	1	Luxembourg	FAC: Somalia briefing

When	Number of working days out of the office	Where	Reason
Tuesday 13 to Wednesday 14	1½	Ukraine	Bilaterals and visit KHF Projects
Thursday 15 to Friday 16	2	Russia	
Tuesday 27 to Friday 30	4	Tokyo	Humanitarian aid to FSU conference (28 October). Aid talks with Japanese (27 October)
November			
Wednesday 4	1	The Hague/ Brussels	Bilaterals. Address to ACP Ambassadors
Saturday 14 to Sunday 15	2	Madrid	Bilaterals
Tuesday 17 to Wednesday 18	1½	Brussels	EC Development Council
Thursday 19 to Friday 20	1½	New York	Address to UNGA. Bilaterals
Monday 30	1	Paris	OECD: DAC High Level Meeting
December			
Tuesday 1	1	Brussels	EP Development Committee

Lady Chalker's overseas travel 1993 (to date)

When	Number of working days out of the office	Where	Reason
January			
Sunday 17 to Thursday 21	4	Nigeria, Ghana	Bilaterals, project visits
Wednesday 27 to Thursday 28	2	Bosnia	Assessment of humanitarian relief operation
February			
Friday 5 to Monday 8	2	Somalia, Kenya	Bilaterals, project visits and (in Somalia) relief operation
Tuesday 23 to Thursday 25	3	South Africa	Bilaterals with Mandela, Buthelezi, de Klerk
March			
Monday 1 to Saturday 6	5	Nepal	Accompany HRH Princess of Wales on working visit
Friday 26 to Saturday 27	1	Germany	Königswinter Conference
April			
Wednesday 21	1	Turkey	President Ozal's funeral
May			
Monday 3 to Wednesday 5	3	Hungary	Accompany Her Majesty The Queen on state visit
Tuesday 18	1	Brussels	ACP/EC Council of Ministers
Tuesday 25	1	Brussels	EC Development Council
Monday 31 to Thursday 3	2	New York/ Washington	Bilaterals with UN/State/USAID/World Bank

When	Number of working days out of the office	Where	Reason
June		No Visits	
July		No Travel	

PRIME MINISTER

Trade Facilitation Groups

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what trade facilitation groups have been set up in Peru, Colombia and Mexico in the wake of his visit; and what advantages have accrued to Britain as a result of agreements and understandings arrived at during his visit.

The Prime Minister: On my visit to Colombia last year I agreed with President Gaviria that we should establish a trade facilitation group and that the United Kingdom and Colombia should begin negotiations for an investment promotion and protection agreement and a double taxation agreement. The trade facilitation group has now reported back on obstacles to bilateral trade and how to overcome them and has identified many opportunities for British businesses. We hope to sign an IPPA and a DTA soon. I did not visit Peru or Mexico.

Departmental Bills

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the steps taken by his Government to ensure that Government Departments pay outstanding bills within 30 days of their receipt; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: "Government Accounting" requires all Departments to pay outstanding bills in accordance with the terms of the contract or generally understood terms of business, or within 30 days of the receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice or similar demand for payment, whichever is the later, if no terms are specified.

Departments are responsible for monitoring their payment performance. The results for 1991-92 were published in written parliamentary answers on 13 July 1992. The results for 1992-93 will be published shortly and Departments will, in future, also be required to publish details of their payment performance in departmental reports.

Child Migrant Scheme

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will place in the Library all Government records relating to the child migrant scheme;

(2) what discussions he has had with representatives of the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian Governments concerning the welfare of United Kingdom child migrants; what is the Government's policy towards the compensation of those who have suffered as a result of this scheme; if he will take steps to increase Government grant assistance to the Child Migrant Trust; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: It would not be right to place personal record files in the Library. Other records are considered for deposit in the Public Record Office in the usual way.

I have not raised the subject of child migrants with the Heads of Government in Australia, New Zealand or Canada, nor have they raised the subject with me. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is contacting the Australian authorities.

I know there have been allegations of physical and sexual abuse of a number of child migrants some years ago in Australia, but any such allegations will be a matter for the Australian authorities. I am not aware of any allegations involving the British authorities or claims against them for compensation.

The Child Migrant Trust applied for Government funds and has received a section 64 grant of £25,000 from the Department of Health for the current year.

Any future application will be considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

PRIME MINISTER

No. 10 Downing Street

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), of 5 July, *Official Report*, column *11*, what charges are made to organisations or persons holding non-official events at 10 Downing street in respect of overheads or indirect costs associated with such functions.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* The practice under this and previous Administrations is that the organisers are responsible for all catering and staff costs, as well as other miscellaneous direct costs. No charges are levied for overheads or indirect costs.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newham North-West (Mr. Banks) on 5 July, *Official Report*, column *11*, whether all political parties represented in the House can apply to use 10 Downing Street for fund raising and other social purposes.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* As under previous Administrations, the use of 10 Downing street for non-official or party functions is a matter for the Prime Minister.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 5 July, *Official Report*, column *11*, which Ministers have hosted non-official or party receptions or functions in 10 Downing street since 1979.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* I have hosted all such events since November 1990.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 5 July, *Official Report*, columns *11-12*, if

he will give details of the occasions upon which No. 10 Downing street was used for functions for which tickets were sold for the benefit of political parties since 1979.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* As I said in the reply to which the hon. Member refers, that is not a matter for the Government.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 5 July, *Official Report*, column *12*, on attendance by Mr. Asil Nadir at functions at No. 10 Downing street, which of the functions attended were Government functions; and who issued the invitation in each such case.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* The only Government function was the dinner for the President of Turkey. For all the functions, invitations would have been issued in the name of the Prime Minister.

Foreign Heads of State (Visits)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the official visits made by heads of foreign states to Northern Ireland in each of the last three years, the engagements carried out by them during each such visit, and indicating which engagements were private, public and official.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* There have been no official visits made to Northern Ireland by heads of foreign states in the last three years.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Conservation Areas

Mr. Fishburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he will publish the consultation paper on the protection of conservation areas.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I issued this on 8 July together with a draft planning policy guidance note on historic buildings and conservation areas. Further details were given in my reply of 9 July to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), *Official Report*, column *287*.

Arts Council

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on how many occasions grants have been made by the Arts Council under its *(a)* bursaries to writers scheme and *(b)* writers in residence scheme during the last five years to applicants who were neither resident in England nor had any previous connection with England.

Mr. Brooke: Under the Arts Council of Great Britain's "Bursaries to writers scheme", bursaries are offered only to writers currently resident in England. Separate schemes are run by both the Welsh and Scottish arts councils. Grants to five writers from abroad have been made by the Arts Council of Great Britain under its "writers in residence scheme" attached to particular areas of the country. Grants under other residency schemes have, to date, been made only to British writers.

North West Council for Sport and Recreation

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement explaining the categories and criteria by which the North West Council for Sport and Recreation assesses the needs of rural communities in terms of minimum levels of sports facility provisions.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* This issue has been examined in a specific study commissioned by the North West Council for Sport and Recreation, published in June 1991, entitled "Sport for Rural Communities". The study offers guidelines for sports facility provision based upon the size of rural communities.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will give a breakdown by category or rural community of the grants made by the North West Council for Sport and Recreation in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* The North West Council for Sport and Recreation does not make grants, but advises the Sports Council's North West regional office and others on the allocation of their grant aid. Grants made by the Sports Council's north-west region in rural areas in 1992-93 were as follows:

Capital grants applicant	*Project*	*Grant* £
John Schofield tennis centre	Construction of two indoor court tennis centres at Clitheroe	50,000
Nantwich & Border Counties sailing club	Extension to clubhouse to provide changing facilities	10,000
Cheshire NW schoolboys scramble club	Purchase of land and the provision of toilet/wash-house facilities at Peacock Hay	7,500
Chester mountaineering club	Renovation and upgrading of a mountain hut	10,000
Revenue Grants		
Community council of Lancashire	Rural areas sports development officer to assist in implementing the Rural Areas Topic Study	30,000
Cheshire community council	Appointment of sports development officer for rural areas in Cheshire to assist in implementing the Rural Areas Topic Study	30,000
Ribble Valley borough council	Appointment of a sports development officer to promote all aspects of sport in the borough	10,382

Mesopotamian Archaeological Objects

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 14 June, *Official Report*, column *463*, what information he has on the total holdings of Mesopotamian archaeological objects in British public museums.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* Information on the total holdings of Mesopotamian archaeological objects in British public museums is not held centrally. If the hon. Member requires such information, the director of the British Museum would be happy to advise him on how best to proceed to collect it.

EDUCATION

Portuguese

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what representations he has received from the director of Canning house on the study of Portuguese in British schools; and what was his response;

(2) whether he will arrange for at least one examination board to offer GCSE in Portuguese.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has received several representations about the decision of the University of London Examinations and Assessment Council to discontinue its GCSE examinations in Portuguese after 1994, including one from the director general of Canning house. Following discussions with the Department, the council has recently decided to continue offering the syllabus beyond that date.

Special Schools

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to stop the practice of including special schools in performance league tables.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has no such plans. Special schools, like all schools, deserve credit for the level of performance they achieve and should not therefore be excluded from the comparative tables. They will be listed in a separate section of the tables.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he intends to include special schools in the proposed national truancy league tables.

Mr. Robin Squire: Yes. Regular school attendance is important for all pupils. Special school pupils will benefit from the provision being made for them only if they attend regularly.

Teacher Training

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what arrangements he has made for the introduction of a preliminary scheme of school-centred initial teacher training this year.

Mr. Forth: In March this year my right hon. Friend invited proposals from consortia of schools to design, organise and make provision for courses of initial teacher training for up to 250 graduates. The courses will lead to qualified teacher status for successful students. On 31 May he announced those consortia which have been approved to offer courses starting in September. A further announcement on courses starting in January 1994 will be made shortly. Parliamentary approval to this new service will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the higher and further education vote—class X, vote 2. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £500,000 will be met by a repayable advance from the Contingencies Fund.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will provide in respect of each school which has held a ballot on grant-maintained status *(a)* the percentages of parents voting and *(b)* the percentages voting for and against.

Mr. Robin Squire: The details requested, correct as of 11 July, are available in the Library.

Teacher Training

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what experience of working with young children will be necessary to enter the proposed one-year primary teacher training courses;

(2) what will be the minimum qualifications needed to take part in the one-year teacher training courses for primary schools; and what age groups will be recruited;

(3) what percentage of the future intake of teacher training will consist of persons taking the one-year primary school courses.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend issued a draft circular on 9 June which included proposals for specialist one-year courses of initial training for early years teaching, for mature people with the academic qualifications for higher education together with significant experience of working with children. Views on the organisation and content of such courses were invited. The consultation period will continue until the end of July and criteria for all courses of initial training for primary teachers will be finalised in the autumn. It will then be for those wishing to offer one-year courses to make detailed proposals and satisfy the Secretary of State that they meet the necessary requirements.

Class Sizes

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 7 July, *Official Report*, c. *137*, if he will obtain for his departmental library copies of the research on the impact of class size in educational attainment in Tennessee in the United States of America, details of which have been given to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: I have arranged for a copy of the report on the STAR project to be made available in the DFE information bureau and library. I have noted the findings of this research but conclude that it adds little to an understanding of the effects of class size on educational attainment in schools in England.

Student Loans

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many student loans have been granted in each year since they were introduced; what is the total cash figure in each case; and what is the figure repayable in each case.

Mr. Boswell: This is a matter for the Student Loans Company. I will ask the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Expenditure

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the total change in public expenditure that would result from public expenditure per person in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland being at the same level as in England for *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1992-93 and *(c)* the 1994-95 and 1995-96 published plans.

Mr. Portillo: Information on general Government expenditure per head in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is published annually in the "Statistical Supplement to the Autumn Statement". The latest information, for 1987-88 to 1991-92, was published in Cm. 2219. Equivalent information is not available for 1979 or for years beyond 1991-92.

Table E1 in Cm. 2219 shows identifiable general Government expenditure per person in 1991-92 of £2,963 in England. Equivalent figures for the rest of the United Kingdom were £3,506 in Scotland; £3,268 in Wales; and £4,191 in Northern Ireland. On this basis, total identifiable general Government expenditure was some £5½ billion higher in the rest of the United Kingdom taken together than in England.

Those figures go wider than expenditure for which the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are directly responsible. They include, for example, expenditure on social security. They exclude, however, almost a fifth of total general Government expenditure, which cannot be identified from official records as having been incurred on behalf of the population of a particular territorial area.

Departmental Budgets

Mr. Page: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Government Departments have introduced monthly budgets with analysis of variations of performance against targets.

Mr. Portillo: This information is not collected centrally. The 1986 multi-departmental review of budgeting recommended that

"budget should include output and performance indicators, and there should be regular evaluation of what has been achieved compared with the objectives which have been set".

Most Departments made good progress in meeting this principle. The subsequent next steps initiative, which requires the responsible Minister to set performance targets for each of his agencies normally covering financial performance, efficiency—including unit costs—and quality of service, has led to significant further improvements: typically, the 90 agencies analyse variations of performance against targets on a monthly basis.

End-year Flexibility Schemes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the entitlements for 1993-94 resulting from the carry-forward of the capital and running costs underspends allowed under the end-year flexibility schemes.

Mr. Portillo: A list of entitlements totalling £358 million for capital expenditure and £48 million for running costs is shown in the table.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, individual cash limits and running costs limits will be increased when entitlement is taken up.

The total increase in cash limits resulting from the take-up of end-year flexibility will be charged to the Reserve and will, therefore, not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Entitlements for 1993-94 cash limits resulting from the carryover of capital underspends

			Cash limits on Votes	
Class	*Vote*	*Accounting Department*	*Description of expenditure*	*Annual £ thousands*
I		Ministry of Defence	Operational and support costs, logistics services and systems procurement and research	95,375
II	1	Foreign and Commonwealth Office	Overseas representation	8,201
II	3	Foreign and Commonwealth Office	External broadcasting and monitoring	2,597
III	4	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	Agricultural, food and fishing services	1,873
IV	1	Department of Trade and Industry	Support for business, consumer and investor protection, energy programmes and administration	3,304
IV	6	Export Credits Guarantee Department	Administration	2,000
V	1	Department of Employment	Programmes and central services	714
VI	1	Department of Transport	National roads, England	21,107
VI	2	Department of Transport	Administration and transport services	2,000
VI	4	Department of Transport	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	2,000
VI	5	Department of Transport	Local roads and transport	1,919
VII	5	Department of the Environment	Central environmental services, etc., England	669
VII	7	Department of the Environment	Administration	1,386
VII	10	Ordnance Survey	Ordnance survey	63
VIII	2	Home Office	Prisons, England and Wales	1,728
VIII	3	Home Office	Administration, immigration, probation and police support services, England and Wales	1,847
IX	11	Public Record Office	Public Record Office	2,000

Cash limits on Votes

Class	*Vote*	*Accounting Department*	*Description of expenditure*	*Annual £ thousands*
IX	12	The Crown Office, Scotland, Procurator Fiscal Service and Lord Advocate's Department	Administration	59
X	4	Department for Education	Administration	1,122
XI	1	Department of National Heritage	Museums and galleries	372
XI	2	Department of National Heritage	Arts	420
XI	7	Department of National Heritage	Administration	64
XII	1	Department of Health[1]	Hospital, community health, family health services (part) and related services, England	44,957
XII	3	Department of Health	Administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England	2,244
XII	6	Office of Population Censuses and Surveys	Office of Population Censuses and Surveys	751
XIII	4	Department of Social Security	Administration and miscellaneous services	10,806
XIV	2	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland	Agricultural services, agricultural grants and fisheries, Scotland	2,249
XIV	3	Industry Department for Scotland	Training programmes, roads and transport services and industrial support, Scotland	1,777
XIV	12	Scottish Home and Health Department	Law, order and miscellaneous health and social work services, Scotland	1,761
XIV	14	Scottish Home and Health Department[1]	Hospital, community health, family health (part) and other health services, Scotland[1]	8,401
XIV	17	Scottish Education Department	Education, arts and libraries, Scotland	2,606
XIV	22	Scottish Record Office	Scottish Record Office	52
XIV	23	General Register Office for Scotland	General Register Office for Scotland	212
XV	2	Welsh Office	Agricultural support and services, fishing ; regional and industrial development, Wales	4,660
XV	5	Welsh Office	Tourism, roads and transport, housing other environmental services (including civil defence), education, arts and libraries and health and, personal social services, Wales	3,065
XV	8	Welsh Office[1]	Hospital, community health, family health services (part) and related services, Wales	7,232
XV	9	Welsh Office	Administration	50
XVII	1	Her Majesty's Treasury	Her Majesty's Treasury	2,000
XVII	6	Inland Revenue	Administration	7,711
XVII	10	Department for National Savings	Department for National Savings	186
XVII	14	Central Statistical Office	Central Statistical Office	533
XVIII	1	Cabinet Office: Office of Public Service and Science	Office of Public Service and Science	868
TOTAL VOTED				252,941

[1] Special health scheme.

Cash limits on non-voted expenditure

1992-93			*£ thousand*
DOE/HC	Department of the Environment	Grants and capital expenditure financed by the Housing Corporation in England	741
DOE/UA	Department of the Environment	External financing requirements of Urban Development Corporations in England, grants to local authorities and other bodies under the urban programme, the derelict land reclamation and city grant programmes (including associated LA credit approvals), grants for urban and housing projects under the City Challenge initiative and other expenditure for inner cities initiatives	30,461
DOE/LACAP	Department of the Environment	Basic credit approvals to local authorities in England for housing, transport (except passenger transport authorities), education, health, other services and Home Office (fire services in shires only). Supplementary credit approvals and certain other grants to local authorities in England for housing. Supplementary credit approvals to certain local authorities for all capital purposes to offset some categories of commutation losses	61
DOE/ES DOE/ERDF	Department of the Environment	Supplementary credit approvals for other environmental services in England, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and the Isles of Scilly (water and sewerage) and ERDF grants	7,855
DOH/LACAP	Department of Health	Supplementary credit approvals for health in England	1,184
MAFF/LACAP	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	Supplementary credit approvals for flood defence, coast protection and harbour improvements in England	870
HO/LACAP	Home Office	Supplementary credit approvals for probation, police and civil defence in England and Wales. Basic credit approvals for fire (joint FCDAs only) in England and Wales	192
LCD/LACAP	Lord Chancellor's Department	Supplementary credit approvals for magistrates' courts in England and Wales	695
SO/LA1	Scottish Office	Net capital allocations and grants to local authorities in Scotland for roads and transport, water and sewerage, police, education, social work services, general services, urban programme, river purification and civil defence	32,604
SO/LA2	Scottish Office	Net capital allocations and grants to local authorities in Scotland for housing. Capital expenditure by New Towns in Scotland for housing and other environmental services	13,019
WO/LACAP	Welsh Office	Basic credit approvals for local authorities in Wales. Supplementary credit approvals for all services (except urban programme and urban development grant) and housing grants	4,467
WO/UA	Welsh Office	Supplementary credit approvals and grants (both capital and current) to local authorities in Wales in respect of the urban programme and Urban Development Grant. Urban Investment Grant and expenditure by the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	3,729
NID1	Northern Ireland Departments	Services in Northern Ireland broadly analogous to services in Great Britain covered by cash limits but including family practitioner services	8,235
NID4	Northern Ireland	Expenditure in Northern Ireland on national agricultural capital grant schemes, certain assistance for production, marketing and processing and the fishing industry	1,022
Total non-voted			105,135
Total capital end-year flexibility			358,076

Entitlements for 1993-94 running costs limits resulting from the carryforward of running costs underspends

Department	*Amount £ thousands*
Overseas Development Administration	235
Intervention Board—Executive Agency	144
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	1,362
Trade and Industry	1,528
Office of Telecommunications	50
Office of Electricity Regulation	50
Department of Transport	1,104
Department of the Environment	982
Property Holdings	238
Home Office	7,235
Charity Commission	50
Lord Chancellor's Department	2,032
Crown Prosecution Service	950
Department of Education	478
Department of Health	1,333

Department	Amount £ thousands
Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys	238
Department of Social Security	12,628
Scottish Office	1,433
Scottish Courts Administration	191
Welsh Office	365
Northern Ireland Office Northern Ireland Departments	3,582
HM Treasury	397
HM Customs & Excise	3,484
Inland Revenue	7,504
Department for National Savings	579
Central Statistical Office	162
Government Actuary's Department	50
TOTAL	48,384

Income Tax

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the direct revenue yield in a full year at 1992-93 and 1993-94 levels of income from imposition of limits for all allowances and reliefs within the tax system to *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £15,000 and *(c)* £20,000 and the additional revenue yield from restricting all allowances including personal allowances and reliefs within these limits, to relief at (i) 20p and (ii) 25p, giving in each case the numbers of people affected.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* Estimates of the direct revenue yield in a full year at 1992-93 and 1993-94 levels of income from imposition of the specified limits for allowances and reliefs within the tax system for these years are as follows. These are based on information compiled from a number of statistical surveys and are subject to more than the usual margin of uncertainty, and incorporate the conventional assumption of no changes in mortgage interest rates in 1993-94.

Limit for total allowance and reliefs £	1992-93 yield £ million	1993-94 yield £ million
10,000	690	650
15,000	380	380
20,000	270	280

After restriction of the allowances and reliefs within these limits to 25 and 20 per cent., the estimated further yield would be as follows:

Limit for total allowances and reliefs £	Full year yield at 1992-93 income levels from restricting allowances and reliefs within limits		Full year yield at 1993-94 income levels from restricting allowances and reliefs within limits	
	25 per cent. restriction £ million	20 per cent. restriction £ million	25 per cent. restriction £ million	20 per cent. restriction £ million
10,000	2,100	8,600	2,200	8,400
15,000	2,100	8,700	2,200	8,500
20,000	2,200	8,800	2,300	8,600

The number of people with total allowance and reliefs in excess of these limits:

Limit £	1992–93 thousands	1993-94 thousands
10,000	610	420
15,000	85	85
20,000	45	45

The estimates of revenue yield do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of the changes.

Personal Taxation

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the yield in 1993-94 of restricting all personal allowances and reliefs to the basic rate.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* The estimated full year yield at 1993-94 income levels from restricting all personal allowances and reliefs to the basic rate of tax is £2·4 billion. This incorporates the conventional assumption of no changes in mortgage interest rates during 1993-94.

The estimate of revenue yield does not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of the changes.

Discretionary Share Option Schemes

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people have received discretionary share option schemes for the years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93; and if he will provide an estimate for 1993-94;

(2) how many employees *(a)* were granted and *(b)* exercised discretionary share options; and what was their value in each year since 1990-91.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answers 12 and 13 July 1993]:* Information on the number of employees exercising options under discretionary share option schemes approved by the Inland Revenue was not collected prior to 1991-92. Data are not yet available for 1992-93 and 1993-94. Estimates for earlier years are as follows:

	Number of employees to whom options were granted during year (Thousands)	Number of employees who exercised options during year (Thousands)	Initial value of shares over which options granted during year (£ million	Market value of shares over which options exercised during year (£ million)
1990-91	65	n.a.	1,450	700
1991-92	80	20	1,350	1,100

Company Taxation

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate for 1993-94 *(a)* corporation tax repaid and *(b)* reliefs for capital allowances.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* It is estimated that total corporation tax repayments in 1993-94 will be £3·7 billion and reliefs for capital allowances will cost £14 billion.

Trading Losses

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the yield in 1992-93 and 1993-94 of restricting the carry-back of trading losses to *(a)* two years and *(b)* one year.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* Restricting the carry back of trading losses to two years in 1992-93 might have increased net corporation tax receipts by £300 million. A restriction of the carry back to one year might have increased receipts by a further £100 million. Comparable estimates for 1993-94 are not available.

SCOTLAND

Surgical Treatment

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will develop and publish measurements of the outcome, successful or otherwise, of surgical and medical treatments other than mortalities within the national health service.

Mr. Stewart: Yes. A working group to develop clinical outcome measures involving managers and clinicians was established in late spring 1992. Its first discussion document was published in December 1992 proposing a range of outcome measures. On 7 July 1993 a second discussion document—"Clinical Outcome Measures"—was issued presenting pilot outcome measures at the level of health board of treatment. These include measures other than mortality such as:

1. Proportion of patients discharged home within two months of emergency admission from home for fractured neck of femur;
2. One year re-operation rate after transurethral prostatectomy.
3. 28-day emergency readmission rate after discharge from medical specialities.

These measures are now included in service contracts to ensure arrangements are made for collection of good quality data which are consistent and comparable.

The use of outcome measures and the validity of any comparison depends on standard data and on careful interpretation. The working group is currently addressing these issues in consultation with managers and clinicians.

Anaesthetists

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by each health board the current number of vacancies for anaesthetists; and what action is being taken to fill these posts.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is not available centrally. As at 30 September 1992, however, there were three established posts for consultant anaesthetists which had been vacant for six months or more. Two or these, in Argyll and Clyde and Western Isles health boards, were filled earlier this year. A further post in Argyll and Clyde health board has been advertised but no appointment has been made.

Health Care International

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures are being taken to ensure that Health Care International does not compete with the national health service in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: The HCI hospital at Clydebank will not compete with the NHS for patients. The hospital is to focus on the treatment of overseas patients; NHS hospitals will continue to treat United Kingdom patients unless a health board determines that it would be in the best clinical interests for a patient to receive treatment outwith an NHS facility.

Furthermore, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), the then Secretary of State for Scotland, took steps, at the time of the HCI application to build the hospital, to safeguard the position of the NHS. The application was subject to a rigorous consultative process under the health service Acts. Acceptance by HCI of the consequential stringent conditions designed to protect the NHS was a prerequisite of the authorisation given by my right hon. and learned Friend to the building and operation of the hospital. These conditions relate to the recruitment of medical and nursing staff, the pay and conditions of service of these staff and the supply of blood and blood products. The relevant NHS interests and medical institutions are currently discussing these various aspects with HCI to ensure that the hospital fully meets the specified conditions and that NHS interests are effectively safeguarded.

NHS Reform

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer by the Secretary of State for Health to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) of 23 November 1992, *Official Report*, columns *497-98*, whether he will provide a similar table setting out his Department's figures, for the costs of NHS reform, for each year from 1989-90 to 1992-93.

Mr. Stewart: Details of the cost of NHS reforms for each of the years from 1989-90 to 1992-93 are shown in the table.

£ million

	1989-90	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
HCH Revenue				
100 Consultants initiative	—	—	—	—
Resource management initiative medical and clinical audit, IT	1	7	13	13
Enhancement of personnel, finance and other key staff functions and training		Not available		
NHS Trusts—mainly consultations and start up costs	—	—	7	35

	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Family Health Service Authorities Administration		Not applicable		
Others—mainly quality initiatives pilot projects and capital charges	—	—	—	—
TOTAL REVENUE	1	7	20	48
HCH Capital				
Resource management initiative medical and clinical audit, IT	—	2	5	3
Quality Initiative	—	—	—	—
TOTAL CAPITAL	—	2	5	3
FHS Practice Funds Management Allowance	—	—	—	2
TOTAL FHS	—	—	—	2
SO Administration				
SO Staff and consultancy costs related to the Review	—	—	—	—
Prescription Pricing (Pharmacy Practice)	3	4	5	6
Post Royal Assent Publicity		Not applicable		
	3	4	5	6
TOTAL NHS REVIEW	4	13	30	59

Not Proven Verdicts

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to publish the conclusions of the review of the not proven verdict; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* We expect to publish a consultation paper on the functions of the jury in criminal trials and the not proven verdict towards the end of the year.

WALES

County Council Elections

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the percentage turnout in each county in each county council election in Wales since 1974; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on county council election turnout is published in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys "Electoral Statistics" series and in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Local Government Elections, England and Wales 1989" copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Midwives

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many midwives were employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in each region in each year since 1988;

(2) how many midwifery staff are employed in each region *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time (i) on an agency basis and (ii) on bank contracts;

(3) how many practising midwives there are in each grade in each region, including those in senior nurse/senior midwive grades, senior nurse grades and education and clinical grades, excluding agency midwives; how many are employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time; and how many student midwives there are in each region.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Detailed breakdowns of nursing and midwifery staff employed by health authorities and NHS trusts into occupational groups such as those requested are not considered reliable. However, information on the numbers—whole time and part time—of nursing and midwifery staff for the years 1988 to 1992 is listed as follows. In addition, a table showing the figures split by grade—excluding student and pupil nurses and staff nursery staff—is shown for 1992. Figures include those agency and bank staff who are paid on standard pay scales but exclude those who are not paid on standard pay scales. Separate information on these is not available. The information is shown for Wales as a whole as there are no regional health authorities in Wales.

Nursing and Midwifery Staff in Post as at 30 September

	Number	
	Whole-time	*Part-time*
1988	19,945	12,936
1989	20,026	13,210
1990	20,069	13,632
1991	19,843	13,913
1992[1]	19,447	14,993

Nursing and Midwifery Staff in Post as at 30 September 1992[1,2]

	Number	
Pay scale/Grade	*Whole-time*	*Part-time*
Clinical grades:		
NPO1 Grade A (under 18)	5	1
NPO6 Grade A (18 and over)	3,255	4,508
NP16 Grade B	794	1,126
NP21 Grade C	459	800
NP26 Grade D (2nd level enrolled nurses)	1,686	2,106
NP31 Grade D (1st level registered nurses)	1,540	1,180
NP36 Grade E	3,674	3,347
NP41 Grade F	1,360	1,041
NP46 Grade G	3,173	767
NP51 Grade H	646	39
NP56 Grade I	346	1
Education staff:		
NRO1 Grade 1	33	2
NR11 Grade 2	226	18
NR21 Grade 3	10	—
NR31 Grade 4	43	—
NR41 Grade 5	6	—
NR51 Grade 6	1	—

Pay scale/Grade	Number Whole-time	Part-time
NR61 Grade 7	2	—
Senior nurses[3]:		
NT21 Senior nurse 4	1	—
NT26 Senior nurse 3	2	—
NT36 Senior nurse 1	4	—
Senior Nurses/Midwives[3]:		
NXO1 District/unit	79	—
NXO2 District/unit	3	—
NX11 Unit 1st level	34	—
NX12 Unit 1st level	1	—
NX21 District 1st level	3	—
NX31 Region	1	—
Previous senior nurses grades[3]:		
ND Director of Nursing Services	5	—

[1] The 1992 figures exclude about 64 whole-time equivalent nursing and midwifery staff employed by Pembrokeshire NHS trust on local pay scales to whom the standard pay grades do not apply. In addition, there are about 1,000 student nurses who have been reclassified as students following the introduction of Project 2000 nursing education reforms.

[2] Excluding student and pupil nurses and staff nursery staff.

[3] Since 1 January 1991 staff on "Previous senior nurse grades" shown and senior nurses (NT) have been eligible to transfer to new senior nurse pay scales.

Churches and Chapels

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many churches and chapels were located in each local authority area in the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is not available centrally.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the level of sickness absence among employees expressed as a percentage of total working time for *(a)* full-time manual employees, *(b)* full-time non-manual employees, *(c)* part-time employees and *(d)* all employees in Wales for each year since 1987.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is not available.

NHS Management

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent by the National Health Service in Wales on external management consultation in each year since 1990.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Welsh Language

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many tutors are employed in a full-time capacity in Wales to teach the Welsh language to adults; and what plans his Department has to increase the number of full-time tutors of Welsh for adults.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not held centrally.

The Further Education Funding Council for Wales, in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, has established a joint working group to review the provision of Welsh language education for adults. The joint review group will prepare recommendations to the funding councils on *(a)* the supporting activity needed to ensure the maintenance and development of Welsh language education for adults; *(b)* the way in which this activity might be funded; and *(c)* how the funding of Welsh language education for adults might be channelled in future.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many courses are currently offered in the Welsh language in *(a)* Gwynedd technical college, *(b)* Llandrillo technical college and *(c)* the North East Wales institute of higher education; and if he will name the courses and the number of students currently on each one.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not held centrally.

Empty Properties

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local authority-owned houses were untenanted in each local authority area at the latest available date; and what information he has on the length of time they had been vacant.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the table.

Vacant local authority dwellings[1]

Local authority	Total	Of which vacant for more than six months
Aberconwy	6	0
Alyn and Deeside	38	8
Arfon	35	0
Blaenau Gwent	109	0
Brecknock	4	4
Cardiff	269	4
Carmarthen	12	7
Ceredigion	24	5
Colwyn	16	0
Cynon Valley	30	0
Delyn	27	0
Dinefwr	10	0
Dwyfor	12	0
Glyndwr	28	4
Islwyn	73	10
Llanelli	101	47
Lliw Valley	60	21
Meirionnydd	14	2
Merthyr Tydfil	31	1
Monmouth	51	19
Montgomeryshire	31	3
Neath	61	14
Newport	96	14
Ogwr	91	7
Port Talbot	66	22
Preseli	47	1
Radnorshire	3	0
Rhondda	33	0
Rhuddlan	5	0
Rhymney Valley	18	0
South Pembrokeshire	11	2
Swansea	141	0
Taff-Ely	64	1
Torfaen	105	19
Vale of Glamorgan	44	5
Wrexham Maelor	179	18
Ynys Mon	83	21

[1] At 1 April 1993. Includes those dwellings which were to be let after undergoing repair and those awaiting sale or demolition.
Source: Welsh Office local authority returns.

Neurology

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the medical schools within Wales indicating which schools teach neurology as part of their courses.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The university of Wales college of medicine is the only medical school in Wales. Neurology is part of the range of subjects in the college's undergraduate medical curriculum.

HEALTH

District Nurses

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district nurses were employed in each regional health authority in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: The information available is shown in the table.

District Nurses, for England by RHA, 1982-91 at 30 September (whole-time equivalents)

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
England	10,120	10,030	9,770	9,930	9,990	9,500	9,390	10,160	10,380	9,900
Northern	na	na	na	na	820	820	810	850	850	820
Yorkshire	na	na	na	na	720	740	710	790	780	660
Trent	na	na	na	na	1,000	1,000	1,030	1,040	1,000	980
East Anglian	na	na	na	na	390	360	370	370	350	350
North West Thames	na	na	na	na	650	590	570	720	710	660
North East Thames	na	na	na	na	650	630	610	710	730	710
South East Thames	na	na	na	na	720	480	410	350	800	680
South West Thames	na	na	na	na	660	620	610	660	620	630
Wessex	na	na	na	na	650	620	620	640	630	620
Oxford	na	na	na	na	510	510	500	570	570	580
South Western	na	na	na	na	620	620	630	750	710	640
West Midlands	na	na	na	na	1,060	1,040	1,020	1,100	1,080	1,070
Mersey	na	na	na	na	520	530	510	570	540	520
North Western	na	na	na	na	1,000	920	980	1,030	1,010	990
SHAs	na	na	na	na	20	10	10	10	—	—

Notes:
1. "na" means figure is not available, — = zero.
2. All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
3. Totals may not add due to rounding.
4. Figures exclude senior nurses 1-5. Includes senior nurses 6-8 in district nursing, district nurses, district nurse practical work teachers, holders of dual post (DN/midwife) and bank district nurses. From 1989 included clinical grade G to I in district nursing.
5. The figures exclude the total number of nurses working in GP practice in England and Wales which increased from 1,515 at 1 October 1982 to 8,780 whole-time equivalent at 1 October 1991.
N.B. For details on appropriate qualifications for practice nurses read para 52.23 (Page 211) national health services, general medical services statement of fees and allowances and payable to general medical practitioners in England and Wales from 1 April 1990.

Nottingham Clinic

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations she has received from hon. Members relating to the Nottingham clinic.

Mr. Sackville: Since the district auditor wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 23 March 1993 under section 20(3) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, there have been nine such representations, including four parliamentary questions from the hon. Member for Nottingham, East himself.

Emergency Admissions

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of emergency admissions to *(a)* the Doncaster Royal and Montagu trust, *(b)* Doncaster healthcare trust and *(c)* the Trent region in 1990-91.

Mr. Sackville: The information from the hospital episodes statistics is not yet available. The collection of the management information on non-elective admissions in the general and acute specialities given in the reply I gave the hon. Member on 29 June at column *418* did not begin until April 1991.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of emergency admissions of elderly patients to *(a)* the Doncaster and Montagu trust, *(b)* Doncaster healthcare trust and *(c)* the Trent region for the years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Sackville: In 1992-93 purchasers in the Trent region purchased 129,000 non-elective admissions of persons aged 65 and over. The comparable figure for 1991-92 was 131,000; the information for 1990-91 is not available. In 1992-93 the Doncaster royal infirmary and Montagu trust provided 6,400 non-elective admissions for those aged 65 and over. The corresponding figure for the Doncaster healthcare trust was 1,600. Similar information for 1990-91 and 1991-92 is not available.

Primary Health Care Teams

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will bring forward proposals for the provision of primary health care teams focused around general practitioners' practices in which the co-ordinating role is assumed by a named person and to provide that the

co-ordinator receives training in local information and co-ordination skills and is committed to ensuring that all residents have access to the health services they need; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We welcome the report of the task force chaired by the chief nursing officer—"New World New Opportunities"—which highlights the issues and ways forward for primary health care teams. Within those teams there has been a large increase in numbers of practice staff in recent years—an increase of 74 per cent. between 1989 and 1992—and their organisation should suit local health needs. The task force's report is being widely circulated within the health service and we hope that it serves as a stimulus to action for purchasers and providers of services in the light of their assessment of local circumstances.

Smoking

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the advice her Department has provided to insurance companies on the health effects of smoking, as proposed in "The Health of the Nation" White Paper; and what response she has received from those companies.

Mr. Sackville: Officials of the Department of Health have met with representatives of the Association of British Insurers (ABI) and the Department of Trade and Industry to discuss smoking-related issues and to ensure that the ABI is aware of the full range of scientific and medical evidence of the dangers of smoking. There have been no meetings with individual companies.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress the interdepartmental task force announced in "The Health of the Nation" White Paper has made in developing and implementing the proposed comprehensive strategy to reduce smoking prevalence and tobacco consumption; whether this strategy will be published; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The interdepartmental task force on smoking has been established to develop and implement the strategy to reduce smoking. An implementation programme to take forward the strategy will be published in due course.

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures, other than an increase in the price in real terms of cigarettes, she will implement in order to achieve the Government's target of a 40 per cent. reduction in consumption of cigarettes by the year 2000 as set out in "The Health of the Nation" White Paper; and if she will quantify, in terms of a percentage reduction in consumption, the contribution that each may be expected to make to achieving the target.

Mr. Sackville: "The Health of the Nation" White Paper sets out a comprehensive strategy to reduce smoking prevalence including action on price, health education and ensuring effective controls on advertising. It also emphasises the key role of health authorities in leading moves to improve the health of local people including action to reduce smoking.

It is difficult to quantify the comparative effect of the different influences on smoking habits with any certainty.

Crime Prevention Audit

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further action she proposes to take in the light of the crime prevention audit received by her Department in 1992.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) on 26 May at columns *579-80*.

Mental Illness

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to extend the availability of advocates to patients wishing to make complaints about mental health services.

Mr. Bowis: We have advised health authorities and service providers of the need to support the work of independent advocacy services in the mental illness key area handbook. The independent national health service complaints review announced last month will be considering the procedures for the making and handling of complaints by NHS patients and their families in the United Kingdom, and the costs and benefits of alternatives to current procedures.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mentally ill patients were treated *(a)* in the community and *(b)* as in-patients, for each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Bowis: Information on the number of patients treated in the community is not available centrally.

The table gives the number of admissions to national health service hospitals in England. For 1985-86 the figures are from the mental health inquiry and for 1985-88 to 1989-90 from the hospital episode statistics system.

The figures include people admitted more than once in a year.

Mental illness
All admissions to NHS hospitals (England)

	Number
1985	199,995
1986	197,251
1987-88	203,700
1988-89	188,900
1989-90	194,500

Note: Figures up to 1986 are admissions to mental illness hospitals and units during the calendar year and include transfers between hospitals. From 1987-88, figures are estimates of admissions to all NHS hospitals during the financial year of patients under the mental illness specialties. These exclude transfer between hospitals.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to amend the code of practice under the Mental Health Act 1983 with regard to the discharge of patients into the community; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: We have revised chapter 27 of the code of practice on aftercare arrangements to draw attention to the care programme approach set out in departmental circulars. In the case of patients who have been detained, the application of the care programme approach should meet health and local authorities obligations under section

117 of the Mental Health Act 1983 to provide aftercare. The revised code was laid before Parliament on 19 May and we intend to publish it in the autumn.

Child Surveillance

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of general practitioners submitted child surveillance claim forms in the last year.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is not available in the form requested. Ninety-three per cent. of general practitioners in England were registered to provide child health surveillance as at October 1992.

Health Complaints

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints were referred in each year by each local authority to independent persons under the provisions of *(a)* the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and *(b)* the Children Act 1989.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Foster Care

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average time spent in fostered care or social service care prior to adoption in the age groups *(a)* all ages, *(b)* under one, *(c)* over one and under five, *(d)* over five and under 10, *(e)* over 10 and under 15 and *(f)* 16 and over in the year before the Children Act 1989 came into force.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 17 June at column *688*.

Fluoridation

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which water companies have stopped fluoridation since privatisation;

(2) how many new water fluoridation schemes have been introduced since the Water Fluoridation Act 1985.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions for fluoride supplements have been issued since January; and what are the figures for the comparable period in 1992.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is shown in the table.

Fluoride supplement prescriptions
England

Period	*Number of prescription items Thousands*
January 1992 to March 1992	2·1
January 1993 to March 1993	34·8

Note: Since 1 January 1993 general dental practitioners have been able to prescribe fluoride supplements for the long-term care of their patients under the continuing care arrangements introduced by the new dental contract in October 1990.

Unemployed People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what encouragement has been given by her Department to general practitioners to address the mental, dietary and lifestyle pressures upon people who are out of work; and if she will make available pump-priming moneys to assist general practitioners to develop programmes to assist unemployed people.

Mr. Sackville: We have not introduced any initiatives specific to unemployed people. However, some 90 per cent. of general practitioners are now taking part in health promotion programmes for the prevention of coronary heart disease and stroke, as part of new arrangements under the GP contract introduced on 1 July this year. Practices will identify the groups within their local population who they consider may be at higher risk, and will offer them help in adopting a more healthy lifestyle.

Opportunity 2000

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the effects of Opportunity 2000 within the national health service to date.

Mr. Sackville: The target completion date for achieving the goals set out in Opportunity 2000 in the national health service is 1994.

Progress so far shows the regions and national health service trusts to be actively pursuing policies to promote women's participation in the national health service. Many of the points for action listed in the implementation guide are in operation; others are being actively considered. As a result there has been an increase in the profile and contribution of women, in all areas covered by the goals, in the service.

A copy of the implementation guide will be placed in the Library.

Children in Need

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have been defined as being in need under the Children Act 1989 in each year since the Act was passed; and how many have had services provided for them.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally. Information is collected on the total number of children receiving certain specific services; children in need will be included in these totals, but are not identified separately.

Residential Homes

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations she has received regarding the inspection of residential and nursing homes; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: We regularly receive correspondence about the registration and inspection of residential care and nursing homes. A large number of helpful comments were received earlier this year in response to our consultation document "Inspecting Social Services", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Uranium Particulates

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been commissioned or undertaken by her Department into the nephrotoxicity of inhalation of uranium particulates.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Hepatitis A Vaccine

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what current difficulties are being experienced in the production and or distribution of the hepatitis A vaccine; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has been assured by the manufacturers that there are no current difficulties in production or distribution of this vaccine, known as "Havrix".

Paediatric Services

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the number of consultant paediatricians and paediatric units in each of the last five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is shown in the table. The number of paediatric units is not available centrally.

Consultant paediatricians—England at 30 September each year

Year	*Paediatric specialties Number of consultants*
1987	676
1988	695
1989	800
1990	821
1991	856

Child Guidance Clinics

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many child guidance clinics there were in each of the last five years.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Adults at Risk

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to extend legal definitions of adults at risk to include vulnerable elderly people.

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities already have a duty to assess the needs of elderly people who appear to them to require community care services.

Maternity Claim Forms

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of general practitioners submitted a maternity claim form in the last year.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is not available in the form requested. Some 96 per cent. of general practitioners in England were on their family health services authority's obstetric list as at 1 October 1992.

Small Pharmacies

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria must be satisfied in order for a dispensing chemist to qualify for the essential small pharmacies scheme.

Dr. Mawhinney: A pharmacy must dispense between 6,000 and 17,200 prescriptions per year and be more than 2 km from the next nearest pharmacy.

General Practices

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the general practices she has visited in the last year which are not fund-holding.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have met many non-fund-holding as well as fund-holding general practitioners on my various visits to national health service regions.

Mr. Jeremiah Kearney

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has yet received a report from the social services inspectorate on the death of Jeremiah Kearney.

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today received the social services inspectorate's report on the death, on 24 April, of Jeremiah Kearney. I am arranging for a copy to be sent to the director of social services for Haringey.

The report shows that Mr. Kearney had a severe alcohol problem, and was at severe health risk. He was a tenant of the London and Quadrant housing association, and during the three months prior to his death was in contact with the Irish community care centre in Stroud Green, which has delegated authority from Haringey social services department to undertake community care assessments. I am satisfied with the report and that Mr. Kearney was well informed of the options for residential and day care available to him, but had chosen not to pursue them. There is nothing in the report which can be seen as a criticism of the services provided by Haringey social services department or of the actions of its staff, or of the Government's community care policies.

Sight Tests

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many national health service sight tests have been undertaken since 1987-88 in each district health authority area in the northern region.

Dr. Mawhinney: We do not collect data on national health service sight tests carried out at district health authority level. The number of NHS sight tests paid for by each family health services authority (FHSA) in the northern region is shown in the table.

NHS sight tests: Northern Region FHSAs

Thousands

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*[1]	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*[2]
Cleveland	137·8	143·8	69·7	58·0	66·1	72·0
Cumbria	107·5	109·4	41·0	31·6	37·2	41·6
Durham	124·2	128·6	57·1	48·4	55·1	59·4
Northumberland	66·6	71·3	26·7	27·5	28·7	34·2
Gateshead	45·6	53·2	28·3	21·0	25·7	28·0
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	89·3	96·2	46·4	33·5	37·2	39·0
North Tyneside	39·3	40·0	19·1	15·6	18·0	21·2
South Tyneside	27·9	30·6	15·7	13·8	15·4	17·3
Sunderland	59·8	67·4	32·7	26·2	31·2	33·2
Total[3]	698·0	740·4	336·8	275·6	314·7	345·9

[1]From 1 April 1989, NHS sight tests were restricted to certain groups in the population. The sight tests paid for in 1989-90 include some conducted prior to 1 April 1989 when sight tests were universally available. The remainder paid for in 1989-90 do not represent a full year under the new system, because of the delay in payments. The figure for 1989-90 is not, therefore, directly comparable with that for 1990-91.
[2]Provisional figures.
[3]Totals may not sum, due to the effects of rounding.

Child Migrant Scheme

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each year after 1963 for which appropriate records were kept the number of children and young persons leaving the United Kingdom under the child migrant scheme, indicating to which countries they were sent and setting out the agencies responsible for their care and control to their migration.

Mr. Bowis: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dementia

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the Government's community care programme in relation to the care of people with dementia.

Mr. Bowis: Our community care arrangements offer local authorities new opportunities to tailor services to the needs of users, inciuding those with dementia.

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on provision of care for dementia sufferers in west Cumbria.

Mr. Bowis: The Government's policy for England, including west Cumbria, is to enable elderly mentally ill people to live in their own homes or in a homely setting, with appropriate support for them and their carers for as long as desirable and practicable.

District health authorities are responsible for securing a comprehensive range of psychiatric services to meet the needs of their residents, including quality services for elderly mentally ill people requiring long-term care.

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines she has issued to ensure adequate quality of care in residential homes for people with dementia.

Mr. Bowis: The Department's social services inspectorate publications "Guidance on Standards for Residential Homes for Elderly People" and "Homes are for Living in", which are both available in the Library, give standards of care for all elderly people, including those with dementia.

Alzheimer's Disease

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the United Kingdom presently suffer from dementia; and how many of them have Alzheimer's disease.

Mr. Bowis: The proportion of people suffering from dementia in England is shown in the table. It is estimated that around two thirds of these suffer from Alzheimer's disease.

Mental Disorder	*Prevalence per cent.*
Dementia	
aged over 65	5
aged over 80	20

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what ratio of staff to patients her Department recommends in respect of residential homes and day centres for people suffering with Alzheimer's disease.

Mr. Bowis: The Department has not issued guidance on staffing ratios. The levels of staffing needed in any particular establishment will depend on the particular needs of the individuals who are being cared for.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to whom each of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department is responsible; whether the public bodies or their members in each case are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 6 July 1993]:* All executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) sponsored by the Department of Health are responsible to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. No Department of Health executive public bodies are subject to surcharge. The Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, the Medical Practices Committee and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority are subject to investigation by the parliamentary commissioner. Information on audit arrangements is set out in "Public Bodies 1992", and NDPBs are not subject to the statutory provisions for open government which apply to local authorities. All Department of Health executive NDPBs except the Medical Practices Committee include performance indicators in their management statements. All public bodies are being encouraged to follow the principles of the citizens charter. Members of non-departmental public bodies are expected to declare any potential conflict of interest and this is made clear in letters of appointment. Copies of "Public Bodies 1992" are available in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Consultation

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation exercises his Department is currently conducting; and what is the timetable in each case.

Mr. Gummer: The Department of the Environment is currently undertaking 50 consultation exercises, the details of which have been placed in the Library.

Government Car Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what negotiations he has had with private organisations in respect of running the government car service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: There have been no negotiations with private organisations about running the Government car service. This option was recently investigated by Coopers and Lybrand and it concluded that it would be more expensive than the current GCS service.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he published his Department's interim guidance for local authorities on energy efficiency in council housing; and to whom the document has been distributed.

Mr. Baldry: The guidance was published on 29 June 1993. Copies have been sent to all local housing authorities in England, and to other interested organisations.

Planning Consent

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to end the exemption from planning consents for newly privatised utilities and local authorities.

Mr. Curry: We have no plans to withdraw the permitted development rights granted to statutory undertakers or to local authorities by the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988. The need for newly privatised utilities to have permitted development rights is considered on a case-by-case basis in the context of the relevant privatisation legislation.

Acid Rain

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has in regard to the proposals to be put to the Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva on new targets to reduce acid rain in Europe.

Mr. Yeo: The proposal for the second sulphur protocol under the 1979 convention on long-range transboundary air pollution is that the gap between current sulphur depositions and substantial protection should be closed by 60 per cent. Different levels of reductions will apply to different nations according to the relative impact of their emissions.

The next meeting in August of the official-level working group will consider further the target date and the ranges of figures calculated for each party. The Government are at present considering its position on the reduction figures indicated for the United Kingdom.

Urban Programme

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of schemes originally funded by the urban programme has been continued by local authority mainstream funding when time expired; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: This information is not held centrally. It is for local authorities to decide which schemes to support from their own resources.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions have recently taken place *(a)* at the Environment Council and *(b)* informally

between EC Environment Ministers over the plan by France to block the further import of waste for disposal from Germany; and what are the implications for (i) EC policy and (ii) United Kingdom policy of the French Government's position on waste exports between EC member states.

Mr. Yeo: The impact of exports of surplus recyclable materials on member states was discussed at the Environment Council on 29 June. We share French concerns about the impact of such surpluses on our domestic recycling infrastructure, but I am not convinced that banning imports is the right way to solve the problem. However, the Government are urgently considering what action they can take to ensure that recycling capacity in the United Kingdom is sustained. EC policy on shipments of waste between member states is set out in the waste shipments regulation (259/93/EEC), which will apply from 6 May 1994.

Water

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance is issued to water companies as to the exact maximum level of concentration of cyptosporidium oocyst permitted in the public water supply.

Mr. Yeo: As explained in my answer pursuant to the hon. Member's question of 6 July *Official Report*, column 79, the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 require that for water supplies to be wholesome they must not contain any organism at a concentration which is detrimental to public health. With those requirements in mind, water companies have been advised to maintain a close liaison with local authorities, and with health authorities which will provide advice taking into account local circumstances.

Housing Association Rents

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department has undertaken any independent analysis on the impact of grant rate reductions on the future affordability of housing association rents.

Mr. Baldry: We have sought detailed advice from the Housing Corporation on the possible impact of grant rate reductions on rents and on associations' ability to raise private finance. We have also received copies of work undertaken by the National Federation of Housing Associations on this issue and received many representations from housing associations, lenders and other interested bodies.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the average housing association rents on new assured lettings in 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* The average housing association rents on new assured lettings in the years in question were as follows:

Average rent £/week (to nearest 50p)

	£
[1]1989-90	25·50
1990-91	30·00
1991-92	35·50
[2]1992-93	41·00

[1] Estimate.
[2] Provisional.
Source: National Federation of Housing Associations CORE data base.

Leasehold Reform

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of leaseholders who will be able to purchase their freehold after the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Bill receives Royal Assent.

Sir George Young: We believe that there are three quarters of a million long leaseholders who will potentially benefit from part 1 of the Bill. We do not know enough about the numbers and composition of blocks of flats and their tenants to estimate how many individual buildings will be eligible. Whether qualifying tenants in such buildings choose to participate in collective purchase of the freehold is of course a matter for them. Any qualifying leaseholders who meet the residence criteria will be able to purchase a renewed lease, whether or not they also participate in purchasing the freehold.

Housing (Private Sector Funding)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps the Government have taken to generate private sector investment in social housing building programmes since 1988.

Mr. Baldry: By introducing a new financial regime for housing associations in the Housing Act 1988, the Government have enabled associations to raise private finance to augment the contribution made to new schemes from public funds. Housing associations have to date drawn down more than £2·5 billion of private finance in support of the Housing Corporation's approved development programme.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's estimate of the proportion of private sector loan funding which will be required to maintain housing association building programmes in each of the years 1993-94 and 1995-96.

Mr. Baldry: We estimate that the total private sector funding attracted by housing association schemes sponsored by the Housing Corporation in 1993-94 will be £645 million. This represents 33 per cent. of the anticipated total cost of mixed-funded housing for sale and rent to be provided through the Housing Corporation.

The Government have announced their objective of increasing the proportion of private sector funding in new housing association schemes by reducing grant rates to 55 per cent in 1995-96. Final decisions on grant rates will only be taken when Ministers have considered all the relevant evidence, including the availability of private finance to maintain the development programme.

Housing Association Grant

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what analysis his Department has undertaken of the likely impact of the Government's proposal to reduce housing association grant to 55 per cent. by 1995 on new housing association rents in the west midlands;

(2) what estimate has been made of the percentage of new housing association tenants in the west midlands who would be totally reliant on housing benefit if housing association grant rates are reduced to 55 per cent. by 1995;

(3) what proposals the Government have to maintain the flow of private sector funding into social housing schemes in the west midlands in connection with the proposed reduction of housing association grant rates by 1995.

Mr. Baldry: The Government have announced their objective of reducing the average housing association grant rate in England from the current year's level of 67 per cent. to 60 per cent. in 1994-95 and 55 per cent. in 1995-96.

Final decisions will be taken when Ministers have considered all the relevant evidence, including the likely impact on rents, on housing benefit and the availability of private finance. No decisions about grant rates for 1995-96 will be taken until much closer to the time.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will consider using information on the level of unemployment and the level of long-term unemployment as part of the standard spending assessments for 1994-95.

Mr. Baldry: The review of standard spending assessments for 1994-95 will include the consideration of a range of indicators in SSAs including where appropriate alternative measures of unemployment.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to ensure that the review of standard spending assessments is fundamental and considers all alterations including reducing disparities between authorities within the same category.

Mr. Baldry: We are undertaking a review of standard spending assessments to incorporate information from the 1991 census into the underlying SSA formulae. We are also taking this opportunity to consider more widely the range of social factors used within SSAs and the weight placed upon them. We also wish to reconsider the area cost adjustment, measures of density and sparsity and the inclusion of day visitors.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangement he has agreed for the review of standard spending assessments.

Mr. Baldry: We have invited each local authority in England to make representations to us on the review of standard spending assessments and to provide evidence to support any changes. My officials are meeting regularly with representatives of the local authority associations to discuss technical aspects of the review.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what timetable he has drawn up for the review of standard spending assessments, including when the consultation period will be completed.

Mr. Baldry: Our review of standard spending assessments will be completed in time for any changes to be incorporated in SSAs for 1994-95. We shall consult in the usual way on our proposals for the revenue support grant settlement for 1994-95, including SSAs, in the late autumn.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation he has had to date at member and officer level with local authority associations about the review of standard spending assessments; and what further consultation he expects to have in the future.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend will meet representatives of the local authority associations at the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance later this month and again in October. The results of the SSA review will be discussed at the October meeting.

My officials have regular meetings with officers from the local authority associations in the SSA subgroup, which is the main forum for discussion of SSA data and methodology issues. The SSA subgroup has met six times so far this year and there will be at least three more meetings before the subgroup reports to the settlement working group in September.

We shall consult in the usual way on our proposals for the revenue support grant settlement for 1994-95, including SSAs, in the late autumn.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to change from using the 1981 to the 1991 census data in calculating standard spending assessments.

Mr. Baldry: It is our policy to use the most up-to-date information available within SSAs. Population estimates based on the 1991 census were incorporated into SSAs for 1993-94 and it is intended to make use of the remaining information now available from the 1991 census for 1994-95 SSAs.

Local Authorities' Expenditure

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the latest estimate of the extra capital expenditure which will be undertaken by local authorities as a result of the temporary relaxation of the restrictions on the use of capital receipts in comparison with the original estimates given at the time of the autumn statement.

Mr. Baldry: No new estimate of local authorities' extra capital expenditure arising from the temporary relaxation in the capital receipts rules has been made since that published in the autumn statement.

Financial Management Review

Mr. Marland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the financial management review of the Audit Commission to be published.

Mr. Curry: I have placed a copy of the report of the financial management of the Audit Commission in the Library of the House.

Asylum (Housing)

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to issue guidance to local authorities about implementing the housing provisions in the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, and on the consequences of the Court of Appeal's judgment in the case of R. *v.* Secretary of State for the Environment ex parte London borough of Tower Hamlets.

Sir George Young: I am today sending to all housing authorities and other interested bodies a consultation paper about proposed changes to the homelessness code of guidance to local authorities. The paper contains a draft supplementary code explaining the new duties of local authorities in relation to asylum seekers who apply for accommodation under the homelessness legislation. In the light of the Court of Appeal's clarification of the law in the Tower Hamlets case, the paper also contains a draft revision to the homelessness code of guidance about the response that authorities should make to applications under the homelessness legislation from persons who have entered the country illegally.

I believe that these proposed changes to the homelessness code of guidance will assist authorities in managing their housing stock, by reducing pressure from applicants whose right to remain in the country has yet to be resolved, or who should not be in the country at all. I intend to issue revised guidance on these matters in the light of the responses to the consultation paper, which are requested by 13 September. I am placing a copy of the paper in the Library.

Temporary Development

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he plans to alter the permitted development rights for temporary uses granted by part 4 of schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988.

Mr. Baldry: My Department issued a consultation paper in August last year inviting views on the scope of the permitted development rights for the temporary uses of land. I have given very careful consideration to the many hundreds of responses which my Department received both for and against introducing new or tighter controls.

I propose to remove the existing permitted development rights for the temporary display of advertisements in order to end the current duplication of controls over such development. I have concluded that there is insufficient justification to remove existing permitted development rights for other temporary uses. We shall continue to keep these arrangements under review.

A paper setting out the Government's full response to the consultation exercise has been placed in the Library.

Water Disconnections

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses have been declared unfit as a result of water disconnection in Nottingham during the last 12 months and in each of the previous five years.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 8 July 1993]:* Data on the reasons for houses being declared unfit have been collected since 1990, in which time no houses have been declared unfit in Nottingham on grounds of inadequate water supply.

Interpretation of fitness standards is a matter for local authorities, and ultimately for the courts, but in my view disconnection of a water supply for non-payment of charges does not mean that the property is statutorily unfit.

Rainforests and Cocoa

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had from the Brazilian delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union about the Atlantic rainforest and tariffs on cocoa.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* My Department had no direct representations from the Brazilian delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Following a telephone call from the hon. Member, officials from the Overseas Development Administration attempted to set up a meeting to discuss the Atlantic rainforest, but this did not prove possible.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Comfrey

Mr. Hagin: To ask the Minister of agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information she has concerning the number of people in the United Kingdom *(a)* who currently use and *(b)* who have suffered adverse health reactions as a result of using comfrey in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not collected, but the independent expert committees that advise Ministers on food safety issues concluded that there was sufficient evidence linking the intake of comfrey to toxic effects in humans to warrant action to reduce intakes of comfrey. A particular concern was the very high levels of pyrrolizidine alkaloids generally present when comfrey is presented in concentrated form.

Imported Animals

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which animals have been designated under the Destructive Imported Animals Act 1932 and in subsequent regulations made under that Act.

Mr. Soames: The Destructive Imported Animals Act 1932 (as amended) places controls in Great Britain on the importation and keeping of musk rats. Orders made under this Act extend these controls to grey squirrels, non-indigenous rabbits, coypu and mink.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which animals designated under the Destructive Imported Animals Act 1932 may now be imported from other member states of the EC.

Mr. Soames: All of the animals to which the Destructive Imported Animals Act 1932 applies may be imported from member states, subject to the controls imposed by the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order 1974 (as amended). However, these animals cannot be kept in Great Britain without an appropriate licence from Agriculture Departments. Licences may only be issued to permit the keeping of these animals for exhibition, scientific research or other exceptional purposes, except in the case of mink which may also be kept for fur.

Veterinary Products

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many EC countries implemented EC directive 81/851 on the harmonising of veterinary products by *(a)* automatically renewing the licences of current medicines and *(b)* by a fresh process of relicensing; what considerations led him to opt for the latter approach for the United Kingdom; what are the costs of relicensing a medicine through the Veterinary Medicines Directorate; and how many existing products have not been submitted for relicensing.

Mr. Soames: All member states have been required to apply the full provisions of Directive 81/851 to long standing pharmaceutical veterinary medicinal products, and this approach has been adopted within the United Kingdom. While details of implementation in other countries are a matter for those countries and the EC Commission, the directive does not allow for automatic renewal of licences in respect of old products and we are not aware of any member state which has done this.

No fee is charged for the review of an old product in the United Kingdom. The costs to the company are variable, and will depend on what data are necessary to demonstrate that a product meets current standards of safety, quality and efficacy. As at 25 June 1993, 1,727 such products (63 per cent. of those called for review) have had their licences withdrawn or allowed to expire in the United Kingdom. This is comparable to my understanding of the position in France (68 per cent.) and Spain (56 per cent.).

Folic Acid

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *571*, he will list *(a)* those foodstuffs in which folic acid occurs in significant quantities, and *(b)* those breads and breakfast cereals which are fortified with folic acid, noting separately those products which have been fortified since his Department commended the report of the Chief Medical Officer on folic acid and the prevention of neural tube defects indicating the contribution to intake of folic acid made by a standard portion of each.

Mr. Soames: A list of those foodstuffs in which folic acid occurs in significant quantities and the contribution to intake of folic acid made by a standard portion of each is set out in the table. Details are not held centrally of breads and breakfast cereals fortified with folic acid, nor of those fortified products which have been introduced since my Department commended to the food industry the recommendations of the expert advisory group in its report to the Chief Medical Officer on "Folic Acid and the Prevention of Neural Tube Defects". I am aware, however, that many breakfast cereals and a number of breads are fortified.

Amount of folic acid in portions of selected foods

	Portion size		*Folic acid per portion micrograms*
	grams	*ounces*	
Broccoli	90	3·0	60
Brussels sprouts	90	3·0	100
Cauliflower	90	3·0	45
Green beans, frozen	90	3·0	50
Okra	90	3·0	40
Peas, frozen	90	3·0	40
Potatoes, old	180	6·5	45
Potatoes, new	180	6·5	35
Spinach (or other dark green leafy vegetable)	90	3·0	80
Black-eye beans	60	2·0	130
Chickpeas	60	2·0	30
Baked beans, canned reheated	135	5·0	30
Two slices of wholemeal bread	70	2·5	30
Two slices of white bread	60	2·0	20
Two slices of bread (fortified)	60	2·0	70
Two Chapatis	120	4·0	20
One bowl of breakfast cereal (fortified)	40	1·5	100
Milk, pint	585	20·0	35
One banana	100	3·5	15
One orange, or a glass of orange juice	200	7·0	60
Half grapefruit	80	3·0	20
One cup Bovril or Marmite (from one level teaspoon)	—	9·0	95
Bovril or Marmite on one slice of bread	—	4·0	40

Note: All vegetables are boiled.

Rare Farming Breeds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action her Department has taken in respect of protecting the United Kingdom's rare farming breeds by artificial insemination; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The regulations governing artificial insemination in cattle and pigs are intended to ensure that semen is collected only from healthy animals and apply equally to all breeds, including rare farming breeds. In EC negotiations on rules for intra-Community trade in bovine semen the Department has taken account of the interests of the rearers of rare and minority breeds. For the foreseeable future, national rules will continue to apply to the use of stored semen which does not meet Community standards.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement about the number of confirmed cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy which have occurred in Great Britain since the information contained in the progress report which was recently placed in the Library.

Mr. Soames: Up until 13 July 1993, 100,012 cases of BSE have been confirmed in Great Britain, 7,051 of these since the preparation of the progress report on 30 April 1993. The cumulative total of cases has no particular scientific significance and has no relevance to the epidemiology of the disease. What is more important is that the number of suspect cases now being reported is less than at the same time last year, and that the number of cases occurring in younger cattle has dropped sharply. These changes indicate that the ruminant feed ban is

bringing the epidemic under control in the way predicted by our scientific experts and that with time the number of cases being confirmed will decline to a negligible level.

Sea Fish Conservation Act

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is her latest estimate of the cost of implementing the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1992, and how much has been spent so far.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 2 February at column *133*, and, more generally, to the announcement that I made in the course of the debate on the fishing vessels (decommissioning) scheme on 7 July at column 413.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Vacancies

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many vacancies notified in each of the last six months in the north-west were *(a)* part-time, *(b)* full-time, *(c)* permanent and *(d)* temporary.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. J. Turner to Mr. Peter Pike, dated 14 July 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, it is the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the Agency's Chief Executive to answer Parliamentary Questions about relevant operational matters. In his absence, I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State about vacancies notified in the North West.

The total number of vacancies notified to Jobcentres is collated monthly. Detailed full time, part time and temporary vacancy information is available on a quarterly basis.

The table attached shows the information you requested for the past three quarters.

I this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Breakdown of vacancies notified to Jobcentres in the North West Region

Quarter	Number of part-time vacancies notified[1]	Number of full-time vacancies notified	Total number of vacancies notified
5 October 1992 to 8 January 1993	29,493	40,292	69,785
11 January 1993 to 2 April 1993	27,980	39,486	67,466
5 April 1993 to 2 July 1993	32,522	51,583	84,105

[1] Part-time—Under 30 hours work per week.

Quarter	Number of permanent vacancies notified	Number of temporary vacancies notified[1]	Total number of vacancies notified
5 October 1992 to 8 January 1993	51,670	18,115	69,785
11 January 1993 to 2 April 1993	53,792	13,674	67,466
5 April 1993 to 2 July 1993	64,203	19,902	84,105

[1] Temporary—Work lasting six months or less.

Media Employees

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are employed in the media sector in the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available estimates from the Labour Force Survey of employment in the media industries in the United Kingdom are as follows:

	Numbers
Printing and publishing of newspapers	89,000
Printing and publishing of periodicals	29,000
Radio and TV services, theatres etc.	97,000

These figures are based on the estimates for Great Britain in winter (December to February) 1992-93 and those for Northern Ireland in spring (March to May) 1992.

Employer Liability Insurance

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases of employers not providing proper employer liability insurance have been recorded in each of the last five years; and in how many cases directors have been prosecuted and convicted of an offence.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Employers Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969 (ELCI) is enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Available information is set out in the following table:

Outcome of HSE inspections under the ELCI for 1988 to 1992.

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
A: *Prosecutions*					
Number of prosecutions for non-compliance	6	7	17	8	5

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
B. Other cases of non-compliance					
Number of cases in which non-compliance was identified but which did not lead to a prosecution	35	24	9	16	12

Information on whether any directors were prosecuted and convicted under ELCI (and the outcome of all prosecutions) is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the results of recent research into the distribution of invalidity beneficiaries by severity of their disablement on the 10 point OPCS scale or other measures of severity of disablement.

Mr. Scott: The programme of research is not yet complete.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to publish renewed guidance to local authorities about their duties in respect of making housing benefit payments.

Mr. Burt: The Department issues guidance to local authorities on all aspects of housing benefit, in the form of a guidance manual and circulars. The manual has recently been fully updated and was issued to all authorities earlier this month. It covers the requirement for local authorities to make interim payments of rent allowance where, through no fault of the applicant, a claim cannot be settled within 14 days.

The Department is committed to issuing strengthened guidance to local authorities shortly to remind them of this duty.

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will announce the arrangements for claiming industrial injuries disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will shortly lay before Parliament regulations to prescribe chronic bronchitis and emphysema as industrial diseases in relation to underground coal miners. The regulations will come into effect from 13 September 1993. The terms of the prescription, which are as recommended by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council were announced by my right hon. Friend in his reply to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on 29 March at column 77. He has also announced that there will be a two-stage take-on in order to ensure that claims can be handled as quickly as possible and that unacceptable delays do not arise.

Claims from seriously ill and older miners will be dealt with first; their claims will be accepted from 13 September. Claims from all others will be accepted from 1 March 1994. No-one will lose benefit as a result of the staged take-on. Payments will be backdated to 13 September 1993 if people claim at the appropriate time and satisfy the usual conditions for the award of benefit.

For the purpose of claiming benefit in stage 1, the regulations will define "seriously ill" miners and ex-miners as those who are in receipt of an award of the higher rate care component of disability living allowance or higher rate attendance allowance. Miners and ex-miners who are awarded one of these benefits between 13 September 1993 and 28 February 1994 will also be able to submit a claim in stage 1. Claims will also be taken in stage 1 from other miners and ex-miners who are age 70 or over on 13 September 1993. In stage 2, claims will be taken from all other miners from 1 March 1994.

The details about claiming will be widely publicised by the Benefits Agency before 13 September.

Social Fund

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many loans have been granted under the social fund for rent in advance by each local social fund office in each year since the establishment of the fund.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Mr. Dafydd Wigley, dated 13 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many loans have been granted under the Social Fund for rent in advance by each local Social Fund office in each year since the establishment of the Social Fund.

The Social Fund was introduced in April 1988 and you seek information in respect of each local office. The information is only in this form for the period 1990-91. From April 1991 when the Benefits Agency was created the information is only available by District Office because local offices were grouped into Districts. This information has been placed in the Library under the heading "*BENEFITS AGENCY Loans for Rent in Advance from the Social fund*".

Information was not kept by local office for the financial years 1988-89 and 1989-90. I can, however, tell you that the numbers of loans awarded nationally for rent in advance for those periods were 9,098 and 12,833 respectively.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy of this letter will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Severe Hardship Allowance

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for social Security how many applications were *(a)* made and *(b)* approved for severe hardship allowance in the last 12 months for which figures are available in *(a)* England, *(b)* the north-west, *(c)* Lancashire and *(d)* Burnley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Mr. Peter Pike, dated 13 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many applications were *(a)* made and *(b)* approved for severe hardship allowance in the last 12 months for which figures are available in *(a)* England, *(b)* the North West, *(c)* Lancashire and *(d)* Burnely; and if he will make a statement.

The complete range of information you requested is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. This is because statistics relate to Benefits Agency Districts and are not routinely collected to show the number of claims and awards for severe hardship by county or town.

I have however, shown below information relating to England, the Benefits Agency's Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale District and the North Western Social Security Region (which existed prior to the inception of the Benefits Agency in April 1991).

Severe Hardship applications, year ending 30 June 1993

	Awards	*Refusals*	*Total*
Burnley District	569	119	688
North West	15,549	3,159	18,708
England	78,265	15,400	93,665

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy of this letter will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

United States

13. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on which occasions since 1979 Her Majesty's Government have expressed disagreement, or reserve, on any foreign policy initiative of the United States on matters in which both Governments were concerned.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Member will not expect me to list details of all our private discussions with successive United States Administrations over the past 14 years.

World Trade

14. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that the EC is able to take advantage of opportunities for growth in world trade.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have played a leading role in focusing the Community's attention on the need to improve competitiveness in order to promote economic recovery and secure a greater share of world trade. We will be contributing fully to the Commission's White Paper on this subject. At the same time, we are giving our full support to the Commission's efforts to negotiate a balanced and comprehensive outcome to the Uruguay round which will benefit the United Kingdom, the EC and the world economy generally.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

15. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment as to the possibility of the continued existence of the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina within its present boundaries.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Heads of Government at the Group of Seven economic summit in Tokyo on 7 to 9 July reaffirmed their commitment to the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina and to a negotiated settlement based on the principles of the London conference.

British Industry (Promotion)

17. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are taken by the diplomatic service positively to promote British industry overseas.

Mr. Goodlad: Through the overseas trade services, which includes the DTI regional offices as well as our commercial sections overseas, the British Overseas Trade Board and direct contact, the diplomatic service maintains close links with industry. Trade promotion is the largest single activity of the diplomatic service overseas, providing British industry with a wide variety of export services, ranging from tailored market reports and trade fair assistance, to facilitating trade missions and individual business contacts.

Middle East

19. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards peace in the middle east; and if he will make a statement.

25. **Sir Rhodes Boyson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress he can report on the middle east peace talks.

28. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's contribution to finding a diplomatic and peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict acceptable to the international community.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The 10th round of bilateral negotiations adjourned in Washington on 1 July. The Israeli/Palestinian negotiations have reached an important moment. Both sides now face the decision whether to engage in detailed textual negotiations about interim arrangements in the occupied territories. We are urging them to do just this.

Azerbaijan

20. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with Azerbaijan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Relations with Azerbaijan have been good. We are however concerned by the recent upheavals in Azerbaijan and, together with our EC partners, have called on the leading political figures in Azerbaijan to resolve the present crisis peacefully and constitutionally. We are also concerned at the effects

which the present crisis is having on efforts to end the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. We are urging all sides to the conflict to implement the CSCE plan to which they have already agreed.

Channel Islands (Wartime Internment)

21. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the German Government about the payment of compensation to Channel islanders interned in Nazi Germany during the last war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have raised the matter with the German Government on many occasions and at many levels. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised it with Foreign Minister Kinkel on 12 September 1992. The Germans told us definitively on 7 April that they were not prepared to give the Channel islanders any form of compensation or settlement. They said that this decision has been taken at a high political level, and made it clear that they would not reconsider it. We are disappointed by the decision, but I regret that we see no practicable way of taking the Channel islanders' claims any further.

Gibraltar

22. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit Gibraltar to discuss its position relative to the European Community.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs nor I have any present plans to visit Gibraltar. However, we maintain a close dialogue with the Government of Gibraltar on all aspects of Gibraltar's position within the European Community.

Angola

23. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has held in the Foreign Affairs Council concerning Angola.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Angola was discussed at the European Council in Copenhagen on 21 and 22 June. The Council expressed its support for United Nations Security Council resolution 834 of 1 June, reaffirmed the urgent need for a peaceful solution to the current hostilities based on the Bicesse peace accords and called on UNITA to accept the United Nations plan for humanitarian relief.

35. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current position in Angola.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We continue to support United Nations efforts to promote dialogue between the Angolan Government and UNITA, leading to a ceasefire and full implementation of the Bicesse peace accords. To help alleviate suffering caused by fighting we have pledged up to £2 million of humanitarian assistance and 3,000 tonnes of food aid.

Guatemala

24. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with the new regime in Guatemala since the recent coup; and what assessment he has made of whether it will respect the United Kingdom's view of the status of Belize.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Her Majesty's ambassador in Guatemala City is in regular contact with new Guatemalan authorities. The Guatemalan Foreign Minister has reaffirmed that the Guatemalan Government maintain their predecessor's constructive policy towards Belize.

Diplomatic Overseas Estate

26. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total value of all contracts for construction refurbishment, and maintenance of the diplomatic overseas estate in the last year for which figures are available; and what percentage of those contracts in terms of value was placed with United Kingdom businesses.

Mr. Goodlad: The total value of all contracts for construction, refurbishment, and maintenance of the diplomatic overseas estate awarded by the overseas estate department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1992 was about £11·5 million. Of this, about 40 per cent. by value was placed with United Kingdom businesses. Small works contracts are also awarded by posts overseas directly to locally based contractors in accordance with delegated authorities.

Maastricht Treaty

27. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on when the Maastricht treaty will come into force.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Maastricht treaty will enter into force

"on the first day of the month following the deposit of the instrument of ratification by the last signatory State to take this step"

as outlined in article R of the treaty.

Export Promotion

29. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department takes for promotion of British exports.

Mr. Goodlad: It is a key objective of the Department to promote United Kingdom exports. Seventeen per cent. of frontline diplomatic staff and 48 per cent. of senior locally engaged staff working in 196 missions overseas are employed full time on this task.

Malawi

30. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with Malawi after the recent referendum.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 29 June to my hon. Friend the Member for

Worcester (Mr. Luff). We are pleased to note that the Malawian constitution has now been amended to allow for the restoration of other political parties. We look forward to further developments in the establishment of a multi-party democracy.

37. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Commonwealth Secretary General concerning Malawi.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None.

G7 Summit (Tokyo)

31. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what issues were discussed at the G7 meeting in Tokyo.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in the House on Monday, *Official Report*, columns 671-85.

Baltic States

32. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposals he has to improve relations with the Baltic states.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have close and friendly relations with all three Baltic states. We have opened embassies in each of the states and our political and commercial relations are flourishing. One example of our close co-operation is the expanding programme of technical assistance to the Baltic states through the know-how fund.

Iran

33. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the persecution of members of the Baha'i faith in Iran; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are aware of confirmed and documented cases of the persecution of Baha'is in Iran, including summary execution, lack of due process of law, harassment, arbitrary detention, confiscation of, and eviction from, property. We have made numerous representations to the Iranian authorities about this issue bilaterally and with our EC partners.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Iran about persecution of Baha'is in Iran and their threat to take action against Baha'is in the international community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We and our European Community partners have made a number of representations to the Iranian authorities about the persecution of Baha'is in Iran, including during recent discussions between the EC and Iran.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made, or plans to make, to the United Nations Security Council regarding possible breaches by Iran of resolution 598 in respect of attacks on bases of the Mojahedin in Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The possible contravention of Security Council resolution 598 is a matter for the Security Council which is permanently seized of the issue. We have expressed our serious concern at these air raids to the Iranian authorities. In a letter of 25 May to the United Nations Secretary-General, the Iranian permanent representative to the United Nations said that the air raids had been carried out in self-defence on the basis of article 51 of the United Nations charter and without prejudice to Iran's policy of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq or its commitment to Security Council resolution 598.

Bosnia

34. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest United Kingdom position towards the war in Bosnia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We fully support the continuing efforts of Lord Owen and Mr. Stoltenberg to secure a peace settlement in Bosnia, based on the principles of the London conference. We will continue to lend full support to the humanitarian relief operation, and efforts to prevent a possible spillover of the conflict into neighbouring regions.

Subsidiarity

36. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had recently on the implementation of subsidiarity within the European Community.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed the implementation of subsidiarity with our partners most recently at the Copenhagen European Council on 21 and 22 June, when M. Delors presented further examples of legislative proposals which would not be taken forward on subsidiarity grounds. This anticipated a full Commission report, to be delivered at the Brussels European Council in December, which will review existing legislation in the light of subsidiarity. We are working closely with other member states at official level, in particular with the French and the Germans, to ensure that this report is substantive.

Human Rights

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects next to meet his European counterparts to discuss human rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Meetings of European Community Ministers often include discussion of human rights.

Social Charter

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries have subscribed to the Council of Europe's social charter, but have not ratified the amending protocol opened for signature on 21 October 1991; and if he will make it his policy to encourage those who have not ratified the protocol to do so.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Pursuant to my answer of 14 June, *Official Report*, column *422*, the list of countries should have included Germany. The full list of countries which have ratified the social charter, but have not ratified the amending protocol is therefore: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

Minority Languages

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to make representations to the European Community to secure an increase in its budget allocation for European Community minority languages.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. The Government consider that, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, this is a subject better dealt with within a domestic framework having regard to the needs of the individual communities concerned.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the European Community concerning its proposed budget reduction on minority languages.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No specific United Kingdom representations have been made.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which recommendations of the report, "Heritage in St. Helena", will be implemented; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We cannot yet say which recommendations will be implemented as the report is still being considered by the St. Helena Government and the St. Helena Heritage Society for which it was prepared.

Burma

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to seek the extension of the EC arms embargo to Burma to the nations of the Commonwealth.

Mr. Goodlad: There are no proposals formally to extend the current European Community arms embargo. A number of Commonwealth countries have instituted their own embargo on arms sales to Burma. We encourage others to do so.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what approaches he has made to Japan for a trade embargo on Burma; and what was the response.

Mr. Goodlad: As I told the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie in answer to his question on 6 July, wider trade sanctions against Burma do not command the necessary international support. There are no plans to approach Japan about a trade embargo on Burma, *Official Report*, column *87*.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of China about its supply of arms to Burma.

Mr. Goodlad: Both bilaterally and in concert with our European Community partners, we have encouraged the Government of China to reconsider its current position on arms sales to Burma.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make special representations to the Burmese Government on the fourth anniversary of the house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Mr. Goodlad: Together with our European Community partners we take every opportunity to urge the Burmese authorities to release unconditionally all political detainees, including Aung San Suu Kyi. We are considering with our European Community partners how to mark the fourth anniversary of her house arrest.

Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish an itemised list of all the commitments entered into by Her Majesty's Government under the documents of the CSCE, as referred to by article 3 of the bilateral treaty with the Russian Federation laid before the House in April.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In addition to the Helsinki Final Act, the charter of Paris for a new Europe, and the Helsinki document of 1992 referred to in the treaty dated 9 November 1992 with the Russian Federation, CSCE commitments are also to be found in conclusions of the Madrid (1980-83) and Vienna (1986-89) follow-up meetings as well as subsequent meetings such as the Copenhagen conference on the human dimension (1990), the Moscow conference on the human dimension (1990) and the Stockholm summit of 1992. Copies of these documents are available in the Library of the House. It would involve disproportionate expense to produce an itemised list of all the commitments entered into at these and other CSCE meetings.

Tibet

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he plans to take with his EC colleagues following the resolution on Tibet passed by the European Parliament, with particular reference to access by Governments and international human rights agencies to Tibet.

Mr. Goodlad: We are deeply concerned about the situation in Tibet, including the human rights issues mentioned in the European Parliament resolution, and are in close contact with our European Community partners about further measures to follow up the EC statement of 1 June. We support the principle of free access by humanitarian agencies.

Yugoslavia

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many monitors the United Kingdom has sent to Kosovo.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom has provided two monitors for the conference on security and co-operation in Europe's long-term missions in Kosovo, Sandjak and Vojvodina—one of whom has returned to the United Kingdom—and has offered a further three

monitors. The future of the missions is, however, in doubt following Belgrade's refusal to renew the memorandum of understanding covering the missions.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will submit plans to the UN Security Council for lifting the siege of Sarajevo by military means through attacks on Serb artillery positions around the city; and what other plans he has to prevent the fall of Sarajevo within the next few months.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Sarajevo is one of six safe areas established under UN Security Council resolution 824 of 6 May. SCR 836 of 4 June expanded the mandate to include deterring attacks against safe areas. We are pressing for full implementation of that resolution. At present there are no further plans for military intervention in Sarajevo.

South American Graduates

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what he is doing to promote graduate training in Europe of south American nationals; and what assessment he has of the number of such graduates in Europe in 1983 and the most recent available date.

Mr. Goodlad: There has been no reduction in the number of British Missions in Latin America in the last 12 months. The number of United Kingdom-based staff was reduced from 162 to 150 in the 12 months up to June 1993.

A table of diplomatic service staff in each Post in June 1993, together with the man years dedicated to aid and trade, is as follows:

Country	*Post*	*United Kingdom-based staff 1993*	*of which*	*Trade 1993*	*Aid 1993*
Argentina	Buenos Aires	16		2·00	0·05
Belize	Belmopan	6		0·40	1·15
Bolivia	La Paz	4		0·20	0·00
Brazil	Brasilia	17		0·70	0·05
	Rio de Janeiro	5		1·25	0·00
	Sao Paulo	4		2·00	0·00
Chile	Santiago	14		2·00	0·15
Colombia	Bogota	10		1·45	0·20
Costa Rica	San Jose	4		1·10	0·80
Cuba	Havana	10		0·35	0·05
Ecuador	Quito	5		0·65	0·50
El Salvador	San Salvador	2		0·05	0·05
Guatemala	Guatemala City	6		0·20	0·25
Honduras	Tegucigalpa	2		0·15	0·35
Mexico	Mexico City	17		2·30	0·40
Nicaragua	Managua	2		0·25	0·55
Panama	Panama City	2		0·35	0·00
Paraguay	Asuncion	2		0·45	0·05
Peru	Lima	6		0·45	0·30
Uruguay	Montevideo	4		0·30	0·25
Venezuela	Caracas	12		2·00	0·00
OVERALL TOTALS		150		18·60	5·15

DEFENCE

Falkland Islands

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has made to President Menem's suggestion that the flags of Britain and Argentina should both fly over the Falkland islands.

Mr. Heathcote-Amory: We have received no such proposal from the Argentine Government. The Falkland islands are British territory and will remain so. The only appropriate flag is the Union flag.

Austria

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if a time scale for Austrian membership of the EC has been established.

Mr. Heathcote-Amory: The European Council in Copenhagen, with the strong support of the British Government, agreed a target date of 1 January 1995 for the accession of Austria, along with Finland, Sweden and Norway.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Brandreth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the provision of RAF Jaguar aircraft to take part in NATO operations to provide air support for UNPROFOR.

Mr. Hanley: On 10 June my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced—*Official Report*, column *336*—that we were offering a squadron of RAF Jaguar aircraft to take part in an operation to be mounted by NATO to provide air support in case of attack against UNPROFOR in the performance of its mandate in Bosnia. This offer has now been formally accepted and 12 aircraft have been called forward to deploy to Italy, where they will be based. They will fly out on Friday 16 July, and will conduct training and work-up. Routine operational flying will start on a day to be determined by NATO and the UN. The RN Sea Harriers embarked in HMS Ark Royal are also available for this purpose if required.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what regular reports he receives on the effectiveness of the

UN no-fly zone monitoring operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina; and if he is satisfied that the current monitoring procedure is cost effective *(a)* overall and *(b)* in respect of airborne warning and control system.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

We receive twice-weekly reports from UNPROFOR on violations observed by UN military observers and NATO fighter and AWACS aircraft. We believe the monitoring operation has been successful in preventing combat flights, particularly of fixed-wing aircraft. The information collected by AWACS aircraft is essential for proper monitoring and enforcement of the no-fly zone.

Princess Mary's Hospital, Cyprus

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to privatise spare bed capacity at the Princess Mary's hospital, Sovereign base, Cyprus.

Mr. Hanley: There are no plans to privatise any beds at the Princess Mary's RAF hospital, Akrotiri. The hospital has a defined service role in peacetime and war. Civilian patients are already admitted there for treatment, subject to available bed space, on a repayment basis. This widens the case mix and the professional training and experience of service doctors.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to provide medical equipment at the Princess Mary's hospital comparable to that in NHS hospitals in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hanley: The Princess Mary's RAF hospital, Akrotiri, is already sufficiently equipped for its peacetime role.

Ammunition Stocks

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current levels of ammunition stocks relative to the levels before the Gulf war.

Mr. Hanley: Stocks of ammunition have been reconstituted following the Gulf conflict, and some replenishment has taken place. In some areas, however, replenishment has not been necessary due to force level reductions. The actual types and quantities of stocks are based on weapons in service and NATO guidance. It is not the practice of the Government to give details of such stocks.

Skyguard Radar

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to his oral statement of 17 June, *Official Report*, column 1012, if he will make a statement on the future of the Royal Air Force's covert monitoring Skyguard system.

(2) what will be the impact of the disbandment of 1339 Wing Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment on the deployment of Skyguard radars in the low-flying monitoring role.

Mr. Hanley: The disbandment of 1339 Wing Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment will not affect deployment of the Skyguard radar system in the low-flying monitoring role. Arrangements are being made to transfer the system to RAF Spadeadam, from where it will continue to be deployed in this role.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-flying aircraft have been monitored by Skyguard radar since its introduction in the low-flying monitoring role; and how many of the observed aircraft were found to be *(a)* breaching height regulations, *(b)* breaching speed regulations and *(c)* infringing avoidance areas laterally.

Mr. Hanley: Since June 1989 when Skyguard was first used to monitor low flying, 1,426 aircraft have been observed at medium or low level. Of these, nine were detected in apparent breach of regulations; seven in respect of height and two in respect of infringing avoidance areas laterally.

Air Misses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the dates, *(b)* locations, *(c)* types of aircraft involved, *(d)* circumstances and *(e)* altitudes of all (i) category A and (ii) category B air misses involving military aircraft over the United Kingdom since 1988.

Mr. Hanley: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 October 1992, *Official Report*, column *159*, if he is yet able to write to the hon. Member in respect of the air misses at Alnwick on 16 July 1992.

Mr. Hanley: The RAF board of inquiry is not yet complete but my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member as soon as the board of inquiry reports.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of air misses since 1980 which have involved RAF Tornado aircraft; and in how many of these the investigating authorities have found that the Tornado crew did not see the reporting aircraft.

Mr. Hanley: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration his Department has given to the fitting of air-to-air transponder equipment to low-flying military aircraft to provide warning to other air traffic.

Mr. Hanley: A contact for a technology demonstrator programme, to prove the technology needed to provide low-flying military aircraft with collision warning facilities, was placed with Easams Ltd. in January 1993.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by month, for the last six months, the number of low-level air-to-air interceptor practice sorties flown over the United Kingdom by military jet aircraft; and if he will show in his answer the nationality of the aircraft.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Attack Runs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the total number of attack runs made by aircraft at each air-to-ground weapons range in the United Kingdom by year since 1979.

Mr. Hanley: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

RAF Pilots

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the planned proportionate decrease in the number of operational strike/attack/reconnaissance pilots in the Royal Air Force from 1988 to 1994.

Mr. Hanley: The Royal Air Force plans to maintain numbers of fast-jet aircrew in each role, at the levels necessary to meet commitments. The size of the RAF's front-line units in 1988 was set out in annex C to the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1988 (Cm 344-1) and the current position is shown at annex D to the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1993 (Cm 2270).

Service Personnel (Watches)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost has been for the last 12 months in providing watches to service personnel in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Navy and *(c)* the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Hanley: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Royal Naval Reserve

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the existing training divisions or establishments in the United Kingdom which form part of the Royal Naval Reserve; which of these are to be closed; and why they have been selected for closure.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the consultation document on the future of Britain's naval reserve forces, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

A number of factors were taken into consideration. Many units were designed largely to support their mine countermeasure, naval control of shipping and defence of ports and anchorage roles which are no longer required. Also relevant is the need for a geographical spread of reserve centres throughout the United Kingdom in the areas of good recruitment, the state of repair of the buildings and maintenance running costs. These proposals are subject to consultation which will extend up to 30 July.

"Newsnight" Interview

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place a transcript of the interview by the Minister for the Armed Forces on "Newsnight" of 5 July in the Library.

Mr. Hanley: Yes.

Arms Sales

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the names of those countries in the middle east to which the United Kingdom has sold arms since 1979; and what was the total value of those sales.

Mr. Aitken: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to reveal details of arms sales to individual countries. However, the total value of sales to the region since 1979 is some £21 billion.

Sir Bedivere

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether tenders for the refurbishment for the landing ship Logistic Sir Bedivere will be restricted to particular shipyards.

Mr. Aitken: Tenders will be invited from all interested and suitably qualified companies.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many registered disabled people were employed in his Department in each year since 1975.

Mr. Aitken: Figures for the number of registered disabled people for the period before 1989 are unavailable. Details for years 1989 to 1993 are as follows:

Year	*Number of Registered Disabled People*	*Percentage of MOD Total Work Force*
1989	1,202	1·0
1990	1,210	0·9
1991	1,164	0·9
1992	1,164	0·9
[1]1993	1,439	1·1

[1]1993 figures exclude Defence Research Agency, Meteorological Office and AWE. The increase on the previous year of 0·2 per cent. was as a result of a re-survey of the non-industrial work force in 1992.

Refitting Tenders

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times tenderers for refit work on ships have been asked to submit the final bid *(a)* once, *(b)* twice, *(c)* three times and *(d)* more than three times for each year for the last five years for which information is available.

Mr. Aitken: The information requested could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost and effort, as I will explain in a letter I am writing to the hon. Member.

Devonport Dockyard (Wages)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the average hourly wage rate at the royal naval dockyard at Devonport when it was privatised.

Mr. Aitken: The precise details requested are not available. However, immediately prior to the commencement of the Government-owned contractor-operated arrangement at Devonport dockyard on 1 April 1987, the average hourly labour rate was about £6.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Review

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received from Clwyd county council in regard to the forthcoming nuclear review; and what response he has made to the council.

Mr. Eggar: Clwyd county council wrote to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 1 July about the review. The reply explained that an announcement on the review would be made in due course.

New Technology

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance his Department gives to British manufacturing companies to invest in new technology.

Mr. McLoughlin: The main assistance the Government provide to firms to invest in new technology is creating an environment which encourages such investment. The Department also provides support by helping companies gain access to science and technology and innovation best practice and strengthening the local infrastructure and networks for delivery of innovation-related services. Specific support for the development of new technology is also available through such schemes as the small firms merit award for research and technology (SMART), support for products under research (SPUR) and regional enterprise grants for investment and innovation projects. Support will continue for industry/higher education institute collaboration under LINK and for European collaboration under EUREKA.

Armed Services Trainers

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action his Department is taking to ensure the full utilisation in British industry of the skilled trainers declared redundant from the armed services.

Mr. Sainsbury: Wealth creation and the best use of resources in British industry is supported by a wide range of DTI schemes which are complementary to Department of Employment's and the armed forces' programmes and the overall Government strategy of providing the best environment in which companies operate.

Coal

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the average level of Government subsidy per tonne of deep-mined coal in each year since 1988 in each of the member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 13 July, *Official Report*, column *436*, in which I gave figures for the amount of Government aid to the coal industry provided in the United Kingdom for the years 1987-88 to 1992-93. Comparable figures for each of the other OECD countries are not readily available.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Temple-Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the work of the renewable energy advisory group and the timetable of that work, with particular reference to wind energy; and when he expects to make the next non-fossil fuel obligation order.

Mr. Eggar: The report of the renewable energy advisory group (REAG) was published in December 1992 and a copy placed in the Library of the House. The Government will publish a renewable energy strategy document later this year which will include wind energy. An announcement will be made on the next renewable energy order under the non-fossil fuel obligation as soon as possible.

Power Plants

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current output from nuclear power plants; and what was the projected United Kingdom ouput for 1993 given in the Windscale inquiry report.

Mr. Eggar: In the first quarter of 1993 nuclear power stations in the United Kingdom supplied 21·8 terawatt hours of electricity. No projected United Kingdom power plant output for 1993 was given in the Windscale inquiry report.

Post Office

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what powers he has to review a decision by the Post Office for the award of an agency contract.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has no specific powers to direct the Post Office on the award of individual agency contracts. Since the Post Office became a public corporation in 1969, it has been the policy of successive Governments that matters relating to the day to running of the Post Office are the responsibility of the Post Office Board.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what standards his Department lays down for the award of agency contracts by the Post Office.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department does not lay down standards for the award of agency contracts for sub-post offices as this is a commercial and operational matter for the Post Office.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many agency Post Office contracts have been awarded to senior Post Office staff for the period for which records are available.

Mr. McLoughlin: Of the 617 directly operated post offices converted to agencies between April 1989 and May 1993, 189 have been awarded to former Post Office employees. The Post Office keeps no separate records of awards by grade nor of unsuccessful applications by its employees, but the number of senior personnel involved is thought to be very small.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many complaints there have been about the award of agency contracts by the Post Office.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department has in recent years received representations in two previous cases about the award of agency contracts.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the remedies available for a review of a decision by the Post Office.

Mr. McLoughlin: Other than the general remedies provided under the law, there is no specific right of appeal against non-appointment to an agency contract which is a commercial matter for the Post Office. Customers who have unresolved complaints about Post Office services may approach the Post Office Users' National Council.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the criteria used by the Post Office for the award of contracts to senior staff.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. This is a matter for the Post Office in the day-to-day management of its business. The basic principle followed by the Post Office in the award of all contracts to run agency post offices is to appoint the most suitable candidate in order to provide high-quality services to its customers and clients and to safeguard Post Office assets.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many agency contracts for post offices on the Isle of Wight have been awarded to senior Post Office personnel.

Mr. McLoughlin: One.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last visited Ventnor post office; and when he next intends to do so.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the President of the Boad of Trade has not visited Ventnor post office and has no plans to do so.

South America

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what policy he has to enable the Export Credits Guarantee Department to make risk assessments which would allow British firms to compete with foreign competition in south American markets.

Mr. Needham: The provision of ECGD cover for all markets is determined by an assessment carried out under its portfolio management system. This seeks to strike a balance between enabling British exporters to compete for business overseas with Government support, and the potential cost to the taxpayer if ECGD sustains losses.

Latin America

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what increases have taken place in Export Credits Guarantee Department rates to Latin America for medium and long-term capital gains schemes, for convenient dates over the last decade.

Mr. Needham: Figures are not readily available for premiums charged during the 1980s. Since 1991, the cost of ECGD cover has been more directly linked to the assessment of the risks. Premium rates area also individually tailored according to the features of each piece of business. Overall, *average* increases/decreases for premium rates for Latin American markets for which cover has been available throughout this period have been:

	Per cent
1991	+10
1992	−29
1993	+22

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what he is doing to encourage medium-sized British companies to operate in Latin America.

Mr. Needham: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade led a business mission to Mexico and Argentina in June 1993. Bilateral trade facilitation groups have been established with Colombia and Mexico, and the Proyecto Venezuela initiative is being continued. In addition, there is a full programme of outward and inward trade missions, exhibitions, seminars and other promotional activities organised with the help of the Latin American Trade Advisory Group (LATAG). The programme aims to encourage small and medium-sized British companies to operate in Latin America.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the results of his exports promotion scheme in relation to six major Latin American markets.

Mr. Needham: The new export promotion scheme is in its initial stages. Each of the six major Latin American markets will be allocated at least one industry secondee and one market desk officer dedicated to the promotion of that market. The export promoter and dedicated market official will be responsible for the development and implementation of an export strategy for their market.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he has taken to bring in people with experience of Latin American markets into relevant posts *(a)* at his Department's headquarters and *(b)* in British missions abroad.

Mr. Needham: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has written to a large number of United Kingdom companies inviting them to provide secondees to the Department. So far, two export promoters have been appointed for Latin America, and we hope to recruit a further seven. The majority of commercial staff in British missions overseas are recruited from the local private sector.

Argentina

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to the credit offered by competitors of the United Kingdom in deciding the level of Export Credits Guarantee Department cover in Argentina.

Mr. Needham: The recent restoration of cover for Argentina was decided on the basis of an assessment of the risks involved. Although account was taken of the position of export credit agencies (ECAs) in other countries, it is not Government policy to seek to match other ECAs when determining cover arrangements and premium charges.

Company Accounts

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many companies registered with Companies House ceased trading in each of the last five years; what

reasons were recorded for this; and in how many cases the company concerned had failed to submit accounts in the previous year;

(2) how many companies failed to provide Companies house with a full set of accounts in each of the last five years; what percentage of registered companies this represents; and in how many cases directors were prosecuted for this failure.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the chief executive of Companies House executive agency for which my Department is responsible. I have therefore asked Mr. David Durham to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Durham to Mr. Clive Betts, dated 12 July 1993:

On 7 July you tabled the following two Parliamentary Questions:

> To ask the President of the Board of Trade, how many companies registered with Companies House ceased trading in each of the last five years; what reasons were recorded for this; and in how many cases the company concerned had failed to submit accounts in the previous year.
>
> To ask the President of the Board of Trade, how many companies failed to provide Companies House with a full set of accounts in each of the last five years; and what percentage of registered companies this represents; and in how many cases directors were prosecuted for this failure.

Following the answer given by Mr. Hamilton, I am replying as Chief Executive of Companies House.

I am unable to provide the precise figures you require but the figures contained in the attached five tables provide similar information to that requested. This and other information will be made available in the report made each year by the Secretary of State to Parliament under section 729 of the Companies Act 1985. In the meantime, last year's report "Companies in 1991-92" may be of further help.

I am sorry that I cannot provide precisely the information you require but most of the figures are not kept or aggregated in the form you request. Specifically, we do not keep aggregated information on whether a company in receivership or liquidation has filed accounts for its previous financial year. Because of the limited court time available to Companies House and the length of time it takes to get a case to court, I am also unable to provide figures that establish a direct relationship between prosecutions for non-filing and a company's financial year to which the offence relates.

As it is not a statutory requirement to inform Companies House of the reasons why a company discontinues trading and, there is no requirement for a company that ceases to trade to be removed from the register, I am unable to give the number of companies that have ceased to trade in the terms that you specify. Finally, as Section 246 Companies Act 1985 allows companies to file abbreviated accounts in certain circumstances, the "compliance table" (table F3) interprets the words "full accounts" in the widest sense to mean that accounts have been received that comply with the requirements of the Act.

I hope that this reply covers the points tabled in your questions.

Section A—Analysis of The Companies Register

Table A1 Summary of changes in the number of companies on the register, 1988-89 to 1992-93

Thousands of companies

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Great Britain					
On register at start of period	1,115·2	1,133·2	1,175·4	1,186·9	1,180·2
New companies incorporated	135·0	126·3	115·5	112·0	108·8
Dissolved	118·2	85·6	105·4	119·9	153·9
Restored to the register	1·2	1·5	1·4	1·2	1·4
On register at end of period	1,133·2	1,175·4	1,186·9	1,180·2	1,136·4
Of which: in liquidation	63·2	65·1	72·3	84·3	92·9
In course of removal	97·1	100·6	82·7	116·1	82·9
Effective numbers on register at end of period	972·8	1,009·7	1,031·9	979·8	960·6
England and Wales					
On register at start of period	1,061·3	1,075·9	1,115·0	1,125·1	1,117·9
New companies incorporated	128·1	119·3	108·7	105·4	102·7
Dissolved	114·6	81·6	99·9	113·8	147·2
Restored to the register	1·1	1·4	1·3	1·1	1·3
On register at end of period	1,075·9	1,115·0	1,125·1	1,117·9	1,074·6
Change on previous year (per cent.)	1·4	3·6	0·9	−0·6	−3·9
Of which: in liquidation	60·1	61·6	68·3	80·5	88·8
In course of removal	92·2	95·0	78·5	111·2	78·9
Effective numbers on register at end of period	923·5	958·4	978·3	926·2	906·8
Change on previous year (per cent.)	6·6	3·8	2·1	−5·3	−2·1
Scotland					
On register at start of period	53·9	57·3	60·4	61·8	62·3
New companies incorporated	6·9	7·0	6·8	6·5	6·1
Dissolved	3·6	4·0	5·5	6·1	6·7
Restored to the register	0·1	0·1	0·1	0·1	0·1
On register at end of period	57·3	60·4	61·8	62·3	61·8
Change on previous year (per cent.)	6·3	5·4	2·3	0·8	−0·7
Of which: in liquidation	3·1	3·5	4·0	3·8	4·1
In course of removal	4·9	5·6	4·2	4·9	4·0
Effective numbers on register at end of period	49·3	51·3	53·6	53·6	53·8
Change on previous year (per cent.)	10·1	4·1	4·4	0·0	0·4

Section C—Removals from the Register and Liquidations
Table C1 Companies removed from the registers, 1988-89 to 1992-93

Thousands of companies

	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	April-June 1992	July-September 1992	October-December 1992	January-March 1993
Great Britain									
Struck off and dissolved	106·0	72·4	93·6	107·9	137·2	24·7	30·9	41·8	39·8
Wound up voluntarily or subject to the supervision of the Court under the Companies Acts	12·3	13·2	11·8	11·9	16·7	3·7	4·2	3·6	5·2
Total removed from the register	118·3	85·6	105·4	119·9	153·9	28·4	35·1	45·4	45·0
Less:									
Restorations to the register	1·2	1·5	1·4	1·2	1·4	0·3	0·3	0·3	0·5
Net total of removals	117·1	84·1	104·0	118·7	152·5	28·1	34·8	45·1	44·5
England and Wales									
Struck off and dissolved	103·0	69·0	88·6	102·9	131·1	23·7	29·0	40·5	37·9
Wound up voluntarily or subject to the supervision of the Court under the Companies Acts	11·7	12·6	11·3	10·9	16·1	3·6	4·1	3·4	5·0
Total removed from the register	114·7	81·6	99·9	113·8	147·2	27·3	33·1	43·9	42·9
Less:									
Restorations to the register	1·1	1·4	1·3	1·1	1·3	0·3	0·3	0·3	0·4
Net total of removals	113·6	80·2	98·6	112·7	145·9	27·0	32·8	43·6	42·5
Scotland									
Struck off and dissolved	3·0	3·4	5·0	5·0	6·1	1·0	1·8	1·3	1·9
Wound up voluntarily or subject to the supervision of the Court under the Companies Acts	0·6	0·6	0·5	1·1	0·6	0·1	0·2	0·1	0·1
Total removed from the register	3·6	4·0	5·5	6·1	6·7	1·2	2·0	1·5	2·1
Less:									
Restorations to the register	0·1	0·1	0·1	0·1	0·1	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Net total of removals	3·5	3·9	5·4	6·0	6·6	1·1	2·0	1·4	2·0

[1]— Fewer than 50 companies.

Table C2 Liquidations and receiverships notified, 1988-89 to 1992-93

Number of companies

	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	April-June 1992	July-September 1992	October-December 1992	January-March 1993
Great Britain									
Compulsory liquidations	3,789	4,655	7,043	9,210	9,861	2,681	1,804	2,879	2,497
Creditors' voluntary liquidations	6,011	6,981	10,610	14,127	15,164	3,521	3,957	3,787	3,899
Total insolvencies	9,800	11,636	17,653	23,337	25,025	6,202	5,761	6,666	6,396
Members' voluntary liquidations	4,063	4,215	4,172	3,985	3,719	905	693	931	1,190
Total liquidations	13,863	15,851	21,825	27,322	28,744	7,107	6,454	7,597	7,586
Receiverships notified	1,252	2,423	5,580	8,756	7,815	1,987	1,962	1,959	1,907
Administrator appointments	187	160	237	176	123	37	54	15	17
Company voluntary arrangements	52	49	75	129	67	16	23	12	16
England and Wales									
Compulsory liquidations	3,544	4,433	6,786	8,911	9,542	2,609	1,710	2,796	2,427
Creditors' voluntary liquidations	5,837	6,783	10,378	13,808	14,786	3,434	3,867	3,677	3,808
Total insolvencies	9,391	11,216	17,164	22,719	24,328	6,043	5,577	6,473	6,235
Members' voluntary liquidations	3,809	3,984	3,941	3,741	3,501	851	659	852	1,139
Total liquidations	13,200	15,200	21,105	26,460	27,829	6,894	6,236	7,325	7,374
Receiverships notified	1,133	2,266	5,327	8,503	7,522	1,904	1,899	1,906	1,813
Administrator appointments	179	152	222	162	121	36	53	15	17

	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	April-June 1992	July-September 1992	October-December 1992	January-March 1993
Company voluntary arrangements	52	49	75	129	67	16	23	12	16
Scotland									
Compulsory liquidations	235	222	257	299	319	72	94	83	70
Creditors' voluntary liquidations	174	198	232	319	378	87	90	110	91
Total insolvencies	409	420	489	618	697	159	184	193	161
Members' voluntary liquidations	254	231	231	244	218	54	34	79	51
Total liquidations	663	651	720	862	915	213	218	272	212
Receiverships notified	119	157	253	253	293	83	63	53	94
Administrator appointments	8	8	15	14	2	1	1	0	0
Company voluntary arrangements	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table D3 Prosecutions by the Department under the Companies Act 1985

Section and Offence	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
England and Wales					
241(3) and 243(1)					
Failure to deliver Accounts					
(Number of Offences)					
Prosecutions	4,543	4,443	5,680	7,534	6,451
Convictions	2,452	2,513	3,030	3,270	3,315
Percentage convictions	54·0	56·6	53·3	43·4	51·4
Number adjourned to a later hearing date	287	196	386	527	309
Number of charges where a conviction was not obtained	1,764	1,614	2,271	3,667	2,770
365(3)					
Failure to deliver Annual Returns					
(Number of Offences)					
Prosecutions	2,467	2,359	3,050	3,780	3,843
Convictions	1,269	1,245	1,581	1,549	1,897
Percentage convictions	51·4	52·8	51·8	41·0	49·4
Number adjourned to a later hearing date	137	108	212	286	152
Number of charges where a conviction was not obtained	1,032	930	1,282	1,921	1,708
Number of directors involved in proceedings	2,639	2,800	3,356	4,122	3,421
Number of directors convicted	1,125	1,558	1,864	1,661	1,826
Percentage directors convicted	42·6	55·6	55·5	40·3	53·4
Number of companies involved in proceedings	1,595	1,763	2,208	2,504	2,145
Number of companies in which directors convicted	956	1,005	1,284	1,080	1,168
Percentage companies in which directors convicted	59·9	57·0	58·2	43·1	54·5
Scotland					
241(3) and 243(1)					
Failure to deliver Accounts					
(Number of Offences)					
Prosecutions	178	368	258	1,159	587
Convictions	35	55	52	210	98
Percentage convictions	19·7	14·9	20·2	18·1	16·7
Number adjourned to a later hearing date	0	0	0	0	0
Number of charges where a conviction was not obtained	143	313	206	949	489
365(3)					
Failure to deliver Annual Returns					
(Number of Offences)					
Prosecutions	58	160	122	381	462
Convictions	18	22	46	34	48
Percentage convictions	31·0	13·8	37·7	8·9	10·4
Number adjourned to a later hearing date	0	0	0	0	0
Number of charges where a conviction was not obtained	40	138	76	347	414
Number of directors involved in proceedings	358	709	497	835	767
Number of directors convicted	53	77	98	55	89
Percentage directors convicted	14·8	10·9	19·7	6·6	11·6

Section and Offence	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Number of companies involved in proceedings	180	347	251	442	406
Number of companies in which directors convicted	33	40	40	32	60
Percentage companies in which directors convicted	18·3	11·5	15·9	7·2	14·8

Notes:
1. The majority of charges where convictions were not obtained was as a result of the annual returns and accounts being filed and the prosecutions not proceeded with.
2. A number of prosecutions dealt with in the above were started before April 1992.

Table F2 Annual accounts registered at Companies House by type, 1989-90 to 1991-92

Thousands and percentages

	1989-90 000s	Percentage	1990-91 000s	Percentage	1991-92 000s	Percentage	1992-93 000s	Percentage
Great Britain								
Full	443·9	55·8	425·2	54·3	436·8	53·0	453·2	51·3
Abbreviated:								
Small	253·7	31·9	252·3	32·2	268·2	32·5	300·1	34·0
Medium	3·6	0·5	3·8	0·5	4·4	0·5	5·2	0·6
Group	21·8	2·7	24·0	3·1	22·2	2·7	19·2	2·2
Dormant	71·6	9·0	78·1	10·0	92·7	11·2	106·0	12·0
Interim/initial	0·2	0·0	0·2	0·0	0·2	0·0	0·2	0·0
Total	794·8	100·0	783·6	100·0	824·3	100·0	883·8	100·0
England and Wales								
Full	421·7	55·9	403·4	54·4	415·4	53·2	430·6	51·5
Abbreviated:								
Small	239·9	31·8	237·7	32·0	252·7	32·3	281·6	33·7
Medium	3·4	0·4	3·5	0·5	4·1	0·5	4·8	0·6
Group	20·7	2·7	22·7	3·1	21·9	2·7	18·0	2·2
Dormant	68·5	9·1	74·4	10·0	88·3	11·3	101·0	12·1
Interim/initial	0·2	0·0	0·2	0·0	0·2	0·0	0·2	0·0
Total	754·3	100·0	742·0	100·0	781·6	100·0	836·1	100·0
Scotland								
Full	22·2	54·8	21·8	52·4	21·3	49·8	22·7	47·6
Abbreviated:								
Small	13·9	34·2	14·6	35·1	15·5	36·3	18·5	38·8
Medium	0·2	0·6	0·2	0·6	0·3	0·7	0·4	0·8
Group	1·1	2·7	1·3	3·2	1·3	3·0	1·1	2·4
Dormant	3·1	7·6	3·6	8·7	4·3	10·1	5·0	10·4
Interim/initial	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·1
Total	40·5	100·0	41·6	100·0	42·7	100·0	47·6	100·0

Table F3 Compliance rates for annual returns and accounts, 1988 to 1993

Thousands of companies
Per cent. of effective register

	June 1988	June 1989	June 1990	June 1991	June 1992	September 1992	December 1992	March 1993	June 1993
Great Britain									
Effective register	917	985	1,016	984	974	973	969	960	954
Companies up-to-date in filing:									
Annual returns	814	859	916	846	874	875	876	866	870
Percentage	88·8	87·2	90·1	86·0	89·7	90·0	90·4	90·2	91·2
Accounts	783	831	874	850	894	902	904	883	898
Percentage	85·4	84·4	86·0	86·4	91·8	92·7	93·3	92·0	94·2
Both returns and accounts	734	774	829	769	828	835	840	823	841
Percentage	80·0	78·6	81·6	78·2	85·0	85·8	86·7	85·7	88·1
Companies in default:									
Total Per cent.	20·0	21·4	18·4	21·8	15·0	14·2	13·3	14·3	11·9
England and Wales									
Effective register	872	936	964	931	921	919	915	906	900
Companies up-to-date in filing:									
Annual returns	775	817	868	799	825	825	826	817	821

	June 1988	June 1989	June 1990	June 1991	June 1992	September 1992	December 1992	March 1993	June 1993
Percentage	88·8	87·3	90·0	85·8	89·6	89·8	90·3	90·1	91·2
Accounts	742	787	827	802	844	851	853	833	848
Percentage	85·1	84·1	85·7	86·1	91·6	92·6	93·2	92·0	94·2
Both returns and accounts	697	734	784	725	781	787	792	776	792
Percentage	79·9	78·4	81·3	77·9	84·8	85·6	86·5	85·6	88·0
Companies in default:									
Total Per cent.	20·1	21·6	18·7	22·1	15·2	14·4	13·5	14·4	12·0
Scotland									
Effective register	45	52	53	53	53	54	54	54	54
Companies up-to-date in filing:									
Annual returns	39	42	48	47	49	50	50	49	50
Percentage	87·0	86·2	92·0	88·8	91·5	93·3	92·5	91·8	92·5
Accounts	41	44	47	48	50	51	51	50	51
Percentage	92·0	90·7	91·1	91·8	93·5	94·3	94·3	92·7	94·1
Both returns and accounts	37	40	45	44	47	48	48	47	48
Percentage	82·2	81·8	87·1	84·2	88·0	90·2	90·0	87·8	89·4
Companies in default:									
Total Per cent.	17·8	18·2	12·9	15·8	12·0	9·8	10·0	12·2	10·6

National Engineering Laboratory

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set the National Engineering Laboratory for 1993-94.

Mr. McLoughlin: When it was launched as an executive agency in October 1990, the National Engineering Laboratory was set the target of recovering its full costs through "arms-length" contracts from customers by 1994-95. This is still its primary target.

Other key targets I have set the laboratory for 1993-94 are as follows:

to obtain the return of and review at least 60 per cent. of contract completion questionnaires from clients;
to carry out customer consultations and post-completion reviews of 20 per cent. of all contracts valued in excess of £250,000;
to achieve laboratory-wide ISO 9001 accreditation by 31 March 1994;
to increase the number of non-DTI customers who provide revenues of more than £100,000 per annum by 50 per cent.; and
to complete the training of nominated staff in eight competences covered by the four current training programmes.

I have also set the chief executive of the agency the target of replying within 10 working days to letters from MPs delegated to him for reply.

Deregulation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the regulations which have been abolished, with dates, since the establishment of the deregulation unit.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* Records are not kept in this form. The deregulation unit has the job of encouraging Government Departments to take proper account of the impact on business of their policies and does not use the number of regulations abolished as a measure of success.

Much regulation is necessary but over-burdensome and is being examined with a view to simplification without prejudice to the legitimate protection of the public.

The aim is to make regulatory costs proportionate to the benefits.

RECHAR

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those organisations which his Department intends to consult in relation to the European Commission proposal to introduce RECHAR II from 1 January 1994.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* RECHAR I has been one of fourteen "Community Initiatives" under the European structural funds. The Commission has issued a Green Paper on Community initiatives after 1993, but has so far made no formal proposals. The future of Community initiatives, including any RECHAR II, will be considered by the Council later this year.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), 6 July, *Official Report*, columns *105-6*, what were the voting figures for each decision taken at the European Community's Foreign Affairs Council held on 2 July; and if he will make it his policy to include in future statements on council meetings information on whether formal votes were taken and which member states voted in favour, against or abstained on particular measures.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* No formal votes were taken at the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council held on 2 July. I regret that this was not made clear in my answer of 6 July, in accordance with the undertaking given to the hon. Member that statements to the House following meetings of the Council of Ministers will either include details of the vote whenever a formal vote is taken, or report that no formal votes were taken.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what help his Department is giving to those small businesses affected by the phase-out of CFC 113.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* CFC 113 is largely used as an industrial solvent. My Department commissioned a study on the phase-out of CFCs in the solvents sector and the availability of substitutes; the implications for small and medium-sized enterprises were specifically addressed. The Department has since supported a series of regional seminars organised by the Engineering Employers Federation, to make practical advice about alternatives available to small firms in particular; and a booklet encapsulating that advice is about to be issued. DTI has also supported a study concerning CFC elimination in the cleaning of electronic assemblies and the results have been published. As part of a general campaign by my Department to alert businesses to the phasing-out of ozone-depleting substances, a one-page flier about CFC 113 phase-out was circulated by the Health and Safety Executive to all dry cleaners.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Arts Council

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions grants have been made available by the Northern Ireland Arts Council under its *(a)* bursaries to writers scheme and *(b)* writers in residence scheme during the last five years to applicants who were neither resident in Northern Ireland nor had any connection with Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: None.

Prisoners (Appeals)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he has taken to date in respect of convicted prisoners attempting to establish their innocence on appeal, when the Royal Ulster Constabulary cannot trace the original statements taken down by that force's detectives; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The safe guarding of police interview notes is a matter for the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. I understand that a force instruction, which came into effect in September 1992, directed that notes of interviews with terrorist suspects were to be made in booklets, electronically date and time stamped upon issue and following completion of the interview. The instruction also introduced additional measures to safeguard the long-term storage and security of those interview notes.

General Medical Practices

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many general medical practices there are in Northern Ireland; and how many operate from *(a)* publicly-owned health centres and *(b)* privately-owned premises.

Mr. Ancram: At 1 July 1993, there were 355 general medical practices in Northern Ireland, of which 177 were operating from health centres and 178 from private premises.

Special Waste

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* hydrocarbons and their oxygen, nitrogen and/or sulphur compounds, *(b)* inorganic cyanides, *(c)* inorganic halogen-containing compounds, *(d)* inorganic sulphur-containing compounds, *(e)* laboratory chemicals, *(f)* lead compounds, *(g)* mercury compounds, *(h)* nickel and nickel compounds, *(i)* organic halogen compounds, excluding inert polymeric material and *(j)* peroxides, chlorates and azides;

(2) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* acids and alkalis, *(b)* antimony and antimony compounds, *(c)* arsenic compounds, *(d)* asbestos (all chemical forms), *(e)* barium compounds, *(f)* beryllium and beryllium compounds, *(g)* biocides and phytopharmaceutical substances, *(h)* boron compounds, *(i)* cadmium and cadmium compounds, *(j)* copper compounds, *(k)* heterocyclic organic compounds containing oxygen, nitrogen and/or sulphur and *(l)* hexavalent chromium compounds;

(3) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* solvents-S halogen/mixed, *(b)* mineral oil sludges, *(c)* contaminated industrial waste, *(d)* empty contaminated drums, *(e)* pressurised cylinders/aerosols, *(f)* contaminated soil, *(g)* mixed laboratory chemicals, *(h)* biocides-solid, *(i)* biocides-liquid, *(j)* biocides-aqueous diluted, *(k)* resins-organic and *(l)* filter material-organic;

(4) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* solid metal bearing, *(b)* solid inorganic, *(c)* solid CN, *(d)* solid organic, *(e)* solid asbestos, *(f)* filter material-inorganic, *(g)* acid metal bearing, *(h)* acid-inorganic, *(i)* acid-organic, *(j)* alkalis metal bearing, *(k)* alkalis-inorganic, *(l)* alkalis-organic and *(m)* aqueous cyanide;

(5) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste arising *(a)* within the county and deposited within the county, *(b)* within the county and exported out of the county and *(c)* outside the county and deposited within the county;

(6) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* pharmaceutical and veterinary compounds, *(b)* phosphorus and its compounds, *(c)* selenium and selenium compounds, *(d)* silver compounds, *(e)* tarry materials from refining and tar residues from distilling, *(f)* tellurium and tellurium compounds, *(g)* thallium and thallium compounds, *(h)* vanadium compounds and (i) zinc compounds;

(7) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste arisings and deposits;

(8) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* pharmaceutical waste, *(b)* mixed organics in drums, *(c)* metal compounds, *(d)* non-toxic metal compounds, *(e)* metals-elements, *(f)* metal oxides, *(g)* inorganic compounds, *(h)* other inorganic material, *(i)* organic compounds, *(j)* polymeric

material and precursors, *(k)* fuels, oils and greases, *(l)* fine chemicals and biocides, *(m)* miscellaneous chemicals waste, *(n)* filter materials and sludges, *(o)* miscellaneous waste and *(q)* construction waste;

(9) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* neutral metal bearing, *(b)* neutral-inorganic, *(c)* neutral-organic, *(d)* neutral-oily (one to 15 per cent.), *(e)* mineral oil and < 20 per cent. others, *(f)* mineral oil and > 20 per cent. others, *(g)* oil + > 20 per cent. water < 85 per cent., *(h)* grease/fat/wax/vegetable oil, *(i)* tars/phenols, *(j)* solvents-non halogen, *(k)* solvents-halogenated, *(l)* solvents-mixed (including water) and *(m)* solvents-S non halogen.

Mr. Atkins: Special wastes are defined in the Pollution Control (Special Waste) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1981. Under the Regulations, a producer of such waste, before it is removed from his premises, is required to complete a consignment note which contains details of the composition and quantity of the waste. Copies of these notes and the details they contain are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Midwives

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many whole time equivalent midwives there are at each incremental point of each pay scale.

Mr. Ancram: I will write to the hon. Member once the information has been collated.

RUC

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the result of the review carried out by the Royal Ulster Constabulary into its guidelines concerning informants and agents; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Consideration of the relevant issues is continuing.

Community Services

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the involvement of local authorities in Northern Ireland in community care and other community services.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* Northern Ireland's four health and social services boards, through their community-based units of management, are responsible for the provision of community care services and other health and social care given outside hospital.

Local authorities in Northern Ireland have no responsibility for community care.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the suggested proposals to create community trusts in Northern Ireland; and what duties they will be responsible for.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* The Government regard health and social services trusts as the best way of delivering health and personal social services in Northern Ireland. My noble Friend Lord Arran has already approved 10 applications for trust status, including the four community units of management in the Eastern board area. These community units will, subject to the passage of further legislation by Parliament, become fully operational as trusts on 1 April 1994. A proposal for further legislation was published on 17 June. This amending legislation will enable trusts providing community services to discharge certain statutory functions which are at present restricted to boards. In bringing this forward our objectives are to enable as many units as possible to take advantage of the significant benefits that trust status offers.

Units of management which are approved as trusts continue to be responsible for the full range of services they already provide, thus preserving the integrated nature of the services in Northern Ireland.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultations have taken place with social workers, doctors and other interested people in Northern Ireland on the future care of the mentally ill, the handicapped and the disabled with the introduction of the new community care system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* The Department of Health and Social Services has consulted widely on the Government's proposals for community care contained in the 1990 policy paper "People First" and on specific aspects of the new community care arrangements which came into operation on 1 April 1993.

A comprehensive information strategy, incorporating consultative papers and booklets for advisors, clients, carers, home owners and general practitioners was implemented in advance of the new arrangements and culminated in a major community care conference for Northern Ireland on 15 March 1993 attended by representatives of the voluntary, private and statutory sectors.

In addition, health and social services boards and their community-based units of management have consulted with clinicians, social services and other professional staff, providers and users in their areas in developing the new community care systems. Boards are expected to continue to consult regularly with interested parties in bringing forward proposals for development of services and the purchasing of care. The Department will be monitoring the effectiveness of the consultation undertaken by boards.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 15 July 1993

HOME DEPARTMENT

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category A prisoners there are currently in England and Wales.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. D. Lewis to Mr. Rod Richards, dated 15 July 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many Category A prisoners there are currently in England and Wales.

There were 578 such prisoners on 30 June 1993.

Correspondence

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what change there has been in the amount of mail received by his office from hon. Members regarding law and order issues during 1993; and what steps he is taking to avoid excessive delays in replying.

Mr. Maclean: In the first six months of this year my office received 1,624 letters from hon. Members on law and order matters, compared with 414 in the same period in 1992—an increase of 392 per cent. A monthly comparison is set out in the table.

I very much regret the time taken to reply to some hon. Members' letters. A number of measures have been put in hand to reduce delays. Most notably, additional staff have been allocated to the division principally responsible for assisting in the preparation of replies. Every effort will be made to see that all outstanding correspondence from Members is answered as expeditiously as possible.

Number of letters received from hon. Members on law and order issues

	1992	*1993*
January	61	114
February	76	194
March	92	555
April	16	287
May	74	279
June	95	195
Total	414	1,624

Immigration

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants from overseas have been *(a)* granted political asylum, *(b)* granted exceptional leave to remain and *(c)* refused permission to stay since April 1992.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There is no provision to grant asylum to a person not in the United Kingdom. Information on the outcome of entry clearance applications made abroad for the purpose of seeking asylum here is not separately identifiable in the statistics.

In the period April to December 1992 a total of 490 grants of settlement—including dependants—were made to south-east Asian refugees, who form a distinct group dealt with under a specific programme. This information since December 1992 is not yet available.

Information on all decisions made in the period 1 April 1992 to 30 June 1993 on applications for asylum in the United Kingdom is given in the following table.

Decisions[1] on applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, by type, 1 April 1992 to 30 June 1993

	Decisions
Total decisions	46,155
Recognised as refugee and granted asylum[2]	2,230
Not recognised as refugee, but granted exceptional leave[3]	23,900
Refusals	
Total refused	20,030
Refused asylum and exceptional leave after determination	3,755
Refused on third country grounds	770
Refused under paragraph 101 of the Immigration Rules[4]	15,500

[1] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same period.

[2] Excluding South East Asian refugees.

[3] Where it would have been unreasonable or impracticable to seek to enforce return to country of origin.

[4] For failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period, including failure to respond to two invitations to interview to establish identity.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many remand prisoners have been held on remand in custody for more than 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The latest available provisional data are for 30 June 1993. On that date there were about 200 untried prisoners and 100 convicted unsentenced prisoners in Prison Service establishments who had first been remanded in custody over 12 months earlier. Not all of these defendants will have been in continuous prison custody since their first remand. This period excludes any time spent in non-Prison Service establishments—eg police cells—before reception on remand into a Prison Service establishment.

Child Offenders

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders aged 15, 16 or 17 years have received a sentence of detention under section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act since 1983; and if he will break down their offences into categories.

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1983 to 1991 is given in the table. 1992 data will not be available until the autumn.

Number of offenders aged 15, 16 and 17 years sentenced at the crown court under Section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 by offence group 1983 to 1991—England and Wales

Age and Offence group	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Aged 15 years									
Violence against the person	3	5	2	3	9	8	8	—	9
Sexual offences	2	6	2	6	5	6	9	10	5
Burglary	—	—	10	6	5	11	3	6	4
Robbery	6	9	14	15	19	21	13	15	13
Theft and handling stolen goods	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—
Criminal damage[1]	6	4	7	3	7	9	4	8	5
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
All offences	22	24	36	34	45	55	38	39	36
Aged 16 years									
Violence against the person	6	21	14	23	19	12	13	10	13
Sexual offences	6	7	8	10	5	8	5	13	6
Burglary	6	9	19	16	17	21	10	7	8
Robbery	16	27	38	47	42	53	29	35	23
Theft and handling stolen goods	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage[1]	6	6	16	11	8	10	5	11	1
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	—
Other	—	2	5	—	4	2	—	1	—
All offences	40	72	100	107	96	108	62	77	51
Aged 17 years									
Violence against the person	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sexual offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Burglary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Robbery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
All offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1

[1] Including arson.

Note: Comparisons with prison receptions suggest there may have been under recording during 1989 and 1990, although this is less likely in 1990.

Fellowship Charitable Foundation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now ask the Charity Commissioners to consider exercising their temporary protective powers under section 8 of the Charities Act 1992 in respect of the trustees of the Fellowship Charitable Foundation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that the Charity Commissioners are already considering which of their powers, if any, they should exercise in respect of the Fellowship Charitable Foundation.

Manchester Prison

Dame Angela Rumbold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce a decision on the future of Manchester prison (Strangeways).

Mr. Howard: The prisons board met yesterday to consider the report of the panel which evaluated the bids for the management of Her Majesty's prison Manchester. It decided to accept the majority recommendation of the evaluation panel that the preferred service provider should be the in-house team. In the face of fierce competition, the in-house bid offers the best value for money and will set new standards for the operation of established local prisons. Subject to the conclusion of a satisfactory service level agreement, the team now faces the challenge of delivering its promise of a safe, purposeful and open regime, with active prisoner and community involvement. Performance against these commitments will be closely controlled on a basis comparable to private sector contracts.

Firearms

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will lay before Parliament the fourth annual report of the Firearms Consultative Committee.

Mr. Howard: I have placed a copy of the annual report of the Firearms Consultative Committee in the Library of both Houses today.

LORD CHANCELLORS DEPARTMENT

Divorce

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will estimate the average cost to the public sector of divorce for a couple with two children where (*a*) the parties receive legal aid, (*b*) one or both parties are rehoused in public housing and (*c*) the party given custody of the children receives state benefit.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is not possible to estimate the average cost in such a case because eligibility for legal aid, public housing and state benefits depends on a number of factors but particularly the income of the husband and wife at the time of separation. However, the average cost of a legally aided divorce in the county courts in 1992-93 was £1,514.

TRANSPORT

Passenger Transport Authorities

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the contributions to *(a)* capital investment and *(b)* revenue of British Rail by each of the passenger transport authorities in each of the past five years.

Mr. Freeman: The information is as follows:

PTE support to BR over the past five years

£ million

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*Total*
Centro						
Revenue	16	17	19	22	25	99
Capital	2	4	5	8	9	28
Greater Manchester						
Revenue	17	22	26	28	29	122
Capital	8	7	3	6	6	30
Merseyside						
Revenue	12	18	22	18	22	92
Capital	3	6	8	9	14	40
South Yorkshire						
Revenue	3	4	4	5	6	22
Capital	1	2	—	1	7	11
Tyne and Wear						
Revenue	1	1	1	1	2	6
Capital	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Yorkshire						
Revenue	8	9	12	15	15	59
Capital	1	3	1	3	13	21
Strathclyde						
Revenue	27	26	29	31	30	143
Capital	7	26	15	9	6	63
Total						
Revenue	84	97	113	120	129	543
Capital	22	48	32	36	55	193

Notes

1. Revenue contributions, are largely supported by central Government RSG and SSA cover and capital contributions by credit approval cover given by the Department.
2. Revenue is the level of S20 claims after audit, except 1992-93 which as yet has not been audited.
3. Capital refers to investment funded directly by PTEs, ie, it excludes investment funded by the PSO and recovered via debt charges.

Radioactive Materials (Transport)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was Her Majesty's Government's policy position on the draft code of practice for the maritime transport of radioactive materials discussed at the International Maritime Organisation's marine environment protection committee meeting on 5 to 9 July.

Mr. Norris: Her Majesty's Government's policy is to support the decision of the International Maritime Organisation's maritime safety committee to approve the code of practice for adoption by the 18th assembly of the IMO.

Unstaffed Rail Stations

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all the British Rail stations in each parliamentary constituency which are *(a)* wholly or *(b)* partially unstaffed, indicating those which became unstaffed within the past year.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not readily available in the form required. However, as at 14 July, of the 2,551 stations on the British Rail network, 977 were wholly unstaffed. Because of the variation in the number of hours for which stations are open, it would be difficult to define partially staffed.

Airline Passengers (Telecommunications)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to the safety and security implications of airline passengers using telecommunications technology while airborne; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The responsibility for the safety regulation of civil aviation rests with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

It has been found that transmissions from portable telephones may cause interference with an aircraft's own electronic systems. Earlier this month the CAA issued an updated aeronautical information circular giving guidance on this matter to air operators, pilots, flight crew and all

concerned with the operation of the aircraft. They were advised that the use of portable telephones in aircraft is not permitted, and that they should require passengers to switch them off.

Driver's Licence History (Sentencing)

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average cost charged to a magistrate's court of a printout by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency of a driver's licence history needed to assist in sentencing.

Mr. Key: DVLA does not charge courts for driver licence printouts.

Urban Public Transport

Mr Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to meet the president of the Institution of Civil Engineers to discuss the reorganisation of urban public transport.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend has no current plans to meet the president of the Institution of Civil Engineers, but Ministers do have regular contact with the institution.

Network SouthEast

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for providing funding for Network SouthEast to lease new trains.

Mr. Freeman: In last year's autumn statement an additional £150 million was made available to British Rail specifically to allow it to lease new rolling stock. New outer suburban trains for Network SouthEast are one of two options being considered by British Rail. It is expected to take a decision later in the summer. Whatever the outcome, I shall be looking to support further leasing deals, provided that they comply with Treasury guidelines.

ENVIRONMENT

Special Waste

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste category of *(a)* neutral metal bearing, *(b)* neutral-inorganic, *(c)* neutral-organic, *(d)* neutral-oily (1–15 per cent.), *(e)* mineral oil and < 20 per cent. others, *(f)* mineral oil and > 20 per cent. others, *(g)* oil + < 20 per cent. water > 85 per cent., *(h)* grease/fat/wax/vegetable oil, *(i)* tars/phenols, *(j)* solvents-non halogen, *(k)* solvents-halogenated, *(l)* solvents-mixed (including water) and *(m)* solvents-S non halogen;

(2) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* solid metal bearings, *(b)* solid inorganic, *(c)* solid CN, *(d)* solid organic, *(e)* solid asbestos, *(f)* filter material-inorganic, *(g)* acid metal bearing, *(h)* acid-inorganic, *(i)* acid-organic, *(j)* alkalis metal bearing, *(k)* alkalis-inorganic, *(l)* alkalis-organic and *(m)* aqueous cyanide;

(3) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* hydrocarbons and their oxygen, nitrogen and/or sulphur compounds, *(b)* inorganic cyanides, *(c)* inorganic halogen containing compounds, *(d)* inorganic sulphur containing compounds, *(e)* laboratory chemicals, *(f)* lead compounds, *(g)* mercury compounds, *(h)* nickel and nickel compounds, *(i)* organic halogen compounds, excluding inert polymeric materials and *(j)* peroxides, chlorates and azides;

(4) if he will list by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* pharmaceutical waste, *(b)* mixed organics in drums, *(c)* metal compounds, *(d)* non-toxic metal compounds, *(e)* metals-elements, *(f)* metal oxides, *(g)* inorganic compounds, *(h)* other inorganic material, *(i)* organic compounds, *(j)* polymeric material and precursors, *(k)* fuels, oils and greases, *(l)* fine chemicals and biocides, *(m)* miscellaneous chemicals waste, *(n)* filter materials and sludges, *(o)* miscellaneous waste and *(p)* construction waste;

(5) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* acids and alkalis, *(b)* antimony and antimony compounds, *(c)* arsenic compounds, *(d)* asbestos (all chemical forms), *(e)* barium compounds, *(f)* beryllium and beryllium compounds, *(g)* biocides and phytopharmaceutical substances, *(h)* boron compounds, *(i)* cadmium and cadmium compounds, *(j)* copper compounds, *(k)* heterocyclic organic compounds containing oxygen, nitrogen and/or sulphur and *(l)* hexavalent chromium compounds;

(6) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* solvent-S halogen/mixed, *(b)* mineral oil sludges, *(c)* contaminated industrial waste, *(d)* empty contaminated drums, *(e)* pressurised cylinders/aerosols, *(f)* contaminated soil, *(g)* mixed laboratory chemicals, *(h)* biocides-solid, *(i)* biocides-liquid, *(j)* biocides-aqueous diluted, *(k)* resins-organic and *(l)* filter material-organic;

(7) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* pharmaceutical and veterinary compounds, *(b)* phosphorus and its compounds, *(c)* selenium and selenium compounds, *(d)* silver compounds, *(e)* tarry materials from refining and tar residues from distilling, *(f)* tellurium and tellurium compounds, *(g)* thallium and thallium compounds, *(h)* vanadium compounds and *(i)* zinc compounds.

Mr. Yeo: The information is not currently available.

Council Tax

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list those local authorities in England with over 60 per cent. of their properties in bands A and B combined, for council tax purposes; and if he will give the relevant percentage in each case;

(2) if he will list those local authorities in England with 50 per cent. or more properties in band A for council tax purposes; and if he will give the relevant percentage in each case.

Mr. Baldry: I am arranging for the information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the reason for the United Kingdom request for an exception for 15 years to the prohibition on the sea disposal of low and intermediate-level radioactive substances, under the convention for the protection of the marine environment of the north-east Atlantic.

Mr. Yeo: The convention provides no such exception: it provides that, after a 15-year moratorium which starts this year, France and the United Kingdom will each have the option to resume sea disposal of low and intermediate-level radioactive waste. The reason for preserving this option is that sea disposal may be the best practicable environmental option for certain categories of radioactive waste. It would be wrong to close off that option.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make it his policy during the further consultation period on the discharge licences for Sellafield that developed countries should aim for self-sufficiency in dealing with radioactive wastes.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 14 July 1993]:* It is for countries to decide their own policy in dealing with radioactive waste in the light of their international obligations.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will release to all consultees as part of the further consultation period announced for the thermal oxide reprocessing plant project on 28 June, the 20-year forward look review commissioned from the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee.

Mr. Yeo: No. The Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee's review of the radioactive waste disposal issues which are likely to arise over the next 20 years has not been completed.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to consult over the issue of substitution of nuclear waste in contracts between British Nuclear Fuels and other Governments utilities, with particular reference to the issues raised by Professor Knill of RAWMAC.

Mr. Yeo: We require further information from the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee before its advice on waste substitution can be considered properly.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which organisations in the United Kingdom would have the technical capacity to construct or run a dry store capable of taking spent advanced gas-cooled reactor fuel.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.
This is a matter for the organisations concerned.

Toxic Waste (Taiwan)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has received from the Government of Taiwan as to the proportion of the toxic waste exported in 1992 to Taiwan from the United Kingdom that has been *(a)* separated and recycled and *(b)* directly disposed of.

Mr. Yeo: None.

Community Charge Arrears

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will introduce amending legislation to amend regulation 16(1) of the Community Charges (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1989 to enable the collection of community charge arrears by way of attachment of earnings orders or deductions from income support in conjunction with postponed warrants of commitment to prison under regulation 41 of those same regulations.

Mr. Baldry: A court will normally postpone a warrant of commitment under regulation 41(3)(b) of the Community Charge (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1989 on condition that a debtor repays a specified sum each week. The weekly payment will be decided by the court following an examination of the debtor's means. It would not therefore be appropriate for a further statutory deduction to be allowed from the debtor's income to recover that debt.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will introduce amending legislation to enable community charge charging authorities to apply to the magistrates courts to vary the order of that court if both charging authority and the debtor are agreed on a payment arrangement.

Mr. Baldry: We do not think that is necessary. Under the law as it stands there is nothing to prevent a debtor from paying an authority more than the amount specified in the court order if he agrees to do so. It would not be appropriate for the debtor to pay less than the amount specified in the order as this is the amount that the court has decided he should pay, following an examination of his means.

Housing Associations

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the Government's objectives in reducing housing association grant; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The Government's objective in reducing average housing association grant rates is to maximise the proportion of private finance in new housing association schemes, and thereby maximise the number of new homes that housing associations are able to provide from the available public resources. This will ensure that more people now living in unacceptable conditions can be housed satisfactorily.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the Government's proposals to set up a housing association ombudsman.

Sir George Young: The Housing Corporation circulated proposals in a consultation document earlier this year and, have received a range of comments and suggestions. The Environment Select Committee has also recently reported

its views on this subject. These comments are currently being considered and I hope that a revised set of proposals will be issued shortly, dealing both with the establishment of an ombudsman service for housing association tenants and with improved arrangements for the handling of tenants' complaints by associations themselves.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of housing association tenants were in receipt of housing benefit in each year since 1988.

Sir George Young: Reliable information is not available for all housing association tenants covering the period 1988-1992.

The information set out in the table covers permanent lettings by housing associations in the years 1990-1992, and shows the proportion of households assessed by housing officers as qualifying for housing benefit in each year.

Proportion of households qualifying for housing benefit: Housing Association lettings, England.

	Per cent.
1990	55
1991	62
1992	67

Source: National Federation of Housing Associations, CORE data base.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the average income levels of housing association tenants in each year since 1988.

Sir George Young: Reliable information is not available for all housing association tenants covering the period 1988-1992.

The information set out in the table covers permanent lettings by housing associations in the years 1990-1992, and shows the average net weekly household income of new tenants who took up a housing association tenancy and of existing tenants who moved within a housing association.

Average net weekly household income[1] Housing association lettings, England.

	£/week
1990	92·00
1991	94·00
1992	97·50

[1] Includes child benefit but not housing benefit or council tax benefit (or equivalent).

Source: National Federation of Housing Associations, CORE data base.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to respond to the recommendations regarding housing association grant made by the Environment Select Committee in its second report of Session 1992-93 (HC466) on the Housing Corporation; and what account will be taken of those recommendations in relevant decisions taken by his Department before publication of his response to the Select Committee report.

Sir George Young: We are examining the recommendations of the Environment Select Committee report on the Housing Corporation and will make a formal response when the House reassembles after the summer recess. However, where operational decisions are needed sooner, we may provide an interim response on particular issues.

In taking decisions about the level of housing association grant in 1994-95, Ministers will consider all available evidence, including the Select Committee's recommendations.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his current estimate of the amounts of capital receipts received by local authorities since November 1992 and which are available to authorities for capital spending under the terms of the autumn statement; and what was his original estimate.

Mr. Gummer: Estimates of local authorities' capital receipts are based on information provided by local authorities. At the time of the autumn statement, it was estimated that English local authorities would receive some £2·2 billion of capital receipts in 1992-93. On the basis of more recent information from local authorities, a revised estimate of £2·1 billion was made in April this year. No separate estimates of receipts have been made for the period between 13 November 1992 and the end of the financial year, during which virtually all of the receipts received will have been available for capital spending as a result of the temporary relaxation in the capital receipts rules announced in the autumn statement. Provisional outturn information for receipts which local authorities obtained between 13 November 1992 and 31 March 1993 will be published in due course, once returns from local authorities have been received and processed.

Disabled Facilities Grants

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evaluation he has made of the effect of the alterations since 1 April in the disregard rules for calculation of entitlement to disabled facilities grants; what consultations he has had with the representatives of people with disabilities on the effects of the alterations; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: These changes were designed to provide more help to grant applicants on low incomes and less to the better-off. It is too soon to assess their precise effects. Disability organisations were consulted on the changes prior to their introduction. They will have an opportunity to provide views on this as part of the Department's current consultation exercise on the future of private housing renewal programmes.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the principal changes in the disregards for the purposes of calculating the entitlement to disabled facilities grants since 1 April.

Sir George Young: The information requested is contained in the Housing Renovation etc Grants (Reduction of Grant) (Amendment) Regulations 1993 (SI 1993 No. 551) and Department of the Environment circular 7/93, copies of which are available in the Library.

Council Rents

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conclusions he has reached as a result of the consultation carried out by his Department on recent rent increases for regulated tenancies.

Sir George Young: I have considered carefully the representations from both landlords and tenants on this issue. Although generally no new regulated tenancies have been created since 15 January 1989, the Government gave an assurance at the time of the passing of the Housing Act 1988 that existing regulated tenants would not be subject to the new regime which that Act brought in. Registered rents for regulated tenancies have risen substantially in certain areas since 1989, but still remain well below market rents.

Having carefully considered the representations received as a result of the recent consultation, I am not convinced that the public interest would be best served by altering the legislative balance which currently exists. To provide further legislative controls over rents would hinder efforts to promote the revival of the private rented sector. Housing benefit is available to meet the cost of reasonable increases in regulated rents for those on low incomes. Our objective in all sectors is to move towards personal subsidies rather than subsidies to bricks and mortar. Accordingly, the Government have no plans for further legislation on this sector.

I am concerned, however, that there should be general consistency of approach through the country. I have no powers to issue guidance to either rent officers or rent assessment committees, but I plan to encourage greater exchange of information and views between them to encourage consistency.

Dioxin, Derbyshire

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further investigations have been made of dioxin contamination of soils and vegetation in Derbyshire.

Mr. Yeo: I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of the results of soil and vegetation sampling at Stanton-by-Dale and Staveley in Derbyshire. The results are in the same range as the levels found in earlier samples taken at Staveley, announced on 31 March, *Official Report*, column *292*.

Concentrations of dioxins in soil and vegetation are reflected in concentrations in milk from the same area. Milk is the principle source of human exposure to dioxins. The concentrations of dioxins in milk produced in the Staveley area are within the normal range for milk in the United Kingdom. Because the levels of dioxins in vegetation and soil in the Stanton-by-Dale area are comparable to or less than the levels found in the Staveley area, there is no concern about the milk produced in the Stanton-by-Dale area.

Sampling of emissions to the air from the foundry at Staveley reveal a very low level of dioxins, equivalent to one seventh of the guideline limit set by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution for new chemical incinerators. These results suggest that the gas cleaning plant at the Staveley foundry is very effective.

Fruit and Vegetables

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Government's planning policy for farm-based fruit and vegetable packing operations.

Mr. Curry: Farm-based fruit and vegetable packing operations, including those packing the produce of other farms, can help bring necessary diversification to the rural economy and assist our farmers in competing effectively at home and abroad. The Government attach great importance to encouraging new sources of jobs and services in rural areas, and maintaining a strong agricultural and horticultural industry. Planning policy guidance note 7 advises that development which is necessary to sustain the rural economy should be properly integrated with the protection of the rural environment. Unless material considerations indicate otherwise, applications for farm-based packing operations must be determined in accordance with the development plan.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Broadcasting

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment his Department made prior to its decision to require BBC Radio WM to relinquish its medium-wave frequencies of the impact this would have on the ethnic minority broadcasting in the west midlands.

Mr. Brooke: BBC Radio West Midlands simulcasts its services on both FM and AM, except for some 37 hours a week in the evenings, when it broadcasts its Asian programmes on AM. We appreciate that many Asian listeners would regret the loss of these programmes. That is why we have asked the BBC to look for ways of continuing to broadcast them after October 1994, when the Radio Authority will use the AM frequencies for a new local radio service in the west midlands.

North West Council for Sport and Recreation

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the names and backgrounds of the chairman and members of the North West Council for Sport and Recreation.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* The chairman, and those members whom I appoint, are currently as follows:

Chairman:	Mr. J. R. Cochrane
Vice-Chairman:	Mr. J. R. H. Greenwood
Ministerial nominees:	Mrs. M. B. Birkenhead
	Mrs. J. Hammersley-Parker
	Mr. H. A. Cann

There are two vacant ministerial appointments.

It would not be appropriate for me to publish personal details in the *Official Report*. My hon. Friend may therefore wish to pursue this directly with the regional council.

EDUCATION

Student Loans

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the number of students receiving a student loan in further education and higher education.

Mr. Boswell: Loans under the student loans scheme are not available to students in further education. The number of students in higher education who are in receipt of loans under the scheme is a matter for the Student Loans Company. I will ask the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

University Students

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many students were studying at each university in the United Kingdom at the latest date for which figures are available; and what were the figures in *(a)* 1960, *(b)* 1970 and *(c)* 1980.

Mr. Boswell: The numbers of students at universities in the academic year 1960-61, and corresponding data for these institutions in the academic years 1970-71, 1980-81 and 1991-92 are shown in the table. Figures for these institutions and those for universities established since 1960-61 are published in the Universities Statistical Record volume 1, and in Statistics of Education volume 6, copies of which are in the Library.

Numbers of full-time and part-time students in universities in Great Britain in 1960-61, and totals for each comparable institution for 1970-71, 1980-81 and 1991-92

Institution	*1960-61*[1]		*1970-71*[2]		*1980-81*[3]		*1991-92*[3]	
	full-time	*part-time*	*full-time*	*part-time*	*full-time*	*part-time*	*full-time*	*part-time*
Birmingham University	4,457	200	6,782	325	8,884	956	11,437	1,989
Bristol University	3,366	152	6,238	521	7,010	528	9,235	671
Cambridge University	8,950	—	10,720	473	11,479	1,055	13,920	1,217
Durham University	5,184	202	3,374	84	4,770	193	6,046	1,163
Exeter University	1,410	88	3,387	270	5,064	712	6,466	1,186
Hull University	1,660	61	3,943	280	5,498	505	6,669	1,713
Leeds University	4,860	199	9,126	415	10,885	930	13,680	1,281
Leicester University	1,374	190	3,364	605	4,789	651	6,920	1,148
Liverpool University	4,113	396	6,613	495	7,859	530	10,040	1,481
University of London	21,995	8,644	33,131	7,921	40,538	8,704	51,392	13,352
Manchester University	4,944	646	8,271	594	11,327	1,109	13,359	1,976
Manchester College of Science and Technology	1,956	1,965	3,340	145	4,137	460	5,262	307
North Staffordshire University College[4]	769	—	1,863	184	2,801	441	4,440	1,392
Nottingham University	2,506	185	5,194	622	7,053	685	9,581	1,342
Oxford University	8,975	—	11,073	756	11,802	1,717	14,122	768
Reading University	1,557	27	4,917	484	5,819	360	8,229	1,525
Sheffield University	3,009	438	5,744	162	8,369	428	10,854	1,020
Southampton University	1,654	85	4,381	681	6,168	483	7,897	1,269
Total England	82,739	13,478	131,461	15,017	164,252	20,447	209,549	34,800
University of Wales	6,431	221	6,655	406	20,402	1,265	26,810	2,677
Total Wales	6,431	221	6,655	406	20,402	1,265	26,810	2,677
Aberdeen University	2,016	243	5,660	599	5,590	179	7,180	728
Edinburgh University	5,963	1,328	9,368	539	9,783	884	12,550	1,115
Glasgow University	6,223	230	7,969	972	9,830	1,299	12,798	1,485
Glasgow Royal College of Science and Technology[5]	1,695	2,251	5,356	788	6,707	472	9,588	1,948
St. Andrews University	2,632	80	2,577	85	3,348	98	4,225	80
Total Scotland	18,529	4,132	30,930	2,983	35,258	2,932	46,341	5,356
Total Great Britain	107,699	17,831	169,046	18,406	219,912	24,644	282,700	42,833

[1] Source—University Grants Committee "Returns from Universities and Colleges 1960-61".
[2] Source—Department for Education "Statistics of Education Volume 6".
[3] Source—Universities Statistical Record "Volume 1 Students and Staff".
[4] North Staffordshire University College, now Keele University.
[5] Glasgow Royal College of Science and Technology, now Strathclyde University.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will update the table given in his answer of 28 June, *Official Report*, column *358*, by listing by local education authority area and for each grant-maintained school the proposed final annual maintenance grant and the final AMG, where this has now been determined.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is given in the table.

GM AMG—1993-94 School	*Proposed final AMG*	*Final AMG*
Avon		
Beechen Cliff School	1,952,184	—
Oldfield School	1,628,128	—
Barnet		
Hendon School	2,409,076	2,440,651

GM AMG—1993-94 School	Proposed final AMG	Final AMG
Queen Elizabeth's GM School for Boys	2,685,434	2,675,943
Mill Hill County School	2,881,500	[1]2,921,688
Bedfordshire		
Queensbury School	2,219,524	2,497,566
Thomas Whitehead CE School	326,490	318,337
Manshead CE Upper School	1,819,281	1,804,759
Sharnbrook Upper School	3,082,414	3,235,054
Ashcroft High School	1,699,750	1,853,806
Crawley Green GM Infant	443,864	453,773
Icknield High School	2,696,196	2,803,589
Lea Manor High School	2,597,388	2,743,544
Lincroft Middle School	675,363	728,131
Wootton Upper School	2,386,232	2,605,756
Berkshire		
Southlands School	1,388,715	1,336,886
Reading School	1,625,933	1,715,218
St Bartholomew's School	3,432,434	3,584,862
Desborough Comprehensive School	2,374,578	2,326,426
Denefield School	2,100,230	2,202,280
Langley Grammar School, Slough	1,526,243	1,561,050
Herschel Grammar School	1,328,282	1,481,846
The Downs School	1,319,024	1,359,609
Cippenham Middle School	671,467	706,528
Priory Combined School	818,634	871,735
Upton Grammar School	1,399,355	1,409,494
Holy Family Combined School	461,129	519,043
Whitelocke Infant and Nursery School	268,260	267,466
Bexley		
Barnehurst Infants School	270,593	276,889
Barnehurst Junior School	385,918	390,904
St Columba's RC Boys School	1,728,391	1,598,267
St Mary and St Joseph's School	1,604,686	1,522,403
Birmingham		
Baverstock GM School	2,444,257	—
Small Heath School	2,468,506	—
Handsworth Grammar School for Boys	1,759,199	—
Great Barr School	4,260,290	—
Hall Green School	1,555,385	—
King Edward VI Aston School	1,381,228	—
King Edward VI Camp Hill Boys School	1,480,522	—
King Edward VI Camp Hill Girls School	1,420,988	—
King Edward VI Five Ways School	1,492,205	—
King Edward VI Handsworth School	1,850,229	—
Bolton		
St. James' CE School, Bolton	1,617,428	1,794,487
Crompton Fold Primary School	639,332	668,643
Canon Slade School	3,184,651	3,344,288
George Tomlinson School	1,502,743	1,340,663
Bradford		
Bingley Grammar School	2,107,250	—
Hanson GM School	2,642,398	—
Laisterdyke GM Middle School	678,103	—
Oakbank School	2,463,211	—
Thornton School	2,014,073	—
Brent		
Claremont High School	2,883,678	—
Copland Community School	2,930,432	—
Convent of Jesus and Mary	2,205,616	—
Kingsbury High School	4,931,819	—
Queens Park Community School	2,178,054	—
Bromley		
Butlers Wood School for Girls	2,498,965	2,498,965
Coopers School, Chislehurst	2,879,623	2,879,623
Langley Park Boys School	2,756,105	2,756,105
Hayes School, Bromley	2,906,576	2,906,576
Ravens Wood School, Bromley	2,229,200	2,229,200
Kelsey Park chool	2,057,976	2,057,976

GM AMG—1993-94 School	Proposed final AMG	Final AMG
Beaverwood School for Girls	2,300,643	2,300,643
Crofton Junior School	1,048,129	1,048,129
Newstead Wood School	1,855,892	1,855,892
Charles Darwin School	2,411,849	2,411,849
Holy Innocents Primary School	382,014	[1]382,014
St. Olave's and St. Saviour's School	1,619,235	[1]1,619,235
St. John Rigby School	2,117,319	[1]2,117,319
Buckinghamshire		
Bridgewater Hall School	3,204,466	—
Brindley Hall School	2,431,157	—
Beaconsfield High School	1,721,529	—
Brookmead County Combined Middle School	339,118	—
The Chalfonts School	2,152,263	—
Overstone Combined School	443,334	—
Beechview Middle School	392,261	—
Hamilton Combined School	1,010,910	—
Lord Grey School	2,367,618	—
The Radcliffe School	3,660,581	—
Wycombe Royal Grammar School	2,644,713	—
Calderdale		
Crossley Heath School	1,501,989	—
North Halifax High School	1,674,604	—
Salterlee Primary School	131,837	—
Holy Trinity CE Senior School	1,591,393	—
Rastrick High School	1,937,528	—
Cambridgeshire		
St. Helen's Primary School, Bluntisham	401,047	428,396
Bassingbourn Village College	902,676	858,366
Gamlingay Village College	415,101	412,435
The Queen's School, Wisbech	3,067,674	3,024,982
Park Lane Primary School	390,793	401,207
Sawtry Village College	1,354,921	1,291,906
Wheatfields Junior School	505,856	498,875
Crosshall Infant School	445,731	472,486
Crosshall Junior School	518,051	537,874
The King's School, Peterborough	1,834,790	1,782,920
Jack Hunt School	3,071,177	3,011,650
Ailwyn Community School	1,462,188	1,516,425
Deacon's School	1,900,822	1,963,122
Longsands Community College	2,834,472	2,813,248
Orton Wistow Primary School	372,322	384,970
Sawston Village College	2,339,941	2,315,722
Stanground College	2,779,761	2,886,358
Village College, Comberton	1,543,918	1,557,103
Cheshire		
Bankfield High School	1,279,547	—
Kettleshulme CE Primary School	89,659	—
Fallibroome High School	1,879,222	—
Henbury County High School	1,774,896	—
Croydon		
Riddlesdown High School	2,474,018	—
Edenham School	2,549,918	—
Cumbria		
Kirkbie Kendal School	2,212,594	—
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School	1,233,850	—
Hayton CE Primary School	132,259	—
St. Aidan's School	1,456,320	—
Trinity School	3,787,687	—
Scotby CE Primary School	268,313	—
The Queen Katherine School, Kendal	2,618,932	—
Appleby Grammar School	1,089,603	—
Dallam School	1,457,983	—
Harraby School	1,221,534	—
Kirkby Stephen Grammar School	806,540	—
Derbyshire		
Netherthorpe School	1,745,449	1,900,896
Ecclesbourne School	2,794,799	2,876,695
Borrow Wood Junior School	312,012	326,448
Belmont Primary School	457,194	472,904

GM AMG—1993-94 School	Proposed final AMG	Final AMG
Chellaston School	1,942,677	1,996,409
The Merrill Community School	2,296,888	2,142,353
Belper Grant-Maintained School	2,218,033	2,371,000
Heanor Gate School	1,977,148	2,168,605
John Port School	3,466,400	3,455,267
Murray Park Community School	2,020,900	1,961,579
Noel Baker School	2,772,186	2,691,008
Repton Primary School	286,568	272,386
Devon		
Colyton Grammar School	1,236,902	—
Torquay Boys Grammar School	2,021,436	—
St. Boniface's College	1,548,905	—
Teign School	1,749,091	—
Dorset		
Bournemouth Grammar School	2,099,218	—
Woodroffe School	1,768,493	—
Budmouth School	1,957,125	—
Avonbourne School	1,896,285	—
Parkstone Grammar School, Poole	1,582,203	—
Bournemouth Girls School	1,899,453	—
Highcliffe Comprehensive School	1,505,584	—
Poole Technical High School	2,362,279	—
St. Walburga's RC Primary School	519,550	—
Dudley		
Old Swinford Hospital	1,353,932	[1]1,333,690
Ellowes Hall School	1,682,743	1,748,389
Kingswinford GM School	1,496,201	1,530,593
Ealing		
Brentside High School	2,527,864	—
Drayton Manor High School	2,800,599	—
Ellen Wilkinson High School	2,297,226	—
Greenford High School	2,280,914	—
Northolt High School	2,238,588	—
Wood End First School	515,262	—
Wood End Middle School	481,652	—
Essex		
Chalvedon School	2,942,384	3,097,544
Westcliffe High School for Boys	1,983,393	2,023,768
King John School, Benfleet	2,543,937	2,700,946
Beauchamps School, Wickford	1,632,598	1,500,912
Bromfords School, Wickford	1,621,266	1,715,516
Elmwood Primary School	640,727	663,359
Newlands Spring Primary School	441,625	479,367
Saffron Walden High School	2,893,757	2,991,923
The Philip Morant School	2,306,316	2,438,457
The Plume School	3,729,556	3,796,954
West Hatch High School	2,119,945	2,139,867
The Boswells School	2,789,752	2,917,087
Chelmsford County High School	1,551,437	1,555,402
The Eastwood School	1,772,834	1,748,207
Furtherwick Park School	1,877,288	1,880,719
Katherine's Primary School	385,503	390,484
King Edward VI G School, Chelmsford	1,668,285	1,645,444
King Harold School	1,654,751	1,611,949
North Crescent Primary School	331,361	309,353
Rickstones School	1,354,346	1,304,412
Thurstable School	1,759,796	1,769,834
Torells Comprehensive School	1,348,562	1,323,256
Northlands Junior School	422,835	437,656
Great Totham County Primary School	519,880	559,603
The Appleton School	2,403,831	2,351,509
The Deanes School	1,378,823	1,534,698
The Hedley Walter School	2,039,499	1,914,949
Castle View School	1,677,326	1,696,896
Cornelius Vermuyden School	1,626,928	1,677,509
Westcliff High School for Girls	1,979,784	1,963,536
The Fitzwimarc School	2,338,709	2,384,271
Westborough Primary School	797,187	871,092
King Edmund School	2,388,014	2,362,489
Belfairs Community College	2,688,155	2,601,882

GM AMG—1993-94 School	Proposed final AMG	Final AMG
Chelmer Valley High School	1,850,564	1,922,695
Davenant Foundation School	2,191,067	2,250,799
Gable Hill Grant-maintained Comprehensive	2,082,046	2,082,098
Jotmans Hall Primary School	391,615	400,350
Newport Free Grammar School	1,373,664	1,382,974
Northwick Park County Infant School	331,619	329,561
Northwick Park County Junior School	447,237	467,390
Rainsford School	1,908,746	1,922,091
Rolph CE Voluntary-assisted Primary School	236,270	271,858
Southend Girls High School	1,843,623	1,882,642
St. Andrew's CE Primary School	213,082	241,635
St. Clere's School	1,795,939	1,844,734
St. Martin's School	2,261,602	2,437,456
Tendring High School	2,737,470	2,826,959
The Grays School	1,802,033	1,856,598
The Greensward School	1,703,645	1,808,695
Thorpe Bay School	1,514,686	1,664,222
William De Ferrers School	2,893,884	3,068,491
William Edwards School	1,722,225	1,805,779
Gloucesteshire		
Ribston Hall High School	952,515	—
Marling School	1,589,093	—
Pate's Grammar School	1,979,013	—
Stroud High School	1,506,846	—
Robinswood Primary School	504,800	—
Tewkesbury School	2,191,122	—
The Crypt School	921,601	—
Balcarras School	1,385,422	—
Chosen Hill School	2,269,284	—
Katharine Lady Berkeley School	2,106,532	—
Churchdown School	2,146,453	—
The Cotswold School	1,172,924	—
Newent Community School	2,308,178	—
Rednock School	2,238,057	—
Saintbridge School	1,665,487	—
Chipping Camden School	1,647,517	—
St. Gregory RC Primary School	524,541	—
Blue Coat CE Grant-maintained School	330,774	—
Picklenash County Junior School	332,954	—
Wyedean School	1,262,851	—
Hammersmith		
London Oratory School	4,254,240	—
Hampshire		
Hardley Secondary School	1,651,981	1,802,699
Burgate School	1,288,576	1,363,405
Arnewood School	2,421,755	2,514,246
Ringwood Comprehensive School	1,666,419	1,759,723
Crofton School, Fareham	2,142,854	2,160,203
The City of Portsmouth Boys' School	1,864,855	1,955,989
The Priory Primary School	166,754	190,383
Testwood School	1,850,730	1,913,697
Abbotswood Middle School	844,731	826,691
Front Lawn Middle School	431,852	447,565
All Hallows RC School	2,258,710	2,424,544
Bay House Grant-maintained School	3,276,655	3,203,364
Blackfield Middle School	586,385	578,966
Bohunt Community School	2,167,405	2,296,747
Calmore Grant-maintained School	535,464	614,455
St. Joseph's RC Primary School	554,535	685,197

GM AMG—1993-94 School	Proposed final AMG	Final AMG
Havering		
Abbs Cross School	1,726,574	—
Coopers Company and Coborn	2,706,265	—
Frances Bardsley School	2,648,292	—

GM AMG—1993-94 School	Proposed final AMG	Final AMG
Hereford and Worcester		
St. Augustine's RC High School	1,604,896	1,640,491
St. Bede's School	872,397	886,339
Hertfordshire		
Rickmansworth School	2,349,929	2,363,251
Watford Boys Grammar School	2,521,834	2,535,614
Francis Bacon School	1,179,739	1,216,702
Watford Girls' Grammar School	2,482,995	2,539,319
Parmiters School	2,333,813	2,322,198
St. Mary's R.C. Primary School	304,749	305,310
Christ Church CE JMI School, Chorley	319,139	311,975
Parkside First School	363,115	391,288
Hertingfordbury School	244,250	240,010
Bishop Stortford's School	2,310,664	2,466,927
Ashlyns Grant-Maintained School	1,492,243	1,559,997
Bushey Hall School	2,571,885	2,397,349
Bushey Meads GM School	2,143,420	2,228,601
Dame Alice Owens School	2,577,663	2,624,084
Mount Grace School	1,214,475	1,424,777
Queens School	2,738,038	2,849,229
Hillingdon		
Bishopshalt School	2,403,584	2,422,836
Haydon School	2,707,686	2,720,645
Queensmead School	2,229,343	2,299,623
Vyners School	2,161,804	2,004,307
Uxbridge High School	1,714,649	1,822,505
Northwood School	2,278,887	2,201,048
Hayes Manor School	1,747,694	1,727,799
Mellow Lane School	2,372,797	2,318,510
Oak Farm Infant School	503,191	518,217
Oak Farm Junior School	578,099	601,549
The Douay Martyrs School	2,359,500	2,557,837
Abbotsfield School	1,789,388	1,819,125
Grange Park Infant School	435,117	468,892
Grange Park Junior School	474,170	506,794
Swakeleys School	1,856,814	1,833,869
Hounslow		
Gumley House Convent School	2,251,140	2,220,884
Gunnersbury Catholic School	2,208,717	2,219,875
Humberside		
Wold Newton Primary School	151,221	151,221
Kensington		
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School	2,212,931	—
Kent		
The GS for Girls Wilmington	1,101,219	1,150,731
The Cornwallis School	1,826,773	2,024,564
The Maplesden Noakes School	1,555,626	1,621,979
Wilmington Grammar School for Boys	830,956	[1]974,896
St. George's CE School, Gravesend	2,330,199	2,357,482
Homewood School	2,792,083	2,913,572
Thamesview School	2,280,985	2,254,247
Dartford Grammar School	1,707,230	1,929,403
Southlands Comprehensive School	2,462,598	—
Dartford Grammar School for Girls	1,707,230	1,835,365
Aylesford School	2,085,430	2,111,294
Wrotham School	1,024,272	1,103,099
Simon Langton Boys' Grammar School	1,416,773	[1]1,461,523
Snodland CE Primary School	535,424	548,533
Oldborough Manor High	1,537,167	—
Senacre High School	2,067,367	2,118,277
Cranbrook School	1,699,728	1,760,629
Angley School	1,770,291	1,776,358
Fulston Manor School	1,731,977	1,805,342
Oakwood Park Grammar School	1,077,926	1,005,749
Rainham Mark Grammar School	2,292,762	2,332,940
Robert Napier School, Gillingham	1,754,076	1,888,104
The Minster School	2,938,993	3,010,954
The Skinner's School	1,501,127	1,525,792
The Canterbury School	1,[illegible]353	1,915,215
Borough Green Primary School	424,435	450,287
Chatham Grammar School	1,207,990	297,125
Sir Roger Manwood's School	1,505,123	1,451,715
The Archbishop School	1,382,493	1,418,357
The Malling School	1,293,312	1,321,004
Sandown Court School	1,881,011	1,909,388
Meopham School	986,030	935,095
Holy Trinity	349,381	372,716
The Bradbourne School	998,561	1,081,782
Hugh Christie School	1,995,981	[1]2,089,046
St. Simon Stock School	1,906,283	1,998,991
Mascalls School	2,868,192	2,848,129
Roseacre Junior School	454,503	462,317
St. Gregory's Catholic Comp. School	1,888,110	2,030,483
St. John Fisher, Chatham	2,422,432	2,503,687
Sutton-at-Home CE Primary School	443,276	455,039
The Charles Dickens School	1,657,401	1,727,919
The Folkestone School for Girls	1,759,327	1,900,829
The Wildernesse School	1,456,554	1,389,844
Westlands High School	2,883,852	3,040,893
Kingston		
Tiffin School	2,369,820	2,258,964
Holy Cross Convent School	1,512,082	1,605,165
Richard Challoner School	1,569,710	1,534,475
Kirklees		
Heckmondwike Grammar School	1,561,430	1,658,905
Castle Hall GM School	957,073	1,035,467
Lambeth		
La Retraite School	1,833,557	—
St. Bernadette Junior School	458,829	—
Archbishop Tenison's School	1,497,461	—
Bishop Thomas Grant School	2,520,496	—
Dunraven GM School	3,157,842	—
Lancashire		
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School	1,860,719	2,008,763
Lancaster Royal Grammar School	2,003,296	[1]2,052,518
Lancaster Girls Grammar School	1,634,088	1,651,403
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School	2,267,523	[1]2,394,558
Newton Blue Coat CE School	394,244	399,323
Baines School	1,562,692	1,615,217
Archbishop Temple School	1,232,110	1,306,839
Leicestershire		
Long Field High School	861,669	—
Abington High School	1,254,560	—
Bushloe High School	1,468,582	—
South Wigston High School	1,469,802	—
Uppingham Community College	1,388,617	—
Lewisham		
Turnham Primary School	985,962	—
Lincolnshire		
Queen Elizabeth's GM Grammar School	893,067	—
Skegness Grammar School	1,505,727	—
The King's School Grantham	1,916,942	—
Carre's Grammar School	1,091,103	—
St. George's School	2,232,973	—
King Edward VI Grammar School	1,440,508	—
Caistor School	1,045,148	—
Bourne Primary School	689,316	—
Gartree School	886,647	—
Magdalen CE/Methodist Primary School	348,144	—
Yarborough High School	2,415,986	—
Lincoln Christ's Hospital School	2,726,583	—
Castle Hills School, Gainsborough	1,146,804	—
North Kesteven School	2,648,988	—
North Rauceby Primary School	132,038	—
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Horn	1,341,978	—

GM AMG—1993-94 School	Proposed final AMG	Final AMG
Robert Pattinson School	2,444,092	—
William Alvey CE Junior School	680,349	—
Ancaster High School	1,267,502	—
William Farr CE School	1,735,540	—
Ermine School	430,157	—
Gleed Girls School	1,208,925	—
Monks' Dyke High School	1,504,824	—
Lacey Gardens Junior School	592,816	—
Malcolm Sargent County Primary School	738,364	—
Liverpool		
St. Francis Xavier's College	2,650,426	2,650,426
Newham		
Stratford School	1,669,153	1,681,318
Norfolk		
Wymondham College	2,341,738	2,303,400
Gresham County Primary	175,466	—
Heacham Middle School	390,702	—
Redgate Middle School, Hunstanton	309,338	—
Loddon Middle School	386,143	—
Costessey High School, Norwich	1,563,502	1,713,332
Cromer High School	1,285,699	1,244,563
Dereham Church VA First School	234,966	—
Downham Market High School	3,162,712	3,304,650
Marshland High School	1,445,781	1,450,658
Norwich Road School	532,262	554,195
Robert Kett Middle School	652,471	653,204
West Flegg Middle School	678,538	660,604
Acle High School	1,175,358	1,144,641
Sheringham High School	1,273,388	1,326,726
South Wooton School	200,679	—
Cliff Park High School	1,537,831	1,571,695
Flegg High School	1,204,462	1,274,541
Great Yarmouth High School	1,616,159	1,585,705
Lynn Grove VC High School	1,629,674	1,675,848
St. Clements High School	1,190,556	1,170,746
Northamptonshire		
Southfield School for Girls	1,457,522	1,572,193
Kingsley Park Middle School	634,205	679,974
Kingswood School	2,159,652	2,178,146
Moulton Primary School	569,645	607,087
King John School	489,239	516,726
Northampton School for Boys	1,963,181	2,196,983
Lodge Park School	1,876,194	1,810,351
Manor School	1,524,610	1,570,521
Montagu School	1,860,992	1,980,827
Weavers School	2,558,015	2,576,385
Windmill Primary School	617,400	578,154
Wrenn School	2,252,542	2,373,269
Sir Christopher Hatton	1,709,232	1,757,218
Danesholme Junior School	515,961	561,510
Woodnewton Way Junior School	548,394	569,809
Nottinghamshire		
Ravensdale Middle School	663,989	—
Greenwood Dale School	1,363,758	—
George Spencer School	2,047,408	—
Oxfordshire		
Shenington CE Primary School	125,756	125,756
Rochdale		
Crossgates Primary School	336,367	—
Smithy Bridge Primary School	550,873	—
St James CE Primary	333,743	—
Wardle High School	2,142,932	—
Sandwell		
Manor High School	1,848,555	1,789,513
Sheffield		
Clifford First School	144,612	120,602

GM AMG—1993-94 School	Proposed final AMG	Final AMG
Shropshire		
Adams' Grammar School	1,164,848	—
Corbet GM School	1,242,066	—
Solihull		
Hatchford Primary School	861,670	969,063
Somerset		
Sexey's School	1,300,720	1,300,720
Bruton Primary School	347,348	347,348
Southwark		
London Nautical School	1,495,297	1,491,358
St. Francesca Cabrini RC Primary	845,723	—
Staffordshire		
St. Thomas More School	1,916,166	—
Cannock Chase High School	2,087,964	—
Surrey		
Guildford County Secondary School	1,828,343	1,935,201
Collingwood School, Camberley	3,452,755	3,642,975
St. John the Baptist School, Woking	1,586,183	1,646,877
Glyn School	1,978,289	2,106,650
Gordon's School	787,666	756,557
Beacon School	1,757,428	1,894,525
Epsom and Ewell High School	1,979,606	2,009,386
Hawkedale First School	182,746	161,194
Heathside Secondary School	1,225,671	1,465,192
Manor First School, Byfleet	259,389	240,411
Roseberry School, Epsom	1,894,516	2,039,296
Stoneleigh First School	308,014	333,102
de Stafford School	1,193,336	1,238,774
Send CE First School	243,980	232,999
Thamesmead School	1,100,720	1,393,999
St. Paul's School	1,480,782	1,625,955
Sutton		
Wilsons School	1,741,804	—
Nonsuch High School for Girls	2,049,840	—
John Fisher School	1,714,027	—
Cheam High School	2,204,728	—
Sutton Grammar School for Boys	1,461,957	—
St. Philomena's School	1,907,056	—
Wallington High School for Boys	1,454,128	—
Wallington High School for Girls	1,703,895	—
Tameside		
Audenshaw High School	1,637,607	1,637,607
West Hill School	1,508,812	1,508,812
Tower Hamlets		
Raines Foundation School	2,535,384	2,752,152
Trafford		
Ashton on Mersey School	1,867,657	1,944,771
New Wellington High School	1,883,460	1,899,279
Sale Moor School	1,291,642	1,337,832
Walsall		
The Streetly School	2,385,678	2,321,781
St. Thomas More RC School	2,719,395	2,812,356
Shire Oak Community School	1,459,790	1,400,817
Waltham Forest		
Highams Park School	2,526,942	—
Wandsworth		
Graveney School	4,595,017	—
Burntwood School	3,593,918	—
Elliot School	3,569,454	—
Salesian College	1,513,423	—
Ethelburga Primary School	443,315	—
Hillbrook Primary School	764,600	—
John Paul II RC School	1,524,504	—
Southfields School	3,571,491	—

GM AMG—1993-94 School	Proposed final AMG	Final AMG
Warwickshire		
Avon Valley School	730,195	727,515
Ash Green School (Exhall)	1,111,820	1,103,673
Hartshill School	1,350,262	1,346,854
Queen Elizabeth School Atherstone	1,554,124	1,552,689
Myton School	2,235,952	2,226,965
Alcester Grammar School	1,262,526	1,262,526
Rugby High School For Girls	1,230,469	1,226,666
Wirral		
Calday Grange Grammar School	2,300,326	—
Wiltshire		
St. Augustine's School	1,215,926	—
Aloeric School	516,885	—
Highbury School	1,158,555	—
Lavington School	1,107,939	—
Wolverhampton		
Moseley Park	2,601,795	2,926,515
Wolverhampton GS	1,412,918	1,450,571

Note: Only schools operating as grant maintained on 1 April 1993.

[1] Updated from previous answer to exclude adjustments in respect of 1992-93.

School Meals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many and what proportion of children received *(a)* paid and *(b)* free meals in (i) primary, (ii) junior and (iii) secondary schools in England as a whole in each year since 1979.

Mr. Forth: Information on school meal arrangements in England since 1989 is shown in the table. Information prior to 1989 is not available on a comparable basis although the results of early school meals censuses were published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy up to 1988 in "School Meal Statistics at October", copies of which are available in the Library.

Numbers and percentages of day-pupils taking paid and free school meals in maintained schools in England 1989-1992
Position at January each year

School type	Other Primary[1]				Junior				Secondary			
	Paid		Free		Paid		Free		Paid		Free	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent.
1992	960,350	27	571,106	16	170,700	29	110,061	19	865,313	30	294,297	10
1991	1,047,810	30	469,286	13	196,820	32	93,707	15	875,576	31	235,107	8
1990	1,110,229	32	429,834	13	215,936	35	89,394	14	864,733	30	222,929	8
1989	1,103,542	33	425,555	13	216,579	35	89,840	15	869,605	30	235,270	8

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a further statement about school teachers' pay in 1993.

Mr. Patten: I am today publishing the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 1993, which will put in place the new pay spine for classroom teachers which I announced in February. I intend to lay an order before the House tomorrow which will bring the document into force with effect from 1 September 1993.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans the United Kingdom Government have to join other European countries in contributing to the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis at Laxenburg, near Vienna.

Mr. David Davis: None at the present time.

Quangos

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the names of individuals who *(a)* are spouses of hon. Members, *(b)* are members of the House of Lords, *(c)* are spouses of members of the House of Lords and *(d)* have been party candidates for Parliament, indicating for which party, who have been appointed by his Department to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations giving, in each case, the title of the post, any salary payable, and the duration of the appointment.

Mr. David Davis *[pursuant to the reply, 9 July 1993, c. 285]:* I regret that the information I gave regarding my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) is incorrect. Although they are members of the Medical Research Council and the Agricultural and Food Research Council respectively, they do not receive any honoraria.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

British Military Hospital, Nepal

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial, medical and administrative support Her Majesty's Government have given the former British military hospital, Dharan, Nepal, to enable it to continue as the major medical and surgical facilitity in east Nepal; and if he will make a statement on the future of the hospital and its staff.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In 1989, when the British Brigade of Ghurkas withdrew from the British military hospital, we agreed an aid package worth £3 million to assist with the transition to Nepali management. This package included assignments by a surgeon, an anaesthetist, a physician and a general manager. It also funded the construction of new wards, the provision of equipment and the training of local staff.

Long-term viability has been assured through the establishment at the hospital by the Government of Nepal

of the BP Koirala Institute for Health Sciences with the assistance of the Indian Government. The final commissioning of wards and transfer of equipment are expected to be complete by the end of this month.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his United States and European Community counterparts about their contributions to United Nations aid for the peoples of the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Humanitarian aid for the peoples of the former Yugoslavia, including assistance through the United Nations, is the subject of frequent discussion with our partners in the European Community and the United States. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development announced an additional package of humanitarian aid for the former Yugoslavia of £18·5 million on 12 July, thus bringing our total bilateral commitment to £63 million. Details of this new package will be set out on 16 July at the meeting of donors which has been called by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and we urge other donors to follow our example.

International Finance Corporation

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make available the voting decisions of the United Kingdom executive director in the International Finance Corporation since 1 January 1991.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* The proceedings of the board of executive directors of the International Finance Corporation are confidential so as not to inhibit full and frank discussion.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

CSCE

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the second meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe in Helsinki on 6 to 9 July.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Helsinki provided a valuable opportunity for parliamentarians from 45 CSCE participating states and representatives of international organisations to meet and debate issues relating to co-operation and security in the CSCE area. The declaration adopted by the Assembly is an important statement of concern regarding conflicts in the CSCE area and also reflects the view of the Assembly that the CSCE has a key role in seeking to prevent and resolve such conflicts.

Chittagong Hill Tract Refugees

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to *(a)* the Indian and *(b)* the Bangladeshi Governments on the proposed repatriation to Bangladesh of the Chittagong hill tract refugees currently in refugee camps in the state of Tripura, India.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have not made formal representations to either Government about the proposed repatriations. But the Indian and Bangladesh authorities are aware of our concern about the tribal refugees from the Chittagong hill tracts in camps in Tripura. For example, the acting British high commissioner in Dhaka discussed the issue with the Bangladesh Foreign Minister on 26 June.

English Language Teaching

Mr. Whitney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent the work of the British Council in direct English language teaching is self-financing, taking account of start-up costs of the ELT operation since the mid-1970s and all relevant overheads.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The work of the British Council in direct English language teaching is entirely self-financing. Students' fees cover all relevant costs, including overheads, and the surplus is used partly to reinvest in the business, partly to cover the business risk and partly to support the council's cultural and educational programmes as a return on earlier investment in start-up costs.

South American Nationals (Graduate Training)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what he is doing to promote graduate training in Europe of south American nationals; and what assessment he has of the number of such graduates in Europe in 1983 and the most recent available date.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Human resource development is a priority for our bilateral technical co-operation programmes and, wherever appropriate, United Kingdom training is an integral part of aid-funded projects.

It has not been possible to obtain statistics relating to south American nationals studying in European countries other than in the United Kingdom. Obtaining the statistics from all European countries could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In 1984-85, the total number of students from south America studying in the United Kingdom funded by Her Majesty's Government sources totalled 292 at an approximate cost of £1·6 million; statistics for overseas students funded by Her Majesty's Government prior to this are not available. In 1992-93, the number of students from south America was 641 at a cost of about £4·38 million. A breakdown of these totals by country of origin has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Our aid programme has supported the bulk of Her Majesty's Government-funded students from south America. Aid funds are provided under our bilateral technical co-operation training arrangements—287 students at a cost of approximately £2·22 million in 1992-93—and under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office scholarship award scheme—274 students at a cost of approximately £1·76 million in 1992-93.

EMPLOYMENT

Wages

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of full-time workers on adult rates currently earn less than *(a)* £100, *(b)* £150, *(c)* £200 and *(d)* £250 per week, including and excluding overtime, in (i) Yorkshire and Humberside, (ii) north Yorkshire, (iii) the north of England and (iv) the United Kingdom, distinguishing between male and female and manual and non-manual.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information available from the new earnings survey can be found in the following tables.

Full-time employees on adult rates—pay unaffected by absence
Proportion with gross weekly earnings EXCLUDING overtime below the following amounts: April 1992

	Yorkshire/ Humberside	North Yorkshire	North	Great Britain
Manual men				
£100	0·9	1·5	1·0	0·8
£150	13·6	19·4	12·1	11·9
£200	42·2	54·2	37·9	39·3
£250	69·5	77·1	66·2	66·9
Non-manual men				
£100	0·8	1·2	0·5	0·5
£150	6·6	8·3	5·5	4·6
£200	18·8	22·6	15·6	14·4
£250	32·0	36·3	28·2	26·1
Manual women				
£100	9·1	10·0	7·2	7·4
£150	58·3	53·3	53·3	49·9
£200	87·6	87·8	82·8	81·9
£250	97·3	94·4	95·3	93·6
Non-manual women				
£100	1·5	2·4	1·8	1·2
£150	20·4	24·4	19·9	14·8
£200	49·9	54·2	51·3	40·6
£250	67·6	71·8	67·9	59·6

Source: New Earnings Survey.

Full time employees on adult rates—pay unaffected by absence
Proportion with gross weekly earnings including overtime below the following amounts: April 1992

	Yorkshire/ Humberside	North Yorkshire	North	Great Britain
Manual men				
£100	0·8	1·5	0·8	0·6
£150	8·1	10·8	8·3	7·8
£200	27·0	34·8	25·9	26·1
£250	50·5	59·8	50·6	49·6
Non-manual men				
£100	0·8	1·2	0·5	0·4
£150	5·5	7·8	4·5	3·9
£200	16·1	20·0	13·6	12·4
£250	28·9	33·3	25·2	23·2
Manual women				
£100	8·3	7·8	5·3	6·7
£150	52·9	48·9	47·7	44·7
£200	80·1	81·1	76·7	75·4
£250	92·6	88·9	92·6	89·3
Non-manual women				
£100	1·4	2·1	1·7	1·1
£150	19·3	23·1	18·7	13·7
£200	47·7	52·3	48·6	38·6
£250	65·8	70·0	65·6	57·8

Source: New Earnings Survey

Wages

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current average earnings of part-time workers on adult rates, distinguishing between manual and non-manual in *(a)* Yorkshire and Humberside, *(b)* west Yorkshire, *(c)* South Yorkshire, *(d)* north Yorkshire, *(e)* Humberside, *(f)* the north of England and *(g)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is contained in the following table:

Average gross weekly earnings of part-time employees on adult rates of pay unaffected by absence
April 1992

	Manual £	Non-manual £
Yorkshire and Humberside	70·8	97·2
West Yorkshire	67·7	96·1
South Yorkshire	73·1	100·4
North Yorkshire	74·9	—
Humberside	72·0	—
North	69·1	93·0
United Kingdom	72·7	103·7

Source: New Earnings Survey, Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
Note: "—" denotes sample number too small or standard error too large for reliable estimate.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of workers on adult rates currently earn less than *(a)* £2·50, *(b)* £3·00, *(c)* £3·50, *(d)* £4·00, *(e)* £4·50, *(f)* £5·00, *(g)* £5·50 and *(h)* £6·50 per hour including and excluding overtime, in (i) Yorkshire and Humberside, (ii) north Yorkshire, (iii) the north and (iv) the United Kingdom, distinguishing between manual and non-manual, male and female and full and part-time workers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information available from the new earnings survey can be found in the following tables:

Full-time employees on adult rates—pay unaffected by absence
Proportion with gross hourly earnings including overtime below the following amounts: April 1992

£	Yorkshire/ Humberside	North Yorkshire	North	Great Britain
Manual men				
2·50	·6	·9	·8	·5
3·00	2·3	3·7	2·6	2·1
3·50	6·1	7·6	6·5	5·8
4·00	13·8	19·7	13·0	12·7
4·50	24·1	31·9	21·6	22·2
5·00	36·0	45·4	31·5	33·3
5·50	48·2	59·4	43·9	45·2
6·50	67·6	77·3	64·1	64·8
Non-manual men				
2·50	·5	·6	·4	·3
3·00	1·0	1·6	1·1	·8
3·50	3·6	6·2	3·1	2·4
4·00	6·9	9·9	6·9	4·8
4·50	10·6	14·3	9·5	7·9
5·00	16·0	21·1	13·6	11·9
5·50	21·3	27·0	17·8	16·4
6·50	31·2	37·9	26·7	24·9
Manual women				
2·50	3·0	1·3	4·2	3·4
3·00	16·6	12·8	17·5	13·8
3·50	39·5	33·3	37·2	31·7
4·00	57·5	52·6	55·2	49·9

£	Yorkshire/ Humberside	North Yorkshire	North	Great Britain
4·50	69·6	62·8	68·2	64·6
5·00	80·9	79·5	78·8	76·7
5·50	89·3	88·5	85·2	84·7
6·50	96·2	93·6	95·6	93·3
Non-manual women				
2·50	·8	·9	1·2	·5
3·00	2·9	4·4	3·4	1·9
3·50	10·3	14·2	10·0	6·7
4·00	19·1	25·9	19·4	13·2
4·50	30·0	38·5	30·3	21·7
5·00	40·3	48·3	42·0	31·4
5·50	50·6	59·3	53·6	41·1
6·50	65·3	76·0	68·6	55·8

Part-time employees on adult rates—pay unaffected by absence
Proportion with gross hourly earnings including overtime below the following amounts: April 1992

£	Yorkshire/ Humberside	North Yorkshire	North	Great Britain
Manual women				
2·50	5·5	4·9	5·6	6·5
3·00	23·2	20·6	26·9	22·0
3·50	49·6	39·2	64·9	51·8
4·00	74·5	65·7	81·2	71·3
4·50	84·6	78·4	87·5	82·9
5·00	92·2	92·2	92·4	90·2
5·50	95·5	95·1	94·2	93·8
6·50	97·7	96·1	96·4	96·9
Non-manual women				
2·50	2·5	3·0	2·2	2·0
3·00	7·3	6·0	7·5	6·0
3·50	28·5	36·3	31·0	24·7
4·00	44·5	51·8	44·4	38·2
4·50	58·2	61·9	54·9	51·5
5·00	68·4	68·5	66·1	62·2
5·50	76·2	78·6	75·6	70·1
6·50	84·7	86·9	85·2	79·9

Full-time employees on adult rates—pay unaffected by absence
Proportion with gross hourly earnings excluding overtime below the following amounts: April 1992

£	Yorkshire/ Humberside	North Yorkshire	North	Great Britain
Manual men				
2·50	0·8	0·9	0·9	0·6
3·00	2·6	3·9	2·8	2·4
3·50	7·3	9·6	7·7	6·8
4·00	17·2	25·0	14·9	15·5
4·50	27·9	37·8	23·6	25·4
5·00	39·6	50·5	34·0	36·6
5·50	52·4	63·8	46·1	48·4
6·50	70·7	79·1	66·3	67·4
Non-manual men				
2·50	0·5	0·6	0·4	0·3
3·00	1·2	1·9	1·1	0·8
3·50	4·0	6·2	3·5	2·5
4·00	7·5	11·2	7·0	5·2
4·50	11·3	14·9	10·0	8·4
5·00	16·8	21·4	14·1	12·5
5·50	22·0	27·6	19·0	17·0
6·50	32·1	38·2	27·7	25·8
Manual women				
2·50	3·2	2·6	4·4	3·6
3·00	17·5	12·8	17·5	14·4
3·50	41·0	37·2	37·7	33·2
4·00	59·3	55·1	56·7	51·8
4·50	72·1	65·4	69·5	66·2
5·00	82·5	79·5	79·3	77·8
5·50	90·2	92·3	86·2	85·6
6·50	97·1	94·9	95·6	93·8
Non-manual women				
2·50	0·8	1·3	1·2	0·5
3·00	3·0	4·7	3·5	1·9
3·50	10·7	14·8	10·2	6·9
4·00	19·3	25·9	19·9	13·5
4·50	30·3	39·4	30·9	22·1
5·00	40·8	48·9	43·2	31·9
5·50	51·1	59·9	55·1	41·7
6·50	65·9	76·0	69·1	56·3

Part-time employees on adult rates—pay unaffected by absence
Proportion with gross hourly earnings excluding overtime below the following amounts: April 1992

£	Yorkshire/ Humberside	North Yorkshire	North	Great Britain
Manual women				
2·50	5·5	4·9	5·6	6·5
3·00	23·9	20·6	27·1	22·3
3·50	49·8	39·2	65·1	52·1
4·00	74·7	63·7	81·4	72·0
4·50	84·6	76·5	87·3	82·9
5·00	91·7	89·2	92·8	90·2
5·50	95·0	93·1	94·6	93·8
6·50	97·5	95·1	96·2	96·8
Non-manual women				
2·50	2·5	3·0	2·2	2·1
3·00	7·6	6·5	7·7	6·1
3·50	28·7	35·1	32·1	25·2
4·00	45·1	52·4	44·7	38·5
4·50	58·4	62·5	54·6	51·6
5·00	68·7	68·5	66·1	62·3
5·50	76·2	78·6	75·4	70·0
6·50	84·7	86·9	85·3	79·9

Source: New Earnings Survey.

Note: Information for part-time men is not available.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the median, highest and lowest decile earnings of full-time workers on adult rates, distinguishing between male and female, manual and non-manual in *(a)* Yorkshire and Humberside, *(b)* the north of England and *(c)* the United Kingdom in each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information for Great Britain and the regions of Britain can be found in table 116 of part E of the new earnings survey for each of the years requested.

Corresponding information for Northern Ireland is available only from 1984 and can be found in table 1 of the Northern Ireland report. Information for the United Kingdom is not available.

Unemployment

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to assist areas with rising unemployment, in particular areas of high concentrations of defence-related industry; what special programmes are available for such areas; and what plans he has to increase such assistance.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 7 July 1993, *Official Report*, columns *201-2*.

Sickness Benefit

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the issue by claimant advisers in the Employment Service of standard letters asking doctors to advise whether a claimant is incapable for work; and if he will publish the guidance for the distribution of such letters.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. J. Turner to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 15 July 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, it is the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the Agency's Chief Executive to answer Parliamentary Questions about relevant operational matters. In his absence, I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State about the issue, by our Client Advisers, of letters asking doctors to advise clients on their capability for work.

It may help if I explain that everyone claiming unemployment benefit (UB), credits of National Insurance contributions and Income Support (IS) as an unemployed person must be capable of, available for and actively seeking work. ES receptionists and advisers have a key role in making sure clients understand and meet these conditions. Where evidence suggests clients are not meeting them, then our people investigate why and explain the alternatives which may exist. This may include helping clients who are not entitled to UB get an alternative benefit such as Sickness Benefit.

Guidance to ES local office receptionists and advisers, when dealing with new claims for UB, therefore requires that they sensitively prove the issue of capability to find out if there is a current claim to Sickness Benefit; or if the client believes they have a health problem which stops them from working. Only where there is a doubt about whether a client is capable of work, and the client is willing to seek further advice from their GP will an adviser suggest they seek medical advice. If the client does not wish to seek further advice but our people have doubts about their capability for work, their claim will be taken and referred to an independent adjudicating authority for a decision on entitlement.

Where a client is already claiming UB but states they are not capable of work, an ES adviser will assess whether there is a more appropriate benefit and seek to facilitate a smooth transition if appropriate. As part of this process an adviser may suggest the client seeks their GP's advice about their capacity to work. To explain the situation to the GP the adviser will send them a letter (Annex 1) explaining why the client is seeking their opinion. The client is also given a letter to make clear to them that they are seeking medical advice on their own behalf, not on behalf of the ES (Annex 2). The use of these letters also makes sure that a consistent approach is maintained across the network of our local offices. I have also attached (Annex 3) a copy of the guidance available to advisers on the issue of these letters.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

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Annex 1

Appendix V4 (para V17)

Letter to GP Explaining Advice Given to Client by Client Adviser

The Employment Service
Employment Department

Date

I am the Client Adviser at..... benefit office; part of the Employment Service. I give advice to unemployed people to help them find suitable work and provide information about the benefits which they may receive. I also have to ensure that people satisfy the conditions of entitlement for receiving Unemployment Benefit, Income Support and/or credits of NI. One of the main conditions laid down in the Social Security Act 1975 is that the client must be capable of taking up suitable work.

When I interviewed your patient on..... *he/she informed me that they had health problems that prevents them undertaking any employment. In these circumstances I have had to suggest that *he/she should seek your advice about their fitness for employment.

If in your opinion *he/she is incapable of all work then you will no doubt advise your patient in accordance with your own clinical judgement.

Should you advise your patient that *he/she is capable of work then it will be necessary for them to see me again to reconsider their claim to unemployment benefit, income support and/or credits of NI.

Client Adviser

*Cross out the one which does not apply.

Annex 2

ES Guide 39

Appendix V3 (para V17)

Letter to Client Suggesting they Seek GPs Advice

The Employment Service
Employment Department

Date

When I saw you on.....about your claim for unemployment benefit, you told me that you had a health problem which prevented you doing any work. This means that you do not seem to be capable of and available for work, which is one of the main rules for payment of unemployment benefit (Social Security Act 1975).

In these circumstances I had to suggest that you seek your doctor's advice about your fitness to work. Please take this letter with you if you decide to go to see your doctor.

*I would like to see you again on.....

at.....

Client Adviser

*Cross out if it does not apply.

Annex 3

V **ES Guide 39**

Current claim—no medical evidence

V16 If the client has an established claim to benefit and states during an interview that they:

a have recently been disallowed Sickness or Invalidity Benefit, and

b wish to appeal against the DSS AO's disallowance, and

c their doctor is not issuing sickness certificates, and

d their medical condition has significantly deteriorated since they last visited their doctor or

e are not capable of undertaking work; and

f have not seen their doctor;

ask them to seek their doctor's advice about their capacity to work.

V17 If the client agrees to see their doctor, complete and give them a copy of the letter in Appendix V3. Write to the GP using the letter in Appendix V4 explaining the reason for the client's visit, enclosing a copy of the letter issued to the client to avoid confusion between the client and the doctor as to why medical advice is being sought about their capacity for work. **Make sure the client knows they are seeking medical advice on their own behalf, not on behalf of you or the ES.**

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fast Breeder Reactor

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the scope of the United Kingdom fast breeder reactor programme following the closure of the Dounreay reactor; if he will outline the differences from the programme for FBR construction contained in the Windscale inquiry report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I announced on 19 November 1992, *Official Report*, column 411, that funding of fast reactor research and development beyond March 1993 was not a priority and that the programme would therefore be wound down. No further Government-funded work is planned except for a limited programme of experiments associated with the closure of the prototype fast reactor at Dounreay. Any work beyond that is a matter for the industry.

In his conclusions to the Windscale inquiry report, the then Mr. Justice Parker concluded that the construction of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant was desirable although it was then possible that it would be decided not to proceed further with fast reactors, at any rate for a period.

Coal Industry

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total amount spent on redundancy pay in the coal mining industry since 1979.

Mr. Eggar: I refer to my reply to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 13 July, *Official Report*, columns *437-38*.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total amount spent on retraining redundant mine workers since 1979.

Mr. Eggar: The information available on expenditure on retraining redundant mineworkers relates to British Coal's job and career change scheme (JACCS).

Total expenditure from the introduction of JACCS in June 1985 to the end of March 1993 was £42·98 million.

This figure does not include expenditure on those who entered retraining directly via other agencies, training and enterprise colleges, job centres, restart programmes etc.

Information about previous occupation and/or industry before entering a Government training scheme is not collected centrally.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications he has received for import licences for spent nuclear fuel shipments destined for THORP between the present time and 1 November.

Mr. Eggar: All shipments of spent fuel for reprocessing at THORP are made in accordance with the provisions of the Import of Goods (Control) Order 1954. Unless the spent fuel is consigned from the European Community a licence is required. The number of shipments to take place between the present time and 1 November is a matter for the company concerned.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, further to his statement on Monday 28 June,

Official Report, column 691, on what evidence he based the figure of £5 billion as the amount of compensation which might be payable in respect of failure to operate THORP.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 8 July 1993]*: Whether any money would need to be paid to customers if THORP did not operate, and if so how much, would depend on the circumstances, including those arising in the event of any breach of contract. British Nuclear Fuels plc has advised me that its legal advice is that the contracts in question are very robust.

BNFL has also advised me that the figure of £5 billion in question is the sum of the company's assessment of the economic detriment to the United Kingdom of abandoning THORP—about £1 billion—plus a further £4 billion, being an approximate estimate of the total amount already invested by overseas customers in THORP reprocessing—taking account of transport costs, interest and exchange rate movements.

If any customer were to make a claim against BNFL, it would be for the company to decide how to respond. In the absence of agreement, how much—if anything—would be payable would be determined in the courts in the light of the specific circumstances.

Unemployment

Mr. Pope: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to assist areas with rising unemployment, in particular areas of high concentrations of defence-related industry; what special programmes are available for such areas; and what plans he has to increase such assistance.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department provides advice on diversification through the "Changing Tack" regional seminar programme and associated help manual. In addition, areas which are adversely affected by defence changes may be able to benefit from the EC KONVER initiative, which will be worth some £15 million to the United Kingdom as a whole.

It is for firms themselves to build on their skills and technologies to achieve success in new markets. The DTI offers a wide range of schemes to help companies improve product planning, innovation processes and marketing skills.

Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 5 July, *Official Report*, column *35*, on representations from lessees, how many of the complainants who wrote to his Department about the treatment of lessees by Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd. have been interviewed by officials of his Department.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: In response to a recent request, my officials are proposing to meet representatives of the National Association of Inntrepreneurs Lessees in the near future.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assurances he has received from Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd. concerning imposition of commercial full market rents on those of its tenants who remain subject to a beer tie.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The company has told my Department that its assessment of a market rent reflects the particular circumstances of individual public houses, including whether or not they are tied.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 12 July, *Official Report*, column *347-48*, on Inntrepreneur's treatment of tenants, if he will list the assurances given to Ministers by Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd. in 1991 about the treatment of tenants, indicating to what extent they were confined to the introduction of procedures for long-term leases to be determined by independent arbitration where they could not be agreed with tenants.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The assurances were given to Ministers in 1991 by all major brewers. They related to the sympathetic treatment of tenants who might have real difficulties in taking on a long-term lease, such as those nearing retirement, as well as the introduction of independent arbitration procedures.

Grand Metropolitan Estates Ltd.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 12 July, *Official Report*, column *347-48*, on discussions with Grand Metropolitan Estates Ltd., what were the undertakings given to the Director of Fair Trading by Grand Metropolitan Estates Ltd., following the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the Elders IXL Ltd./Grand Metropolitan plc merger; and whether he is satisfied that these have been met.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have placed copies of the undertakings in the Library of the House. The majority of the undertakings were to come into effect in three stages, on 31 October 1992, 31 March 1995 and 31 March 1998. The parties have supplied the Director General of Fair Trading (DGFT) with details of the measures they have taken to comply with the first of these stages. These have been considered carefully by the Office of Fair Trading and some points of detail are presently the subject of correspondence with the company. The DGFT's monitoring of compliance will be a continuous process.

Insolvency Service Executive Agency

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set the Insolvency Service executive agency for 1993-94.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have set the Insolvency Service the target of sustaining as far as possible the level of productivity in case administration which it achieved in 1992-93. I shall continue to expect it to bring proceedings for the disqualification of directors of failed companies where these are in the public interest and the submission of prosecution reports where there is evidence of criminal behaviour.

In addition, I have set the service the following quality of service targets for 1993-94:

to report to creditors on assets and liabilities within nine weeks in at least 75 per cent. of all cases;
to hold the initial meeting of creditors within 12 weeks in at least 80 per cent. of all cases;
to check and action at least 95 per cent. of payment requisitions within 10 days or by the due date;
to submit reports within 10 months in at least 80 per cent. of cases where there is evidence of criminality;
to submit disqualification reports within 15 months in at least 80 per cent. of cases where there is evidence of unfit conduct by directors.

These are based on an assumption of 40,000 new cases and the completion of 28,000 cases in 1993-94.

In addition, I have set the chief executive of the service the targets of

replying within 10 working days to letters from Members of Parliament delegated to him for reply, and
producing commercial-style accounts for 1993-94, which will form the basis for the preparation of auditable accounts.

Small Businesses

Dr. Moonie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what definition of a small or medium-sized enterprise is used by his Department.

Mr. McLoughlin: The size of a business needs to be considered in relation to its sector, to its stage of development as well as in the context of any particular scheme or initiative.

The DTI does not therefore use a single definition for all purposes. Instead DTI schemes targeted at small and medium-sized businesses adopt different definitions depending on their particular objectives.

For example, the small firms merit award for research and technology (SMART) competition is for individuals or businesses with fewer than 50 employees; whereas the enterprise initiative consultancy scheme is open to firms employing up to 500 employees. The loan guarantee scheme, on the other hand, makes use of both employee number and turnover and these differ from sector to sector as appropriate.

Dr. Moonie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the maximum size of company that can receive support under the EUREKA programme in the United Kingdom; and what is the maximum size in each of the other participating countries.

Mr. McLoughlin: With regard to the restrictions on the size of company that can receive support from my Department for EUREKA projects, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) on 30 June 1993, *Official Report*, column 513. This outlines the changes that will occur after 1 September 1993.

The restrictions on the provision of funding for EUREKA projects in other countries is a matter for their individual Governments and disclosure of information is limited. Recent information that is available is presented below:

Country	*Restrictions*
Austria	None
Belgium	Priorities for innovative projects with likely economic/employment benefits
Denmark	None
Finland	Priorities for industrial funding especially SMEs and market orientated projects
France	Priorities for SMEs
Germany	Certain technology areas restricted
Greece	Priorities for large national industry and SMEs
Iceland	Priorities for industry, market orientated projects for national advantage
Ireland	Priorities for manufacturing industry. State enterprises not eligible
Italy	Government bodies ineligible. Research institutes must be associated with industry
Luxembourg	Luxembourg-based industrial partner necessary
Netherlands	Research institutes and universities ineligible
Norway	Universities and research institutes must constitute with national companies
Portugal	No information available
Spain	Priorities according to Spanish R and D priorities
Sweden	SMEs given priority
Switzerland	Industry ineligible
Turkey	No information available

Dr. Moonie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the future participation of the United Kingdom in the EUREKA programme.

Mr. McLoughlin: EUREKA is an industry-led, bottom-up initiative, but I expect the United Kingdom to continue to be a major participant with United Kingdom organisations both initiating and joining new EUREKA projects. As part of its commitment to EUREKA the United Kingdom will take over the EUREKA chair in 1996-97.

Dr. Moonie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the maximum size of company that can benefit from *(a)* the small firms loan guarantee scheme, *(b)* LINK, *(c)* advanced technology programmes, *(d)* SMART and *(e)* Support for products under research.

Mr. McLoughlin: The maximum size of company that can benefit from the small firms loan guarantee scheme, LINK, advanced technology programmes, SMART and SPUR is currently as follows:

Small firms loan guarantee scheme—companies of 200 employees or less, with the exception of the construction, mining and quarrying industries where the limit is 25, that also meet the following sectoral criteria:

- Agriculture, horticulture and service industries—maximum turnover of £500,000;
- Wholesaling—maximum turnover £2,000,000;
- Manufacturing—maximum turnover £3,000,000;
- Catering—maximum of two outlets;
- Road transport—maximum of five vehicles.

LINK and advanced technology programmes[1]—there is no size limit.

SMART—49 employees or fewer.

SPUR—500 employees or less.

[1] From 1 September 1993 advanced technology programmes will be closed to applications for new projects.

MINIS Returns

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will publish his Department's management information system for Ministers returns.

Mr. Sainsbury: The MINIS 93 returns were published today. A set has been placed in the Library of the House.

Environmental Schemes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the earliest possible date for the reopening of the environmental management options scheme, environmental technology innovation scheme and EUROENVIRON.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* The Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment are considering what future support might be appropriate to encourage innovation by industry in environmental technology. This support might include some elements of the three departmental schemes referred to by the hon. Member but no decision has yet been taken.

Postal Charges

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultation his Department has had with the Post Office covering the increase in charges for recorded, registered and special deliveries; and if he sought the advice of the Mail Users Association or business leaders about the increases.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 13 July 1993:]* The pricing and specifications of Royal Mail's services are operational matters for the Post Office in consultation with the Post Office Users National Council. My Department has, however, made clear to the Post Office its view that, in line with Government policy, the prices charged for recorded, registered and special deliveries should reflect the true costs of these services and should not be subsidised by users of ordinary mail services.

HEALTH

Speech Therapy

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many speech therapists were employed in the NHS in each of the last five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information available is shown in the table.

Whole-time equivalent speech therapists in England for September of each year

	Number
1987	2,630
1988	2,730
1989	2,810
1990	2,940
1991	3,020

Source: Department of Health non-medical work force census.

Notes:

1. The figures represent speech therapists directly employed in the hospital and community health service.
2. The figures for 1991 include staff in the national health service trusts.
3. Figures for 1992 are not yet available.

Women's Unit

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will publish *(a)* the programme of work for the women's unit and *(b)* the goals that have been achieved to date, following the establishment of Opportunity 2000;

(2) whether she has any plans to continue the women's unit beyond 1994.

Mr. Sackville: In September 1991 the Department of Health was the first Government Department to sign up to Opportunity 2000. The national health service goal is to take full advantage of the potential of women in the NHS so that the best health care can be provided for all members of the population.

To achieve its overall objectives, the national health service management executive has set eight goals for the NHS as the first milestone in the period to the year 2000. The NHSME wants to reach these goals by the end of 1994.

Numerical goals have been set to increase the numbers of women in senior management, accountancy, medical consultants and non-executive positions. Other goals address women's needs for personal and management development; flexible working and child care; and equal access to selection and promotion.

The programme of work for the NHS women's unit has been outlined in the NHS "Implementation Guide to Opportunity 2000", which will be placed in the Library, and 18 months into the campaign enocuraging progress has been made. The monitoring procedure, through local action plans, is ongoing and is constantly assessed by the unit. The future existence of the unit beyond 1994 will depend upon reviewing the progress made in achieving these goals.

Nursery Places

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many day care nursery places there were in each of the last five years for children under three years and from three years to compulsory school age; and what corresponding information for the latest available year she has for other EC member states.

Mr. Bowis: Centrally collected information on places in day nurseries in the public and independent sectors includes all places for children under five; information for the last five years is shown in the table.

Day nursery places available for children under 5
England

As at 31 March	*Number*
1987	60,733
1988	66,237
1989	75,378
1990	87,451
1991	106,068

Information about publicly funded child care services in European Community member states was included in a report from the European Parliament's Committee on Childcare and Equality of Opportunity, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Folic Acid

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment she has made of whether folic acid is generally available as a medical product on prescription in both 4 mg and 0·5 mg strengths;

(2) what proposals she has to implement recommendation 8.3 of the expert advisory group on folic acid and neural tube defects that prescriptions of folic acid, when given for the prevention of NTD, should be free.

Mr. Sackville: Folic acid is not generally available as a licensed product on prescription in either 4 mg or 0·5 mg strengths. Prescriptions of folic acid 5 mg and of folic acid 0·4 mg with iron, are available free of charge to those who are entitled to prescription charge exemption, including pregnant women and those who qualify for charge remission under the national health service low-income scheme. There are no plans to extend these arrangements.

Passive Smoking

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates have been made of the annual number of people dying from causes related to passive smoking; what plans there are to ban smoking in public places to which children have access; and if she will list the diseases in children which can be caused by passive smoking.

Mr. Sackville: In its fourth report, published in 1988, the Independent Scientific Committee on Smoking and Health estimated the numbers of lung cancer deaths in non-smokers exposed to environmental tobacco smoke over most of their lives as "several hundred deaths per year". A copy of the report is available in the Library.

"The Health of the Nation" White Paper sets a target of 80 per cent. of public places being covered by effective smoking policies by 1994. The White Paper states that the Government would consider legislation on smoking in public places if voluntary progress is not maintained.

International scientific studies suggest that exposure of children to environmental tobacco smoke from parental smoking is causally associated with:

increased prevalence of respiratory symptoms of irritation,
increased prevalence of middle ear effusion ("glue ear"),
increased risk of lower respiratory tract infections (pneumonia, bronchitis and bronchiolitis) in infants and young children,
additional episodes and increase of severity of asthma in children who already have the disease.

Doctors (Appeals)

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 12 May, *Official Report*, column *481*, if she will take steps to ensure that the information on which she and the Medical Advisory Committee consider appeals by doctors against penalties imposed on them is complete and free from errors of fact; and if she will propose amendments to the National Health Service (Service Committees and Tribunal) Regulations to allow the involvement of the original complainant in the process.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are satisfied that all the information provided by the complainant and the respondent in connection with the original investigation and any appeal, including sworn testimony in some cases, is available to the Medical Advisory Committee when it considers a penalty. We recently announced a full and independent review of all national health service complaints procedures under the chairmanship of Professor Allan Wilson and we look to his committee to advise us on whether any changes are needed.

Parent-held Records

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost of parent-held records.

Mr. Bowis: We understand that the unit cost of the model record produced by the British Paediatric Association is between £1·05 and £1·08, depending upon the quantity ordered.

GP Fund Holders

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the relative cost of general practitioner fund holding and joint commissioning by district health authorities and general practitioners.

Mr. Sackville: Both general practitioner fund holding and district health authority purchasing are improving value for money and services to patients.

Home Helps

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many home helps are employed by each local authority responsible for community care; and what is the ratio of home helps to population in each authority.

Mr. Bowis: The centrally available data on whole-time equivalent directly employed home helps, excluding home help organisers and assistant organisers, as at September 1992, the latest date for which this information is available, are shown in the table:

Home helps directly employed[1] at 30 September 1992

1992 Local Authority Social Services Department	*Home Helps (WTE)*	*Per 1,000 Total population[2]*
Avon	1272·9	1·32
Barking and Dagenham	243·4	1·68
Barnet	231·4	0·77
Barnsley	421·0	1·88
Bedfordshire	489·0	0·91
Berkshire	590·2	0·78
Bexley	268·5	1·23
Birmingham	1,320·0	1·33
Bolton	338	1·28

1992 Local Authority Social Services Department	Home Helps (WTE)	Per 1,000 Total population[2]
Bradford	696·4	1·48
Brent	108·4	0·44
Bromley	243·2	0·82
Buckinghamshire	532·0	0·82
Bury	208·3	1·16
Calderdale	388·6	2·00
Cambridgeshire	467·5	0·69
Camden	273·3	1·53
Cheshire	865·1	0·89
City of London	13·9	3·40
Cleveland	731·3	1·31
Cornwall and Scilly Isles	478·9	1·00
Coventry	361·0	1·19
Croydon	246·1	0·77
Cumbria	497·5	1·01
Derbyshire	1406·0	1·49
Devon	921·4	0·88
Doncaster	466·6	1·59
Dorset	535·6	0·80
Dudley	309·4	1·00
Durham	943·2	1·56
Ealing	224·0	0·80
East Sussex	631·0	0·88
Enfield	308·0	1·17
Essex	1404·1	0·90
Gateshead	341·0	1·68
Gloucestershire	493·0	0·91
Greenwich	288·0	1·35
Hackney	381·0	2·08
Hammersmith	261·4	1·72
Hampshire	955·9	0·60
Haringey	255·5	1·27
Harrow	239·1	1·18
Havering	256·4	1·12
Hereford and Worcester	654·6	0·95
Hertfordshire	818·6	0·82
Hillingdon	283·6	1·20
Hounslow	226·1	1·09
Humberside	1,199·6	1·37
Isle of Wight	149·0	1·18
Islington	248·0	1·46
Kensington and Chelsea	142·9	0·98
Kent	658·9	0·43
Kingston upon Thames	95·9	0·69
Kirklees	546·3	1·44
Knowsley	92·0	0·60
Lambeth	452·1	1·82
Lancashire	1,637·0	1·16
Leeds	1,600·0	2·26
Leicestershire	691·7	0·77
Lewisham	368·6	1·57
Lincolnshire	525·0	0·88
Liverpool	847·0	1·81
Manchester	699·4	1·63
Merton	216·1	1·26
Newcastle	512·7	1·89
Newham	385·9	1·77
Norfolk	986·8	1·29
North Tyneside	360·0	1·85
North Yorkshire	797·4	1·10
Northamptonshire	375·0	0·63
Northumberland	484·0	1·57
Nottinghamshire	1,201·5	1·18
Oldham	356·0	1·62
Oxfordshire	525·2	0·90
Redbridge	226·5	0·98
Richmond upon Thames	185·2	1·12
Rochdale	438·5	2·13
Rotherham	374·6	1·47
Salford	374·0	1·66
Sandwell	421·2	1·43
Sefton	337·8	1·14
Sheffield	1,503·1	2·90
Shropshire	264·7	0·64
Solihull	183·4	0·91
Somerset	0·00	0·00
South Tyneside	228·0	1·45
Southwark	282·7	1·26
Staffordshire	1,400·5	1·33
Stockport	371·1	1·28
St. Helens	340·9	1·89
Suffolk	556·1	0·83
Sunderland	478·8	1·62
Surrey	457·4	0·44
Sutton	208·0	1·22
Tameside	388·4	1·76
Tower Hamlets	165·5	0·98
Trafford	307·2	1·43
Wakefield	444·3	1·40
Walsall	244·8	0·93
Waltham Forest	442·9	2·06
Wandsworth	439·6	1·73
Warwickshire	464·5	0·95
West Sussex	750·3	1·04
Westminster	304·0	1·67
Wigan	406·9	1·31
Wiltshire	329·4	0·57
Wirral	498·7	1·48
Wolverhampton	391·2	1·58

[1] Excludes staff employed in contracted out arrangements.
[2] Related to OPCS 1991-based population projection for 1992.

Contraception

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of general practitioners *(a)* provide a family planning service, *(b)* put in claims for the fitting of intra-uterine contraceptive devices in the last year, *(c)* provide condoms to patients, *(d)* hold the Joint Committee on Contraception certificate and *(e)* prescribed a diaphragm in the last year.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available in the form requested.

As at 1 October 1992, 82 per cent. of general practitioners in England were contracted with family health services authorities to provide contraceptive services to patients on their own list. For the same date, 17 per cent. of GPs in England were contracted with FHSAs to provide contraceptive services to patients on any list.

Data from a biannual survey indicates that about half of the GPs in England put in claims for the fitting of IUCDs for the six-month period ending 30 September 1992.

Hospitals (Complaints)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the number of recorded complaints about hospital services in each of the health regions in England and Wales during the last 12 months.

Dr. Mawhinney: The latest information available is shown in the table.

Written complaints by or on behalf of patients England 1991-92

	Number
Northern	2,124
Yorkshire	2,074
Trent	3,328
East Anglian	1,699
North West Thames	3,426
North East Thames	4,091
South East Thames	4,375

	Number
South West Thames	2,322
Wessex	2,435
Oxford	1,489
South Western	1,144
West Midlands	3,833
Mersey	986
North Western	3,391
Special Health Authority	799
Total Trusts	7,164
England Total	44,680

Source: K040 return 1991-92.
Under the patients charter, launched in October 1991, we made it clear that patients have the right to have any complaint about national health services investigated.
Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide increased resources to enable CHCs to fulfil their role in representing public opinion and monitoring the NHS.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is for regions, as establishing authorities for community health councils, to ensure that they are properly resourced. The national health service management executive wrote to regions last year reminding them of this obligation.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce legislation to ensure that all regional health authorities make all parts of community health council premises used by either members of the public or council members accessible to people with disabilities, with additional funding to complete such works or increased rental for alternative premises being provided in addition to the annual budget of the community health council; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: No. It is for individual regional health authorities to provide community health councils with suitable accommodation.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will introduce legislation for new statutory duties for community health councils giving them comprehensive monitoring rights over all services provided for NHS patients and rights of consultation and access to *(a)* district health authority units, *(b)* NHS trusts, *(c)* family health services authority services including general practitioner fund holders and *(d)* situations where health and nursing care are provided within the (i) voluntary, (ii) independent and (iii) private sectors; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will introduce legislation to give powers to community health councils to inspect residential and nursing homes; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have no plans to introduce legislation to give community health councils new statutory duties or powers.

Under current legislation, CHCs play a valuable role in helping to monitor services to national health service patients. Recent guidance in relation to monitoring of the patients charter has repeated the importance of this role.

CHCs have statutory rights of access to NHS premises. They must also be consulted by health authorities about proposals for any substantial variations in service. Where services to NHS patients are provided by the independent sector, purchasers can make clear in the contracts concerned the CHC's role in monitoring services.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance her Department issues to regional health authorities regarding the time scale for setting budgets for community health councils; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Midwives

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many midwives practise in each zone in London.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Practising midwives by London pay zone as at 30 September 1991: whole-time equivalent

	1991
Inner London	1,030
Outer London	1,750
Fringe	970
Extra territorial managed units	60

Note: All figures are rounded to the nearest ten whole-time equivalent.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many midwifery staff are employed in each region *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time (i) on agency basis and (ii) on bank contracts.

Mr. Sackville: The information available is shown in the table.

Midwives by nature of contract, England—September 1991 (whole-time equivalent)

	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Bank
ENGLAND	19,640	13,660	5,980	240
Northern	1,310	910	400	0
Yorkshire	1,620	1,210	410	0
Trent	1,880	1,390	490	20
East Anglian	780	610	180	20
North West Thames	1,130	880	250	0
North East Thames	1,600	1,280	310	10
South East Thames	1,310	990	320	30
South West Thames	1,040	780	260	10
Wessex	1,140	790	350	30
Oxford	1,030	730	300	50
South Western	1,180	10	1,1[illegible]	10

	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Bank
West Midlands	2,220	1,650	570	10
Mersey	1,110	770	340	10
North Western	2,190	1,580	620	20
Special health authorities	90	90	0	—

Notes:
1. All figures are rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalent.
2. Totals may not add due to rounding.
3. Bank totals included in full/part time columns.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table:

Midwives

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent midwives there are at each incremental point of each pay scale.

Midwives by pay scale and incremental point as at 30 September 1991, England: wte

Payscale	Incremental Points								Total
	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	Others	
NB61	—	0	0	—	20	—	—	0	30
NB91	—	0	—	—	30	0	0	0	40
NC11	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
NP21	0	10	0	0	0	30	10	0	60
NP26	0	0	0	0	10	0	—	—	20
NP31	20	30	30	0	30	0	—	20	130
NP36	590	620	560	550	3,670	200	—	400	6,600
NP41	70	110	280	450	490	1,530	140	60	3,120
NP46	220	350	400	430	6,130	480	60	90	8,160
NP51	10	20	50	70	330	30	0	10	510
NP56	10	20	20	20	270	20	—	10	380
NQ00	70	—	—	0	0	0	—	0	70
NR01	10	10	0	10	20	—	—	—	40
NR11	20	30	40	30	210	20	—	10	370
NR21	—	0	0	10	40	0	—	0	60
NR31	0	10	0	10	30	0	—	0	50
NR41	0	0	0	0	10	0	—	—	20
NR51	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Total									19,640

Note:—All figures are rounded to the nearest ten whole time equivalent.
Totals may not add due to rounding.
Figures include bank midwives.
"—" = zero
0 = less than 5

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the numbers of midwifery staff in 1992 given as whole-time equivalents.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not currently available. Data for September 1992 will be available later in the year.

London Hospitals

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has in relation to trust funds of the London hospitals.

Dr. Mawhinney: The trust funds of London hospitals are a matter for the trustees of the funds and the Charity Commissioners.

Paediatric Services

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the number of *(a)* paediatric specialist/consultants and *(b)* paediatric beds per 1,000 population in each EC country.

Mr. Bowis: In England in 1991 there were, 0·15 paediatric consultants and 1·76 beds in children wards per 1,000 children under age 15. Equivalent information for other European Community countries is not available centrally.

Splenectomy

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies she has commissioned into the desirability of vaccinating people who have undergone splenectomy against pneumonia and septicaemia.

Mr. Sackville: None. We have recommended to all doctors that people who have had a splenectomy should be vaccinated with the pneumococcal vaccine.

Inner London Services

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made of *(a)* the current level of demand and *(b)* the current level of unmet demand in inner London for services provided by (i) community psychiatric nurses, (ii) health visitors, (iii) other community nursing staff and *(iv)* general practitioners; and what assessment has been made of the increased level of demand if the recommendations in the Tomlinson report are followed.

Dr. Mawhinney: The assessment of local health needs is a matter for district health authorities and family health service authorities who will work together closely in inner London to tailor services to local demand. As we outlined in "Making London Better", the London initiative zone will be a focus for the development of primary and community services in London. LIZ is already enabling assessed needs to be met through a wide range of projects. We have provided an additional £43·5 million for investment on improving primary and community health services in this financial year.

School Nurses

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued as to the requirement for schools to have school nurses; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Under section 5 of the National Health Service Reorganisation Act 1977 district health authorities and other purchasers of health services for children are required to arrange for the medical examination of pupils in attendance at schools maintained by local education authorities and at grant maintained schools. The Department is preparing a good practice guide on community child health services including school health services. Later this year we plan to send a consultative draft to health and education authorities, professional bodies, and special interest groups inviting their comments.

Broadgreen Accident and Emergency Unit

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations she has now received about the closure of Broadgreen accident and emergency unit; how many beds will be lost; what compensatory provision for accident and emergency patients will be made at the Liverpool Royal hospital; and what it will cost to provide these extra beds.

Mr. Sackville: We have received 36 representations from hon. Members, approximately 23,000 letters from members of the public and a number of petitions. Liverpool health authority's consultation document proposing the closure of Broadgreen accident and emergency unit suggests that increasing the efficiency of Liverpool's hospitals to the national average in 1990 will enable services to be delivered from 500 fewer beds across the whole Liverpool conurbation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently considering Liverpool health authority's proposals and will take all factors into account before making a final decision. Under those proposals, A and E services currently provided at Broadgreen will be covered by improved facilities at the Royal Liverpool, Aintree and Whiston hospitals. For more information, the hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. D. H. Tod, chairman of Liverpool health authority.

Job Descriptions

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *614*, in what instances the provision of a job description to job applicants is regarded as beneficial.

Dr. Mawhinney: This is for each national health service employer to decide.

St. Bartholomew's

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the City organisations that have written in opposing the closure of St. Bartholomew's hospital's accident and emergency department; on what dates Ministers in her Department have visited St. Bartholomew's hospital in the last year; and how much time was spent on each visit to the nearest hour.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have received a number of letters regarding the accident and emergency department at St. Bartholomew's hospital, some of which have been received from City organisations. I visited Bart's hospital on 9 September, 5 November, 21 and 27 January. Records were not kept of the time spent.

Contact Lenses

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the charge made for contact lenses prescribed by the hospital eye service for each year since 1979.

Dr. Mawhinney: The charges are shown in the table.

	£
1 September 1979	6·15
1 April 1981	8·30
1 April 1982	7·90
1 April 1984	9·40
1 April 1985	25·00
1 September 1988	26·50
1 April 1990	28·85
1 April 1991	32·15
1 August 1991	32·80
1 April 1992	35·90
1 April 1993	36·90

Note—No changes were made in 1980, 1983, 1986, 1987 and 1989 from previous years.

Psychiatric Patients

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on progress on the inquiry into homicides and suicides committed by discharged psychiatric patients announced on 23 October 1991.

Mr. Bowis: The confidential inquiry into homicides and suicides by mentally ill people being conducted by the Royal College of Psychiatrists has commenced and is identifying cases of homicide by mentally ill people under the care of or recently discharged by the specialist psychiatric services. Of the 68 cases reviewed to date, 20

fall within the inquiry's remit and a further 12 are being followed up for clarification. Clinical staff are being approached in confidence for detailed information.

The inquiry is also looking at suicides by mentally ill people and has received a positive response. In some areas audit mechanisms have been set up to identify cases and give details of events surrounding the suicide. Collation of information began on 1 June this year when the inquiry has been notified of 55 cases for follow-up.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many internal inquiries have been conducted in the last five years by local authorities, health authorities, social services inspectorates and the courts into circumstances in which mentally ill people have been discharged into the community under the statutory after care provisions in section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983, subsequently to commit serious injury, assault, manslaughter or murder; and how many have been made public.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis her Department arrives at an appropriate prescription charge for NHS medicines; and to which votes the revenues raised are appropriated in aid.

Dr. Mawhinney: The prescription charge is an amount which successive Governments have thought it right, for those who can afford to do so, to contribute towards the cost of family health services. The revenue raised by charges is appropriated in aid of class XII, vote 2 and class XII, vote 1 of the main supply estimates 1993-94.

Medicines Commission

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to receive the annual report of the Medicines Commission for 1992.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have received the report and copies have today been laid before both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the requirements of section 5(2) of the Medicines Act 1968.

Bound volumes have been placed in the Library containing the 1992 reports of the Medicines Commission, the Committee on Safety of Medicines, the Committee on Dental and Surgical Materials, the British Pharmacopoeia Commission and the Veterinary Products Committee.

We are glad to pay tribute to the valuable work done by the distinguished members of the Medicines Act advisory bodies and thank them warmly for the time and effort which they contribute to the public interest in this most important field.

Food Safety

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she has taken to ensure that the codes of practice issued under section 40 of the Food Safety Act 1990 are consistently and sensibly enforced; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: On 6 May the Department wrote to all chief environmental health officers in England reminding them that food safety inspections should be conducted in accordance with code of practice No. 9 on food hygiene inspections and urging them to concentrate their efforts where significant risks are posed.

The Department will shortly be consulting on a revision of this code and code of practice No. 5 on the issue of improvement notices to improve and clarify them. in addition, on 25 May, my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food met representatives of the local authority associations, the Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards and the Institution of Environmental Health Officers to emphasise the importance Ministers attach to a sensible, risk-related approach to the enforcement of food law. The Department investigates with the local authorities concerned all cases brought to its attention where there is a suggestion that the law has been applied in an over-zealous way.

Nutritional Therapists

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recognition her Department has accorded to the Register of Nutritional Therapists Ltd.; what representations her Department has received about claims to official recognition made by this body; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We have recently been made aware of the claim that the title "The Register of Nutritional Therapists" has been approved by the Department of Health. We are taking up this matter with the company concerned and I shall write to my hon. Friend when the outcome of our inquiries is known.

Child Residential Care

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost to a local authority each year to keep a child in residential care.

Mr. Bowis: The centrally held national information is the direct revenue cost, net of related income, of keeping a child in a community home or registered voluntary home, excluding the cost of field social work support, central administration etc. This was £29,016 per year for the year ended 31 March 1991.

Adoption

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost to a local authority of arranging for the adoption of a child.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Fellowship Charitable Foundation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions her Department has held, and with whom, regarding the security and welfare of users of establishments currently run by the Fellowship Charitable Foundation.

Mr. Bowis: Our guidance, LAC(93)6, to local authorities stresses the value of having contingency plans to cover events such as unplanned home closures. The aim is to enable home closures to be handled with minimum disruption to individuals. Guidance on the practicalites of

such contingency planning was produced earlier this year by the community care support force and will be placed in the Library.

If, despite these measures, a residential care home suddenly closes and alternative accommodation is not available, the local authority should make residential care arrangements for the residents under its duty under the National Assistance Act 1948 to provide residential care to people who are in need of care and attention which is not otherwise available.

Dentistry

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by how much the minimum charge for dental treatment has risen in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms in each year since 1979.

Dr. Mawhinney: There is no minimum charge for national health service dental treatment. All treatment for those under 18 years is free, and 21 per cent. of adult courses of treatment are provided with full or partial relief from charges.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the location in England of emergency national health service dental units which are open at weekends; what is the average waiting time for a patient at each of these units; what guidance is given as to the recommended weekend opening hours and staffing levels of such units; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The 43 family health services authorities providing emergency dental services at weekends are shown in the table. These arrangements provide cover for patients in 84 family health services authority localities. Information on the average waiting time is not available centrally. Opening hours and staffing levels are matters for local decision. In addition, emergency treatment can also be provided by hospital accident and emergency departments.

Family health services authorities providing emergency dental services at weekends and bank holidays

Cleveland
Humberside
North Yorkshire
Bradford
Kirklees
Leeds
Wakefield
Leicestershire
Nottinghamshire
Doncaster
Sheffield
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster
Camden and Islington
City and East London
Enfield and Haringey
East Sussex
Kent
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham
Surrey
West Sussex
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth
Dorset
Hampshire
Wiltshire
Buckinghamshire
Devon
Shropshire
Staffordshire
Dudley
Wolverhampton
Cheshire
Liverpool
St. Helens and Knowsley
Lancashire
Bolton
Bury
Manchester
Oldham
Rochdale
Salford
Trafford
Wigan

Contraceptives

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration the Government have given to imposing prescription charges on contraceptives.

Mr. Sackville: We have no present plans to do so.

Prescription Charges

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by how much prescription charges have risen in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms between 1979 and 1993.

Dr. Mawhinney: On 1 April 1993, prescription charges had risen by £4·05 cash and £1·53 in real terms since 1979. The charge remains substantially less than the average total cost of a prescribed item to the national health service. Only one in five precribed items dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors now attracts a charge, compared with two in five in 1979.

Drugs Projects

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all drugs residential and rehabilitation projects by borough in the Greater London area; how many places each project has; what was the cost of each project in 1991-92; and what was the budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Bowis: Comprehensive information about residential and rehabilitation projects for drug misusers is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the Standing Conference on Drug Abuse, the national umbrella organisation for drug misuse services, which publishes a directory of services available to drug misusers by county and by London borough.

Steroids

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many successful prosecutions have been made relating to the sale and/or distribution of anabolic steroids in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* There has been one successful Medicines Act prosecution since 1991.

DEFENCE

Skyship 600

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role has been designed for the Skyship 600 airship ordered by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: A Skyship 600 airship has been supplied to the MOD by Westinghouse Surveillance System Ltd. for a series of trials to assess the suitability of airships for a variety of possible roles. Until these trials have been completed and the results assessed, no decisions can be made on any future operational roles that airships might undertake.

Service Training

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the budgeting implications of reduction in numbers of service personnel involved in training in each of the past five years.

Mr. Hanley: Following the introduction of the new management strategy, data is now collected by budgetary area—as shown in table 2.2 of Defence Statistics 1993—and not by programme. It is not possible to identify separately the budgetary implications of the reductions in numbers of service personnel involved in training without disproportionate cost.

Redundant Trainers

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to ensure that skilled trainers declared redundant by the armed services are used to their best advantage in the civilian economy.

Mr. Hanley: The Ministry of Defence provides a comprehensive training and resettlement service for all service leavers, including redundees. This is designed primarily to assist in the move to a second career, and includes advice on the job market and the skills required. Many service leavers not only possess a wide range of skills but will also have several years experience as instructors, trainers and teachers. In addition to the wider marketing of their potential through the "Access to Excellence" campaign, a number of specific initiatives are being pursued in conjunction with the Departments of Employment and Education to promote their value as instructors and trainers for employment opportunities through the training and enterprise councils and within the new general national vocational qualification scheme.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Spanish battalion in UNPROFOR II will be withdrawn; what changes have been or will be made to the area of responsibility of the United Kingdom contingent as a result; if additional logistic support will be required; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The duration of individual nations' contributions to UNPROFOR is a matter for the UN and the nations concerned, which we would expect to make public any such decision. Currently there are no plans to change the areas of responsibility of the various national contingents to UNPROFOR Bosnia-Herzegovina command, and consequently no requirement for additional logistic support.

Burma

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training facilities Her Majesty's Government currently offer to military personnel from Burma.

Mr. Hanley: None: The inclusion of Burma in the list of countries that receive military training provided in the answer my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton) gave the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on 27 May, at column *681*, referred to a civilian who was due to attend a military medical course, but who in the event did not turn up.

Red Arrows

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current annual cost of maintaining the Red Arrows RAF formation flying team.

Mr. Hanley: The full accounting which takes into account station overheads cost of maintaining and supporting the RAF Red Arrows aerobatic team for financial year 1992-93 was some £17,000,000. The cash cost, which comprises pay, aviation fuel and travel and subsistence, was some £2,000,000.

Airborne Warning and Communication System

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what limitations AWACS has in tracking slow-moving propellor-driven light aircraft; if he will make a statement on the reasons for these limitations and on their effects on the ability of the international community to police unauthorised air traffic over Bosnia-Herzegovina; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: AWACS was designed and developed to detect fast-moving military aircraft, larger than those suspected of violating the no-fly zone, flying beyond and below the coverage of surface radars. AWACS' performance in detecting small, slow-moving targets is less effective than for its primary role. The ability to detect these slow-moving targets is further inhibited by the "radar shadow" afforded by the mountainous terrain. Details of suspected violations are reported to the United Nations in a number of ways and the limitations of AWACS does not have a material effect on monitoring the operation of the no-fly zone.

Chemical and Biological Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many committees are run by the Chemical and Biological Defence Board of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council; what are the titles of each committee; how long each committee has existed; how many people sit on each committee; and how many of these people are from universities and institutions of higher education.

Mr. Hanley: The Chemical and Biological Defence Board of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council has three committees reporting to it. These are:

(i) The Biomedical Sciences Committee which has been in existence since 1 January 1992 and has nine members of whom seven are from universities and institutions of higher education.

(ii) The Microbiology and Biotechnology Committee which has been in existence since 1 January 1992 and has nine members of whom five are from universities and institutions of higher education.

(iii) The Physical Sciences Committee which has been in existence since 1 January 1981 and has 10 members all of whom are from universities of higher education.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times the Government have reviewed

their policy concerning the production of *(a)* chemical weapons and *(b)* biological weapons since 1979; and how many times United Kingdom Defence Ministers have discussed this policy with the Defense Secretaries of the United States Government during that time.

Mr. Hanley: The United Kingdom abandoned its offensive biological capability after the second world war and its offensive chemical capability in the 1950s and that remains the Government's policy. Since then the United Kingdom's policy has concentrated on implementation of an effective defence against the use of such weapons and international agreements on their control, destruction and eventual abolition. The Government consider their policy on these latter issues on a regular basis, and have a long-standing and continuing dialogue with the United States authorities. The issues are discussed at ministerial level when necessary.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many contingency plans have been considered or drawn up by the Ministry of Defence for the supply of chemicals and biological weapons from its allies in the event of an emergency, since 1963.

Mr. Hanley: The Ministry of Defence has had no contingency plans to obtain chemical or biological weapons from its allies since the United Kingdom abandoned its offensive capabilities in chemical weapons in the 1950s and biological weapons after the second world war.

Depleted Uranium Shells

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communication he has received since 1 June from *(a)* the Traumatic After Care Trust and *(b)* Galloway United Against Radiation Danger in regard to the health risks posed by the testing and use of depleted uranium shells.

Mr. Hanley: My Department has no record of receiving any communication from Galloway United Against Radiation Danger since 1 June. The directors of the Trauma After Care Trust wrote to me on 8 July, but their letter does not specifically mention such health risks.

Defence Statistics

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many copies of his Department's United Kingdom Defence Statistics 1993 have been printed; at what cost; and to whom it has been distributed.

Mr. Hanley: A total of 9,300 copies of United Kingdom Defence Statistics 1993 were printed. The costs of printing and publication were borne by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which aims to recover its costs from sales revenue.

In addition to commercial sales, copies were distributed widely within the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces, to British embassies and high commissions, other Government Departments, the Libraries of both Houses, the House of Commons Vote Office, members of the press and academics.

Expenditure

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of national income goes on military spending in *(a)* Britain, *(b)* Germany and *(c)* Japan; and what is the European average.

Mr. Hanley: Defence expenditure for the United Kingdom and Germany in 1992 as a proportion of gross domestic product was 4·1 per cent. and 2·2 per cent. respectively. Japan is expected to devote around 1 per cent. of its GDP to defence in 1992-93. Total defence expenditure by European NATO countries in 1992 was some 2·7 per cent. of their aggregate gross domestic product.

Guard service

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of his Department's new guard service and of its performance relative to previous arrangements.

Mr. Hanley: The MOD Guard Service (MGS) was implemented on 1 October 1992 to bring together a variety of guarding grades locally recruited at some 300 different sites under a wide variety of conditions of service. While the guards had given good service and provided security which was generally high, the new service is designed to produce a more professional body with commonality of uniform; professional standards; pay; conditions of service; staffing structure; and centralised training. The result is an improved performance over the previous arrangements. For the future, improvements to MGS training together with the introduction of recently formulated national vocational qualifications for guarding will further enhance the high standards already achieved.

Bangladesh

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there have been any secondees from the British Army to military training establishments in Bangladesh in 1992 or 1993; and what plans there are for such secondments in future.

Mr. Hanley: There were no British Army secondees in the period, although there was a tri-service training team on loan service in Bangladesh until October 1992. There are no immediate plans for any secondments in future.

Mr. Meacher To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for inviting Bangladeshi military personnel to attend development and technical training courses in British military establishments.

Mr. Hanley: Bangladesh bids for places on courses in British military establishments, in a similar way to other countries. Bangladeshi students attend military courses on a variety of subjects. Details of training provided are confidential.

PRIME MINISTER

Referendums

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the dates since 1979 on which Government policy on the desirability of a referendum has been expressed by the Prime Minister in an official capacity; and whether the Prime Minister was in favour in the cases listed in his parliamentary answer, *Official Report*, 28 November 1991, column *608*.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 28 November 1991 at columns

613-14. I supported the views expressed on behalf of the Government by my predecessor. Since then there have been four occasions, all of which referred to European integration, on which I have made the Government's views clear: 3 June 1992, *Official Report*, column 830; 18 June 1992, *Official Report*, column 1037; 16 March 1993, *Official Report*, column 167; and 30 March 1993, *Official Report*, column 156.

Tokyo Communiqué

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what specific steps he intends to take to *(a)* encourage the multilateral development banks to focus more intensively on sustainable development and *(b)* incorporate environmental appraisals into project preparation and to make them publicly available, as stated at paragraph 8 of the G7 communiqué from Tokyo on 9 July.

The Prime Minister: Following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992 the Government have supported a wide range of improvements in this area. For the International Development Association of the World bank, details are set out in the report on the 10th replenishment which the House approved on 12 July. Negotiations on the sixth replenishment of the African Development Fund and the capital resources of the Inter-American and Asian development banks are currently in progress. We are also actively working for agreement by the World bank board to proposals to make more information on its projects publicly available, including environmental assessments: a decision is expected soon.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what consideration he has given to the appointment of a senior Minister as *(a)* a Minister with special responsibility for young people and *(b)* a Minister with special responsibility for older people; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to his similar question on 14 November 1991 at column *639* about designating a Minister with responsibility for young people. Similarly, issues facing older people are not specific to that age group. Appointing a Minister with special responsibility to look after such groups would diffuse responsibilities for particular aspects of policy which presently fall clearly on each departmental Minister.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made towards holding a further meeting of the London conference on former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The steering committee of the international conference on the former Yugoslavia met at senior official level in Geneva on 1 July. There are currently no plans to hold a further meeting, at either official or ministerial level, but the co-chairmen are keeping this under review.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made in placing monitors on the border between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Following the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 838, the Secretary-General submitted to the Security Council a report on the options for deployment of international border monitors on the border between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia/Montenegro. Following full discussion of the report in the Security Council, the President of the Council replied, asking the Secretary-General to investigate whether the states involved were willing to co-operate in the deployment of monitors and, if so, which member states of the United Nations would be prepared to contribute monitors. We await the outcome of these soundings.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) why publication of information about population with disabilities has been discontinued in the report, "Households Below Average Income";

(2) if he will ensure that the next "Households Below Average Income" report makes specific reference to people with disabilities and includes statistical data covering disabled pensioners and recipients of disability benefits and invalidity benefits who are under pensionable age.

Mr. Burt: Information on people with disabilities was discontinued as part of the "Households Below Average Income" (HBAI) report following recommendation 4.34 of the HBAI stocktaking report published and placed in the Library in November 1991.

The family expenditure survey, the data source for the HBAI report, does not record whether an individual is disabled and the stocktaking report, expressed concern about the reliability of the data for sick and disabled people.

There are no plans to change the information provided in the next HBAI statistics.

Incomes

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the increase in real incomes for the top decile of the income range between 1979 and the latest available year before and after housing costs.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) on 8 July at columns *214-15*.

Pensioners Living Abroad

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he has any plans to change the basis on which United Kingdom retirement pensions and widows' benefits are paid to people living abroad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to change the basis on which United Kingdom retirement pensions and widows' benefits are paid to people living abroad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: In general, annual upratings of those benefits are not paid outside the United Kingdom, but some 13,500 pensioners and widows living abroad have

erroneously been awarded benefit in excess of their legal entitlement, most between 1988 and August 1991. All new awards since August 1991 have been made on the correct legal basis. But there are about 10,500 continuing overpayments; some are only a few pence a week and the average is about £10·80 a week. The total cost is estimated at £33 million between 1985-86 and 1992-93.

We shall not be taking steps to reduce those pensions that are being overpaid since the past overpayments are not recoverable under section 71 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 and we are ensuring that United Kingdom pensioners who have received a certain level of benefit, albeit at too high a rate in existing law, should not now suffer a reduction for reasons which are no fault of their own. For that reason, we intend to introduce an amendment to the Social Security Benefit (Persons Abroad) Regulations which will provide a legal basis for maintaining these payments at their present rate.

Expenditure

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing what expenditure on social security would be in real terms in each year since 1973-74 if the number of pensioners, sick, unemployed, widows and families, etcetera had remained unchanged at 1973-74 levels; and what proportion of the gross domestic product such spending accounted for in each year.

Mr. Scott: It is not possible to provide the information requested.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate what expenditure on *(a)* housing benefit, *(b)* council tax benefit and *(c)* the social fund is attributable to the rise in unemployment.

Mr. Scott: Information in the form requested is not available. However, in 1992-93 expenditure on housing benefit and community charge benefit for unemployed people in Great Britain was £2,032 million. Awards from the social fund to unemployed people in Great Britain amounted to £115 million excluding cold weather payments. Information about cold weather payments is not available.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing social security expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product in each year since 1963.

Mr. Burt: The percentage figures for each year from 1963-64 until 1977-78 are in the table. Those for subsequent years are shown in table 4 of the Department of Social Security publication "The Growth of Social Security".

Years	*Benefit expenditure as a percentage of GDP*
1963-64	6·3
1964-65	6·0
1965-66	6·6
1966-67	6·6
1967-68	8·1
1968-69	8·0
1969-70	7·4
1970-71	7·2
1971-72	7·5
1972-73	7·4
1973-74	7·4
1974-75	7·7
1975-76	8·1
1976-77	8·6
1977-78	8·9

Source used to obtain figures "Annual Abstract of Statistics", various years.

Legal Aid

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 28 June, *Official Report*, column *337*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance notes issued to assessment officers assessing financial eligibility in civil legal aid cases.

Mr. Burt: Copies of the relevant guidance have been placed in the Library.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what proposals he has for introducing legislation to disregard attendance on employment training courses by those entitled to adult dependency supplements to their invalidity benefit from before the introduction of the all-or-nothing earnings rule on 15 September 1985, for the purpose of protecting existing beneficiaries;

(2) on what date extra-statutory payments were cancelled for those previously entitled to adult dependency increases on top of their invalidity benefit and who have lost that entitlement due to attendance on an employment training course; what plans he has to issue new instructions restoring the right to make extra-statutory payments to this category of benefit claimants; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what is his current estimate of the number of claimants of invalidity benefit supplemented by adult dependency allowance dating back to before 15 September 1985, who have lost their allowance due to attendance on employment training courses since 1988; and how many successful claims there have been for extra-statutory payments equalling the lost adult dependency allowance and to what total estimated value.

Mr. Scott: Information on the number of invalidity benefit recipients with an adult dependency increase where entitlement ended due to attendance on employment training courses since 1988 is unavailable. By April 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, there had been five successful claims for extra-statutory payments to a total value of £2,477·70. Instructions to staff to make extra-statutory payments in affected cases were cancelled in error in January 1993, but are being reinstated today. The Government intend to bring forward legislation to place these payments on a statutory footing when a suitable opportunity arises.

National Insurance

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of changing the national insurance threshold into a tax allowance in *(a)* 1993-94 and *(b)* 1994-95.

Mr. Hague: If employees did not pay contributions on that part of their earnings which falls below the lower earnings limit the cost would be as follows:

	(£ billion)	
	In year	*Full year*
1993-94	0·9	1·0
1994-95	0·9	1·0

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much revenue would be raised by abolishing the national insurance ceiling in *(a)* 1993-94 and *(b)* 1994-95.

Mr. Hague: If the upper earnings limit for employees' contributions was abolished, the additional revenue yield in a full year would be about £2·7 billion for 1993-94 and £3·5 billion for 1994-95. If the upper profits limit for self-employed class 4 contributions was also abolished, the additional yield would be about £0·4 billion for 1993-94 and £0·5 billion for 1994-95.

Over 3 million people would have to pay extra national insurance contributions as a result.

Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of raising the basic state retirement pension to a level at which income support and housing benefit would cease to be payable to pensioners; and by how much the standard rate of income tax would have to be raised to raise the same sum.

Mr. Hague *[pursuant to his reply, 21 June 1993,* column *61]:* The information was incorrect and incomplete due to a transcription error. The correct information is as follows:

The additional cost of increasing the basic retirement pension to the higher pensioner rate of income support would be £3·4 billion. This represents a full year extra cost in 1993-94 net of savings made by the consequent reduction in spending on income-related benefits.

The basic rate of income tax would have to be increased by 3 pence to raise this amount.

It is not possible to estimate a level of retirement pension at which all pensioners cease to be eligible for housing benefit as entitlement depends on the level of rent paid, and rents vary widely. As an illustration of the cost involved we estimate that it would cost £11·2 billion net in 1993-94 to increase retirement pensions to a level where income support and housing benefit entitlement would cease for pensioners paying the average local authority weekly rent paid by pensioners in receipt of housing benefit—£26·64 in May 1991, the latest available figures.

The basic rate of income tax would have to be increased by 8p to raise this amount.

Note: The estimated amounts of increases in the basic rate of income tax have been rounded to the next whole penny.

SCOTLAND

NHS Trusts

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance he gives to hospital trusts on the amount of money they should spend on the production of business plans.

Mr. Stewart: No specific guidance has been issued. It is for trusts to decide on such matters having regard to the overall principle of obtaining best value for money.

Caledonian MacBrayne

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to set targets for Caledonian MacBrayne.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has decided to set the following targets for Caledonian MacBrayne for the year 1993-94. The company will be required to achieve as a financial target that fares income should cover at least 59 per cent. of operating costs, including depreciation on a replacement cost basis and provision for an 8 per cent. forgone rate of return on capital. As an efficiency target, the company will be asked not to exceed a maximum unit cost of £1·04 per passenger car unit capacity kilometre. As a quality of service target, the company will be asked to achieve a figure of 96·5 per cent. of sailings arriving on time, excluding sailings which are delayed or cancelled for safety reasons, for example, adverse weather conditions. My right hon. Friend considers that the setting of these targets will provide a clear framework for the operation of the company, consistent with the objectives of securing continued improvement in operational efficiency and standards of service.

Fisheries Protection Agency

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the annual report and accounts for 1992-93 of the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency.

Mr. Lang: I have today published the report, copies of which have been laid in both Houses.

House Condition Survey

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects Scottish Homes to publish the main report of the Scottish house condition survey.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand that Scottish Homes will publish the Report of the Scottish house condition survey on Tuesday 20 July and I have arranged for copies to be deposited in the House Libraries and sent to all Scottish Members.

Police

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland; when he will issue his consultation document reviewing police conduct and performance procedures in the Scottish police service.

Mr. Lang: I am today issuing a paper which invites comments on proposals for new procedures to deal with

unsatisfactory performance and unacceptable conduct in the police service. I believe these arrangements would be in keeping with the changes which have been, and are being made, to personnel management in the police service. Some of my proposals are drawn from those contained in a similar consultation paper issued by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department. My proposals which are designed to modernise and simplify existing procedures in line with best management practice, build on the excellent work already being done by the police themselves to improve the quality of their service to the public.

I have invited comments on the paper by 31 August 1993 and shall welcome views from everyone with an interest in these issues.

Copies of the paper are available in the Library and in the Vote Office.

Public Bodies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to whom each of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Scottish Office is responsible; whether the public bodies or their members in each case are subject to *(a)* surcharge, *(b)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(c)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission or National Audit Office, *(d)* the statutory provisions for open government which apply to local authorities, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charters; and whether the chairpersons and members of the boards of each of these bodies are required to declare an interest.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 6 July 1993]:* The day-to-day management responsibility of executive NDPBs depends on the statutory or other arrangements relevant to the individual NDPB. All are responsible through me to Parliament for the proper management of any Government funds made available to them. In respect of the other matters referred to in the question: *(a)* I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) on 24 June at column *273; (b)* those bodies subject to the scrutiny of the Parliamentary Commissioner are listed in the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 as amended by the Parliamentary and Health Service Commissioners Act 1987; *(c)* the audit regime of NDPBs is listed in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies", which is available in the Library of the House and in certain cases the Comptroller and Auditor General is able to undertake other scrutiny of NDPBs; *(d)* the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 does not apply to NDPBs; *(e)* performance indicators are often published in the annual report of the body and will normally be contained in the management statement for the body concerned; a selection are included in my Department's departmental report; *(f)* the citizens charter applies to NDPBs. Scottish Office executive NDPBs are encouraged to fulfil the provisions of the citizens charter and many are already doing so. Management statements will contain commitments to citizens charter principles. In addition, NDPBs will in due course produce charter standard statements.

I take into account the question of interests of chairmen and members of the boards of executive NDPBs when I am making appointments to a body. Arrangements for the declaration of interest of members on specific items under consideration by the body are normal practice; detailed arrangements vary depending on the body.

Parliamentary Boundary Commission

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last consulted the leaders of the political parties in Scotland represented in Parliament regarding appointments made by him to the Parliamentary Boundary Commission of Scotland.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* In December 1988.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he appointed *(a)* Mr. A. R. Napier and *(b)* Professor U. A. Wannop to be members of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland; and what is the duration of the appointment.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 9 July 1993]:* Professor U. A. Wannop was first appointed a member of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland on 6 June 1983 and Mr. A. R. Napier on 2 May 1985. Both members were subsequently reappointed in December 1988 for a period of five years until 31 December 1993.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation

2. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on the balance between direct and indirect taxation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Since 1979 the share of total tax revenue raised as direct tax has fallen by 4 per cent. The share of tax revenue raised as direct tax from individuals has fallen by over 7 per cent.

25. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies have been undertaken into the relationship between the lowering of taxation levels and the amount of revenue generated by those taxes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Changes in the tax system over the last 14 years have lowered marginal tax rates and have encouraged the enterprise and initiative on which a strong growing economy and buoyant tax revenues depend.

Redundant Workers (Counselling)

14. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his proposal to introduce tax relief for companies offering counselling to redundant workers with two years or more service.

Mr. Dorrell: The great majority of the representations we have received have welcomed the proposed relief for outplacement counselling.

Balance of Payments

15. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reduce the balance of payments deficit.

23. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the balance of payments.

Mr. Portillo: The key to reducing the balance of payments deficit is improving our competitiveness. The Government have facilitated this by getting inflation down to its lowest for a generation. Unit wage costs in manufacturing are falling while they are rising in many of our main competitors. The Government have also taken specific action to assist exporters, such as extending Export Credits Guarantee Department cover.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

16. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what financial implications to the Treasury arise out of the delayed consultation on the commissioning of THORP.

Mr. Portillo: British Nuclear Fuels plc has assessed the impact on its profits of a delay to commissioning THORP to be £2 million per week. The level of profits is a consideration in determining the level of dividend BNFL will pay to the Government as its shareholder.

Unemployment

17. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on public spending of Government policies on unemployment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The Government plan to spend £2·8 billion in 1993-94 on training, enterprise and vocational education programmes to help around 1½ million unemployed people back into work. The Budget included £125 million—net cost—to provide an additional 100,000 opportunities.

Value Added Tax

18. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about levels of VAT receipts.

Sir John Cope: VAT receipts in the last financial year, 1992-93 are estimated to have been £37·0 billion. They are forecast to total £39·9 billion in 1993-94.

30. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revenue will be raised by the extension of VAT to fuel bills.

Sir John Cope: The estimated revenue yield is £950 million in 1994-95 and £2,300 million in 1995-96.

Pools Betting Duty

19. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future of the reduction in pools betting duty introduced to enable football clubs to continue to fund capital works in line with the Taylor report.

Sir John Cope: In the 1990 Budget pool betting duty was reduced from 42·5 per cent. to 40 per cent. for five years to help finance the implementation of the Taylor report and in particular the achievement of all-seating. The former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Thames (Mr. Lamont), made it clear that the Government will be prepared to extend the reduction to the year 2000 provided the football leagues and football clubs produce satisfactory plans to finance their own contribution to further necessary ground improvements. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage will shortly be discussing the position with us on the basis of information supplied by the Football Trust and the clubs themselves, in support of an extension of the reduction.

Bank of England

20. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of an independent Bank of England.

Sir John Cope: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has made it clear that he intends to listen to the debate that is now going on, so we have not made a final assessment yet.

Business Expansion Scheme

21. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Cancellor of the Exchequer how many companies set up under the business expansion scheme have achieved substantial growth in profitability, growth and productivity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not available. BES has served its purpose well over the years. A wide range of companies have been helped and the scheme has contributed to a climate in which the role of entrepreneurship has been recognised. We are firmly committed to supporting small firms through a range of policies.

Bank of England

22. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to encourage public debate about the future role of the Bank of England.

Sir John Cope: I am not sure any encouragement is needed from either my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor or me. We are particularly interested in the contribution my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold) and other hon. members who serve on the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee are making in their inquiry into the future role of the Bank of England.

Nationalised Industries

24. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what comparative studies have been undertaken of the systems for providing capital financing for nationalised industries among EC countries.

Sir John Cope: While we are generally aware of other countries' arrangements, the Government have not undertaken a comprehensive study.

Other countries are following the United Kingdom's lead in privatising nationalised industries.

Income Tax

26. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in the current financial year calling for an increase in income taxes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received a number of representations concerning the rates of income tax; some of these favour an increase in the rates and some favour a decrease. It remains the Government's objective to move towards a basic rate of 20 per cent. when it is prudent to do so.

Health Expenditure

27. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much public spending on health has changed in real terms since 1978-79; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: This year we plan to spend 61·4 per cent. more on the national health service, in real terms, than we did in 1978-79.

Stamp Duty

28. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total revenue from stamp duty on the sale of houses and flats in the latest quarter for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: A provisional figure for receipts of stamp duty on all transactions of land and other property except for shares in the first quarter of 1993 is £150·9 million.

Public Spending

29. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the public spending planning total for 1994-95.

Mr. Portillo: The new control total for 1994-95 was set in the 1992 autumn statement at £253·6 billion.

Manufacturing Productivity

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on trends in manufacturing productivity over the past year.

Mr. Portillo: Manufacturing productivity in the three months to May was 3·7 per cent. higher than a year earlier. This was the highest growth rate for over six years.

Consumer Price Inflation

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the level of consumer price inflation is in Britain; and what are the OECD and EC averages.

Sir John Cope: Latest figures show that consumer price inflation in the United Kingdom is 1·2 per cent. This is below the average levels in OECD and EC countries of 2·9 and 3·3 per cent. respectively.

Share Option Schemes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many United Kingdom quoted companies run executive share option schemes; how many directors have taken out options at the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: In relation to executive share option schemes approved by the Inland Revenue, this information is not readily available. Information about schemes that are not approved by the Inland Revenue is not held centrally.

Public Sector Pay

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on the total amount spent on public sector pay in 1994-95 of public sector pay rises in 1994 of *(a)* 2 per cent., *(b)* 3 per cent., *(c)* 4 per cent. and *(d)* the latest rate of inflation which will be used for the upgrading of pensions and benefits.

Mr. Portillo: Estimates of expenditure on pay across the public sector as a whole are difficult to make due to the disparate nature of the pay bargaining arrangements applying to the groups involved. However, it is estimated that each one per cent. change in public sector pay in 1994-95 would cost/save about £¾ billion.

Assumed public sector pay rise in 1994	*Estimated cost in 1994-95 £ billion*
(a) 2 per cent.	1·5
(b) 3 per cent.	2·25
(c) 4 per cent.	3·00
(d) Inflation rate used to upgrade pensions and benefits[1]	1·5

[1] The March 1993 Financial Statement and Budget Report gave an assumption of 2 per cent. for the increase in the RPI over the year to September 1993.

Duty Free Goods

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his best estimate on an annual basis of the loss in revenue to each EC country due to increased sales of duty free goods since changes in duty free laws were introduced on 1 January 1993.

Sir John Cope: The information is not available.

Gulf War

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 June 1992, *Official Report*, column *399*, what has been the total cost to the Exchequer of the Gulf war to date; and what are his latest figures for the cash contribution of other countries to the cost of the Gulf war.

Mr. Portillo: The Ministry of Defence currently estimates that the additional military cost of the Gulf conflict is £2,345 million, spread over several years. The Export Credits Guarantee Department has paid up to 31 March 1993, £499 million of claims arising from the situation in the Gulf in 1990-91 and which have yet to be recovered. A further £160 million of claims on Iraq have yet to be examined. Other Departments incurred minor costs in respect of the conflict.

The bulk of these costs has been offset by the cash contributions from other Governments totalling £2,049 million.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he gives to complaints of excessive zeal on the part of Inland Revenue investigating officers from hon. Members; how many such complaints he has received with regard to the special office No. 2; what written guidance exists to guide him on how to deal with such complaints; and if he will place a copy of such guidance in the Library.

Mr. Dorrell: There are no special arrangements for dealing with this type of complaint, which would be referred to the Inland Revenue for full investigation and report in the normal way. A response would then be made to the hon. Member as appropriate by the Minister responsible or by the Inland Revenue direct.

I am not aware that any such complaints have been received with regard to the special office No. 2.

Government Staff

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of staff in post in central Government Departments at 1 April.

Mr. Portillo: On 1 April 1993 there were 554,212 staff in post in central Government, a decrease of about 13,600 since 1 October 1992. This is the largest six-monthly fall since July 1987.

Of the total staff in post, 502,798 were non-industrials and 51,414 were classified as being in industrial work. A summary showing staff in post by Department has been placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

General Medical Practices

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at which health centres it is planned to proceed with capital expenditure projects in support of general medical practices in each of the next three years.

Mr. Ancram: Health centres in Northern Ireland at which capital expenditure is planned in 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 are as listed:

1993-94	*1994-95*	*1995-96*
Eastern Health and Social Services Board		
Lisburn HC	Not known	Not known
Shankill HC		
Northern Health and Social Services Board		
Glengormley	Ballyclare[1]	Whiteabbey
Antrim	Larne[1]	Ballyclare
Ballymena[1]	Whitehead[1]	Larne
Bellaghy[1]	Ballymena	Carrickfergus
Cookstown	Bellaghy	Whitehead
Cullybackey		Greenisland
Portglenone[2]		Portglenone
Randalstown		
Ballycastle		
Coleraine		
Garvagh		
Southern Health and Social Services Board		
Portadown HC	Nil	Nil
Western Health and Social Services Board		
Dungiven[1]	Dungiven	Nil
Shantallow[1]	Shantallow	
Eglinton	Omagh	
Omagh	Carrickmore	
Lisnaskea		
Carrickmore[1]		

[1] Indicates a project carried into the second year.
[2] Indicates a project split over two years.

Midwives

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many midwives were employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in each health board area in each year since 1988.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	Eastern		*Northern*		*Southern*		*Western*	
	Full time	*Part time*	*Full time*	*Part time*	*Full time*	*Part time*	*Full time*	*Part time*
1990	362	192	115	89	48	70	159	20
1991	284	200	94	92	69	80	161	21
1992	292	197	91	86	62	89	154	20
1993	270	209	88	96	68	98	156	27

Notes:
1. Figures quoted are at March each year and include both hospital and community midwives.
2. Information prior to March 1990 is not available in a compatible form.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many midwifery staff are employed in each health board area *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time (i) on an agency basis and (ii) on bank contracts.

Mr. Ancram: There are no agency midwives employed in the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland. As at March 1993 there were 35 part-time midwives employed on bank contracts by the Eastern board and two by the Southern board.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many practising midwives there are in each grade in each health board area, including those in senior nurse/senior midwife grades, senior nurse grades and education and clinical grades, excluding agency midwives; how many are employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time; and how many student midwives there are in each area.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows at March 1993:

	Eastern Board		Northern Board		Southern Board		Western Board	
	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time
Clinical Grade D	25	9	—	2	2	90	20	4
Clinical Grade E	126	185	45	81	24	4	74	20
Clinical Grade F	6	4	3	3	—	3	5	3
Clinical Grade G	99	8	38	10	39	1	55	—
Clinical Grade H	6	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Clinical Grade I	6	—	1	—	2	—	2	—
Unit Senior Manager II	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Student Midwife D	44	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Student Midwife E	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note:—There are currently a further 21 practising midwives (19 full-time, 2 part-time) in educational grades who are employed by the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Northern Ireland.

Imported Animals

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which animals have been designated under the Destructive Imported Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1933 and in subsequent regulations made under that Act.

Mr. Ancram: Musk-rats, grey squirrels, non-indigenous rabbits, coypus, mink and arctic foxes.

EC Funds

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what EC contribution was made to public expenditure in Northern Ireland *(a)* in total and *(b)* per capita in each of the last five years and the current year; what are his projections for each of the next two years; and for each of those years what is his estimate of the sums received under each heading used by the EC.

Sir John Wheeler: The "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities—the Government's Expenditure Plans 1993-94 to 1995-96" (Cm 2216) published in February 1993 records EC Structural Funds contribution to public expenditure in Northern Ireland as follows:

£ million

	1988-89 Outturn	1989-90 Outturn	1990-91 Outturn	1991-92 Outturn	1992-93 Outturn	1993-94 Plans
Financed by European Regional Development receipts	47	40	49	50	120	103
Financed by European Social Fund receipts	36	46	51	53	47	55
Financed by European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund[1] (Guidance Section receipts)	13	9	10	29	25	19
Total	96	95	110	132	192	177
Per Capita Value (£)[2]	61	60	69	83	119	109

[1] The agricultural industry in Northern Ireland receives amounts under the Guarantee Section of the EAGGF (ie under the Common Agricultural Policy). Most of these payments are made centrally on a United Kingdom basis through the Intervention Board Executive Agency and no record of such payments is maintained on a territorial basis.
Identifiable receipts for 1991-92 amount to some £60 million.
[2] Based on mid-year population estimates.

From 1994 onwards, Structural Funds allocations to Northern Ireland will be governed by a new Community Support Framework. It will be some months before the expenditure under the various headings will be known.

Prisoners

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners there were in each prison in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years and the current year; how many were male and female; and what are his projections for the next two years.

Sir John Wheeler: The average prison population for the last six financial years was as follows:

Prison	1988-89		1989-90		1990-91		1991-92		1992-93		[1]1993-94	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Belfast	503	—	515	—	484	—	475	—	541	—	559	—
Maze	678	—	538	—	488	—	484	—	473	—	494	—
Magilligan	287	—	278	—	302	—	301	—	312	—	322	—
Maghaberry	166	26	273	23	297	30	300	38	317	43	324	40
YOC Hydebank	162	—	156	—	179	—	198	—	179	—	213	—
Totals	1,796	26	1,760	23	1,750	30	1,758	38	1,822	43	1,912	40

[1] April-June 1993 only.

It is not possible to project the population by prison establishment.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for how many prisoners he has budgeted in his estimates for the current year and each of the next two years.

Sir John Wheeler: Financial plans are related to actual and anticipated accommodation needs and usage and not directly to prisoner numbers.

Sheep

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total sheep quota for *(a)* less favoured areas and *(b)* non-less-favoured areas in Northern Ireland; and what is his estimate of the current total breeding ewe flock in each of those areas.

Mr. Ancram: The total sheep annual premium quota for Northern Ireland is 1,393,888, of which 1,140,519 in the less-favoured areas—LFA—and 253,369 in the non-LFA. The total breeding ewe flock is currently estimated to be 1,142,399, of which 911,635 in the LFA and 230,764 in the non-LFA.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many mentally ill patients were treated *(a)* in the community and *(b)* as in-patients, for each of the last five years for which figures are available.

(2) what percentage of patients were treated *(a)* as day patients, *(b)* as in-patients and *(c)* in the community by the NHS in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Ancram: The information is not available in the form requested. Figures on in-patients and community treatment of mental illness patients are presented in the table:

In-patient and community treatment of mental illness in Northern Ireland

Year	In-patient		Community[1,2]	
	Patients admitted	Long stay patients at year ended 31 March	Outpatient referrals seen	Day patients first attendances
1988-89	n/a	[2]1,628	8,916	[2]122
1989-90	5,749	1,786	9,704	685
1990-91	5,479	1,653	8,925	1,335
1991-92	5,376	1,613	9,743	1,463
1992-93	5,752	n/a	11,149	1,304

[1] Does not include patients who began their first episode of care in an earlier year.
[2] This information is incomplete.
n/a Not Available.

Public Expenditure

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total public expenditure in Northern Ireland in *(a)* total and *(b)* per capita in each of the last five years and the current year; and what are his projections for each of the next two years.

Sir John Wheeler: The total public expenditure for Northern Ireland within the Secretary of State's responsibility and public expenditure per capita for the years 1988-89 to 1993-94 and forecasts for 1994-95 and 1995-96 are in the following table:

Year	Total public expenditure £ million	Public expenditure per capita £
1988-89	5,436	3,445
1989-90	5,725	3,617
1990-91	5,872	3,694
1991-92	6,428	4,032
1992-93	7,092	4,402
1993-94	7,476	4,598
1994-95	7,703	4,703
1995-96	7,980	4,842

Rural Planning Review

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the rural planning review, giving details of the consultation which has taken place, and the factors which have delayed it; when he expects to have draft proposals ready; and when they will be expected.

Mr. Atkins: A major consultation exercise was held in August 1991 with the circulation of the leaflet "What Kind of Countryside Do We Want?". In addition during late 1991 representations of the Department's town and country planning service attended 20 public meetings or rural clinics organised by the Rural Development Council, the Rural Community Network and Community Technical Aid at which the issues raised in the leaflet were discussed. By spring 1992 over 100 responses, including a substantial report on the rural clinics, were received. The Department has carefully analysed these comments and in the light of the full response to the consultation exercise the Department has decided that there will be no publication of draft proposals. It is intended that the new strategy will be published in September.

WALES

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* hydrocarbons and their oxygen, nitrogen and/or sulphur compounds, *(b)* inorganic cyanides, *(c)* inorganic halogen containing compounds, *(d)* inorganic sulphur containing compounds, *(e)* laboratory chemicals, *(f)* lead compounds, *(g)* mercury compounds, *(h)* nickel and nickel compounds, *(i)* organic halogen compounds excluding inert polymeric materials and *(j)* peroxides, chlorates and azides;

(2) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categores of *(a)* solvents-S halogen/mixed, *(b)* mineral oil sludges, *(c)* contaminated industrial waste, *(d)* empty contaminated drums, *(e)* pressurised cylinders/aerosols, *(f)* contaminated soil, *(g)* mixed laboratory chemicals, *(h)* biocides-solid, *(i)* biocides-liquid, *(j)* biocides-aqueous diluted, *(k)* resins-organic and *(l)* filter material-organic;

(3) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* solid metal bearing, *(b)* solid inorganic, *(c)* solid CN, *(d)* solid organic, *(e)* solid asbestos, *(f)* filter material-inorganic, *(g)* acid metal bearing, *(h)* acid-inorganic, *(i)* acid-organic, *(j)* alkalis metal bearing, *(k)* alkalis-inorganic, *(l)* alkalis-organic and *(m)* aqueous cyanide;

(4) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* acids and alkalis, *(b)* antimony and antimony compounds, *(c)* arsenic compounds, *(d)* asbestos all chemical forms, *(e)* barium compounds, *(f)* beryllium and beryllium compounds, *(g)* biocides and phytopharmaceutical substances, *(h)* boron compounds, *(i)* cadmium and cadmium compounds, *(j)* copper compounds, *(k)* heterocyclic organic compounds containing oxygen nitrogen and/or sulphur and *(l)* hexavalent chromium compounds;

(5) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* neutral metal bearing, *(b)* neutral-inorganic, *(c)* neutral-organic, *(d)* neutral-oily (one to 15 per cent.), *(e)* mineral oil and < 20 per cent. others, *(f)* mineral oil and > 20 per cent. others, *(g)* oil + > 20 per cent. water < 85 per cent., *(h)* grease/fat/wax/vegetable oil, *(i)* tars/phenols, *(j)* solvents-non halogen, *(k)* solvents-halogenated, *(l)* solvents-mixed (including water) and *(m)* solvents-S non-halogen;

(6) if he will list by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* pharmaceutical waste, *(b)* mixed organics in drums, *(c)* metal compounds, *(d)* non-toxic metal compounds, *(e)* metals-elements, *(f)* metal oxides, *(g)* inorganic compounds, *(h)* other inorganic material, *(i)* organic compounds, *(j)* polymeric material and precursors, *(k)* fuels, oils and greases, *(l)* fine chemicals and biocides, *(m)* miscellaneous chemicals waste, *(n)* filter materials and sludges, *(o)* miscellaneous waste and *(p)* construction waste;

(7) if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste production in the waste categories of *(a)* pharmaceutical and veterinary compounds, *(b)* phosphorus and its compounds, *(c)* selenium and selenium compounds, *(d)* silver compounds, *(e)* tarry materials from refining and tar residues from distilling, *(f)* tellurium and tellurium compounds, *(g)* thallium and thallium compounds, *(h)* vanadium compounds and *(i)* zinc compounds.

Mr. Redwood: The information is not currently available.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste arisings and deposits.

Mr. Redwood: The information is given in the following table.

Special waste arising and disposed of, by county

Tonnes

	Waste arising	*Waste disposed of*
1987-88:		
Clwyd	10,309	621
Dyfed	7,430	83
Gwent	15,616	27,362
Gwynedd	4,446	10
Mid Glamorgan	3,327	350
Powys	120	0
South Glamorgan	12,272	19,268
West Glamorgan	17,515	304
1988-89:		
Clwyd	8,430	715
Dyfed	7,476	315
Gwent	16,428	34,340
Gwynedd	3,152	23
Mid Glamorgan	5,691	780
Powys	139	0
South Glamorgan	7,150	97
West Glamorgan	11,123	579
1989-90		
Clwyd	12,380	1,624

	Waste arising	Waste disposed of
Dyfed	16,240	340
Gwent	23,866	30,396
Gwynedd	3,938	50
Mid Glamorgan	3,740	1,306
Powys	314	0
South Glamorgan	8,125	189
West Glamorgan	10,413	776
1990-91:		
Clwyd	11,999	1,262
Dyfed	15,209	36
Gwent	22,134	15,050
Gwynedd	6,874	819
Mid Glamorgan	6,795	4,875
Powys	381	0
South Glamorgan	10,718	42
West Glamorgan	15,081	613
1991-92:		
Clwyd	27,563	644
Dyfed	21,137	196
Gwent	20,711	28,786
Gwynedd	9,214	700
Mid Glamorgan	9,436	6,973
Powys	373	0
South Glamorgan	8,487	112
West Glamorgan	7,414	733

Source: HMIP 1986-87 to 1989-90; DOE 1990 onwards

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by year for the last five years, and by county, the number of tonnes of special waste arising *(a)* within the county and deposited within the county, *(b)* within the county and exported out of the county and *(c)* outside the county and deposited within the county.

Mr. Redwood: From the information available, it is not possible to differentiate the amount of special waste originating in and deposited in a county from that imported into the county for deposition. Nor is it possible to determine the amount of special wastes exported from a county which originated in the county. Special wastes may be imported and re-exported as part of the treatment and disposal process. The available information is given in the following table.

Special waste arising and disposed of, by county

Tonnes

	Waste arising	Waste imported from other areas	Waste exported to other areas	Waste disposed of
1987-88				
Clwyd	10,309	846	9,991	621
Dyfed	7,430	0	7,347	83
Gwent	15,616	30,573	18,760	27,362
Gwynedd	4,446	0	4,436	10
Mid Glamorgan	3,327	301	3,279	350
Powys	120	0	120	0
South Glamorgan	12,272	12,507	5,511	19,268
West Glamorgan	17,515	36	17,247	304
1988-89				
Clwyd	8,430	654	8,369	715
Dyfed	7,476	92	7,253	315
Gwent	16,428	33,096	15,185	34,340
Gwynedd	3,152	0	3,129	23
Mid Glamorgan	5,691	747	5,658	780
Powys	139	0	139	0
South Glamorgan	7,150	156	7,209	97
West Glamorgan	11,123	52	10,596	579
1989-90				
Clwyd	12,380	1,605	12,361	1,624
Dyfed	16,240	0	15,900	340
Gwent	23,866	31,531	25,002	30,396
Gwynedd	3,938	0	3,888	50
Mid Glamorgan	3,740	1,249	3,683	1,306
Powys	314	0	314	0
South Glamorgan	8,125	45	7,981	189
West Glamorgan	10,413	74	9,711	776
1990-91				
Clwyd	11,999	1,215	11,952	1,262
Dyfed	15,209	13	15,186	36
Gwent	22,134	18,996	26,080	15,050
Gwynedd	6,874	0	6,054	819
Mid Glamorgan	6,795	4,800	6,720	4,875
Powys	381	0	381	0
South Glamorgan	10,718	490	11,166	42
West Glamorgan	15,081	104	14,572	613
1991-92				
Clwyd	27,563	752	27,672	644
Dyfed	21,137	76	20,971	196
Gwent	20,711	13,845	38,388	28,786
Gwynedd	9,214	8,931	1,391	700
Mid Glamorgan	9,436	6,276	8,739	6,973
Powys	373	0	373	0
South Glamorgan	8,487	26	8,401	112
West Glamorgan	7,414	161	6,842	733

Source: HMIP 1986-87 to 1989-90; DOE 1990 onwards.

Valuation Tribunals

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the numbers of community charge and non-domestic rate appeals disposed of per full-time equivalent employee in each valuation tribunal office in Wales during the financial year 1992-93.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The figures for appeals cleared in 1992-93 by each valuation tribunal office are as follows:

Tribunal Office	*Full time equivalent staff*	*Appeals Cleared*	*Per Staff Member*
Clwyd	[1]3·33	2·274	689·1
Dyfed	4·0	2,617	654·2
Gwent	3·5	1,957	559·1
Gwynedd	[2]2·3	1,950	847·8
Mid-South Glamorgan	5·0	4,462	892·4
Powys	2·5	948	379·4
West Glamorgan	4·0	2,390	597·5

[1] Clwyd tribunal office reduced from four to three full-time equivalent staff 1 August 1992.
[2] Gwynedd tribunal office reduced from three to 1·6 full-time equivalent staff 1 October 1992.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many non-domestic rate appeals were outstanding in Gwynedd at 30 June; how many of that number were lodged prior to 30 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: At 30 June, the Gwynedd valuation tribunal had 1,273 outstanding non-domestic rate appeals. Information on the number of those lodged prior to 30 November 1992 is not available.

Midwives

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many whole-time equivalent midwives there are at each increment point of each pay scale.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Detailed breakdowns of nursing and midwifery staff employed by health authorities and NHS trusts into occupational groups such as that requested are not considered reliable. However, I refer the hon. Gentleman to a letter that I sent to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) dated 13 July, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, which gave a breakdown of nursing and midwifery staff in post as at 30 September 1992—excluding students and pupils and staff nursery staff—by grade and pay spine point.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what specialist provision is currently available in Wales for early onset of Alzheimer's disease.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally. It is for health authorities to determine and provide the specialist provision required to meet local needs.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the level of sickness absence among employees in Wales by broad industrial sector expressed as *(a)* the average number of days lost and *(b)* the percentage of employee sickness absence.

Mr. Redwood: The information available on sickness absence, by sector of industry, is given in the following table. These estimates are derived from the labour force survey carried out between December 1992 and February 1993 and may be subject to sampling variability.

Industrial sector	*Employees*	*Percentage absent due to sickness or injury in the reference week*[1]
Agriculture	[2]—	[2]—
Energy and water supply	19,000	[2]—
Manufacturing	236,000	5
Construction	53,000	[2]—
Services	664,000	5
All industries and services	979,000	5

Source—Labour Force Survey.

[1] Respondents are asked to indicate any absence in a particular week.

[2] Sample too small to provide a reliable estimate.

Patients

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of patients were treated *(a)* as day patients, *(b)* as in-patients and *(c)* in the community by the NHS in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information in the exact form requested is not available centrally. However, the available information is given as follows. No percentages have been calculated as a patient may be treated in more than one of the categories or in other categories not given.

	Regular day attenders at NHS day care facilities	*Number of patients treated*[1] *Day cases*	*In-patient cases*	*In the community*[2]
1987-88	12,241	78,471	456,420	—
1988-89	—	85,012	456,858	—
1989-90	11,927	86,486	475,515	—
1990-91	12,152	101,191	482,473	222,869
1991-92	13,275	132,945	500,336	219,548

[1] This does not relate to the number of people treated as one person may have been discharged more than once during the year.

[2] Patients treated by district nurses, community psychiatric nurses, community mental handicap nurses and other community nurses (excluding health visitors and midwives). It should be noted that an individual may be included more than once if they had been treated by more than one category of staff. Comparable information is not available prior to 1990-91.

Voluntary Work

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those voluntary projects, organisations and bodies he has funded in Wales since 1986 along with the amount allocated, other than those which he has financed under section 21 of the Education Act 1980, listing Welsh language projects, organisations and bodies separately.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Department provides direct funding to about 250 voluntary organisations each year. In 1991-92, the latest year for which figures are available more than £10 million was paid in direct grants to the voluntary sector, £2 million of which was paid in support of Welsh language activities. In addition, a further £172 million was provided as indirect grants—i.e. those paid via health or local authorities or NDPBs—the bulk of which —some £164 million—was paid to housing associations.

Information on individual grants awarded prior to 1988-89 is not readily available. Since 1988-89 a list of all direct Government grants to the voluntary sector has been placed in the Library of the House. I have therefore arranged for a further copy of the Welsh Office entries for the financial years 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 to be placed in the Library of the House amended to indicate grants awarded solely in respect of Welsh language activities and those awarded under section 21 of the Education Act 1980. However, many of the other grants paid will also have included an element of support for the Welsh language which is not separately identifiable.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total budget of the Welsh Development Agency in 1990-91, 1991-92; and 1992-93 and what proportion of this was allocated to the north Wales office.

Mr. Redwood: The budget for the three financial years is shown in the Welsh Office departmental report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The agency's budget is allocated according to functions and programmes rather than geographic areas.

Supply Teachers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many supply teachers are registered with each local education authority in Wales for casual cover; and to what incremental point on the main professional grade for teachers' salaries a suitably qualified and experienced supply teacher may progress.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on the number of supply teachers registered with each local education authority in Wales is not held centrally.

The School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document lays down a minimum point on the scale to which teachers may be appointed, depending on their previous service. An experienced supply teacher could be appointed on the minimum point applicable or on any higher point up to the top of the scale. A new pay spine for teachers will be introduced with effect from 1 September 1993.

Welsh Language

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which primary schools in each local education authority in Wales *(a)* use the Welsh language as the main language of instruction, *(b)* use some Welsh as a medium of instruction and *(c)* undertake little or no instruction through the medium of Welsh.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have made a list of the 1,704 primary schools in Wales available in the Library of the House. The schools are broken down into the following categories: those with classes which use Welsh as a sole or main medium of instruction, those with classes which use Welsh as a medium of teaching for part of the curriculum and those which teach Welsh as a second language or not at all. The breakdown is based on information for the 1991-92 academic year.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average number of hours spent teaching Welsh in schools in Wales in the *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary sectors; and if he will give a breakdown by county.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Since 1990, schools in Wales have been progressively implementing the requirements of Welsh as a national curriculum subject. Information on the number of hours or periods spent on national curriculum Welsh is not collected centrally.

However, the 1989 secondary school staffing survey provided information on the number of teaching periods spent teaching Welsh as a first language, Welsh as a second language and remedial Welsh and is given in the following table. Equivalent information is not available for primary schools.

Environmental Contamination

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has received from Gwent county council regarding the potential environmenal contamination of south-east Wales by airborne radioactive particulates arising from Ministry of Defence tests at its Salisbury Plain test area.

Mr. Redwood: None. The Ministry of Defence has also confirmed that it has no knowledge of tests on Salisbury plain which could give rise to radioactive particulates in the environment of south-east Wales.

Land Authorities

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total budget of each land authority in Wales in *(a)* 1990-91, *(b)* 1991-92 and *(c)* 1992-93; and what proportion was spent in Gwynedd and Clwyd.

Mr. Redwood: The Land Authority for Wales is required to be self-financing. The total value of development land sold by the authority and the percentage in respect of Gwynedd and Clwyd were as follows:

	1990-91	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Total value	£9·3 million	£8·8 million	£7·0 million
Of which percentage in Gwynedd and Clwyd	21·6 per cent.	17·0 per cent.	13·6 per cent.

Local Education Authority	*Percentage of periods spent teaching Welsh*
Clwyd	6
Dyfed	7
Gwent	1
Gwynedd	11
Mid Glamorgan	4
Powys	6
South Glamorgan	3
West Glamorgan	5
ALL WALES	5

Mental Illness

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many mentally ill patients were treated *(a)* in the community and *(b)* as in-patients, for each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information in the exact form requested is not available centrally. However, the available information is given in the following table.

	Discharges and deaths[1]	*Resident patients*[2]	*First contacts by community psychiatric nurses*[3]
1987-88	14,157	[4]3,952	—
1988-89	14,289	—	—
1989-90	15,000	[4]3,577	—
1990-91	15,094	[5]3,348	24,984
1991-92	16,236	[5]3,013	22,629

[1] Deaths and discharges of in-patients from NHS hospitals. This does not relate to the number of people treated as one person may

have been discharged more than once during the year. Includes people treated in the specialities of mental illness, child and adolescent psychiatry, forensic psychiatry and old age psychiatry.

[2] Patients resident in mental illness hospitals and units in Wales on the day an annual census was taken. This will not include patients who although resident at some time during the year were not resident on the date of the census.

[3] Information was not collected centrally prior to 1990-91. This does not include patients cared for by other groups of staff (ie GPs and social workers) and voluntary organisations for which no information is collected centrally.

[4] At 5 April.

[5] At 31 March.

Welsh Office Highways Department

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total budget of the Welsh Office highways department in *(a)* 1990-91, *(b)* 1991-92 and *(c)* 1992-93; and what proportion of this money was spent in Gwynedd, Clwyd and Powys.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Gross expenditure in Wales on new construction, improvement and maintenance on motorways and trunk roads was £184·9 million in 1990-91, £171·0 million in 1991-92 and £204·5 million in 1992-93. The proportion spent in Gwynedd, Clwyd and Powys is given in the following table.

	Total gross expenditure on new construction improvement and maintenance (Wales)	*Expenditure in Clwyd*		*Expenditure in Gwynedd*		*Expenditure in Powys*	
	£ million	*£ million*	*per cent.*	*£ million*	*per cent.*	*£ million*	*per cent.*
1990-91	184·9	22·0	11·9	75·2	40·7	14·4	7·8
1991-92	171·0	24·7	14·4	62·6	36·6	11·0	6·4
1992-93	204·5	16·3	8·0	54·3	26·6	14·1	6·9

[1] Projected outturn.
[2] Estimate.

Health Education

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funds have been made available by his Department for health education in Wales in each year since 1987.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The amounts made available for health promotion, of which health education forms part, is shown in the following table.

	£ million
1987-88	2·4
1988-89	3·3
1989-90	4·2
1990-91	6·1
1991-92	7·5
1992-93	[1]9·4
1993-94	[2]9

Arts Services

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the level of arts services budgets in each local authority in Wales since 1990.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Individual local authorities decide what to spend on the arts from within their available resources. Information on the budgets they have set for museums and art galleries is given in the following table. Other arts spending is not separately identifiable from local authority budget returns.

Net current expenditure on museums and art galleries[1]

	1990-91 £000	*1991-92 £000*	*1992-93 £000*	*1993-94 £000*
Alyn and Deeside	0	0	0	0
Colwyn	0	0	0	0
Delyn	109	158	168	190
Glyndwr	43	66	72	48
Rhuddlan	0	0	0	0
Wrexham Maelor	117	140	168	169
Carmarthen	0	0	0	0
Ceredigion	137	133	139	135
Dinefwr	0	0	0	0
Llanelli	35	107	28	45
Preseli Pembrokeshire	0	0	0	0
South Pembrokeshire	1	1	3	3
Blaenau Gwent	0	0	0	0
Islwyn	0	0	0	0
Monmouth	250	350	373	384
Newport	341	425	453	515
Torfaen	39	8	47	44
Aberconwy	0	0	0	0
Arfon	0	0	0	0
Dwyfor	0	0	0	0
Meirionnydd	6	8	13	11
Ynys Môn	0	0	0	0
Cynon Valley	0	83	40	85
Merthyr Tydfil	86	99	121	123
Ogwr	0	0	0	0

	1990-91 £000	1991-92 £000	1992-93 £000	1993-94 £000
Rhondda	106	152	262	158
Rhymney Valley	134	241	98	216
Taff Ely	0	0	0	0
Brecknock	0	0	0	0
Montgomeryshire	0	0	0	0
Radnorshire	0	0	0	0
Cardiff	0	0	0	0
Vale of Glamorgan	0	0	0	0
Port Talbot	0	0	0	0
Lliw Valley	0	0	0	0
Neath	78	94	93	108
Swansea	944	1,022	1,335	1,136
Clwyd	892	559	444	392
Dyfed	337	368	450	393
Gwent	0	0	0	0
Gwynedd	725	193	223	157
Mid Glamorgan	0	0	0	0
Powys	175	208	227	228
South Glamorgan	0	0	0	0
West Glamorgan	0	66	80	93
Total Districts	2,426	3,087	3,413	3,370
Total Counties	2,129	1,394	1,424	1,263
Total Wales	4,555	4,481	4,837	4,633

[1] Local authority budgets.

Housing Revenue Accounts

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out the notional housing revenue account figures for Wales for the current financial year and the estimates made in respect of the next financial year; and if he will list the assumptions on which they are based.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is as follows:

	1993-94 £ million	1994-95 £ million
Notional income from rents	322·9	346·9
Notional management and maintenance allowance	168·8	174·3

The 1993-94 figures are taken from local authorities first advance subsidy claim forms.

For 1994-95, the estimated figures are also based on the initial claim form data for 1993-94. The key assumptions are for per dwelling increases in real terms of 5 per cent. in guideline rents and 1 per cent. in management and maintenance allowances. These assumptions will be reviewed in this year's public expenditure survey and will be subject to consultation in the usual way. The relevant inflation assumptiion from 1993-94 to 1994-95 is 4·25 per cent. as set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1993-94.

Home Helps

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many home helps were employed in each local authority area in the counties of Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The numbers of people employed by the social services departments of Gwynedd county council and Clwyd county council are not reported at district level. The total numbers of home helps—including home help organisers and assistants—employed in each county at the 30 September of each year are shown in the following table:

	Clwyd	Gwynedd
1980		
Number	560	627
Whole-time equivalent	314·0	260·0
1985		
Number	660	670
Whole-time equivalent	400·0	278·0
1992		
Number	[1]840	900
Whole-time equivalent	[1]335·3	390·0

[1] Provisional

Bus Routes

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many bus routes were operating in each local authority area in the counties of Clwyd and Gwynedd in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1992.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on the number of bus routes operating in Clwyd and Gwynedd is not available centrally.

Higher Education

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students are currently studying at each public sector higher education college in Wales; and how many of the students are normally resident in Wales, both in terms of total numbers and as a percentage of the main student body.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Provisional data for the 1992-93 academic year on students enrolled on higher education at the former public sector higher education colleges in Wales —including Trinity college—together with the numbers and proportion who were resident in Wales, are as follows:

Students[1] enrolled on higher education courses at 2 November 1992

Institution	*Total number of students[2]*	*Students usually resident in Wales*	
		Number	*Per cent. of total*
Cardiff Institute of HE	5,520	3,776	68
Gwent College of HE	4,876	3,833	79
Normal College Bangor	1,031	745	72
North East Wales Institute	3,452	2,147	62
Swansea Institute of HE	3,759	2,889	77
Trinity College	1,251	852	68
University of Glamorgan	11,525	7,078	61
Welsh Agricultural College	324	105	32
Welsh College of Music and Drama	415	149	36
Total	32,153	21,574	67

[1]All modes of attendance. Excludes students enrolled on further education courses.

[2]Includes other United Kingdom students and those from abroad.

Market Testing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of the tender specifications for the market testing of the training office functions of his Department; and if such tender specifications will have to be advertised in the supplement to the *Official Journal* of the European Communities.

Mr. Redwood: The specification for the market test of staff training services within the Department will form part of the tender documentation, which will be issued when tenders are invited. There is no requirement to advertise details of the tender specification in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities.

Powys TEC

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Powys training and enterprise council in relation to refunding part of the 1992-93 grant in aid to the council.

Sir Wyn Roberts: None. My officials have been in regular contact with the TEC since a routine financial appraisal monitoring visit revealed that insufficient evidence was available, at that time, to substantiate some of the TECs adult training invoices for payment by the Welsh Office. The TEC has now gathered additional evidence to suport their claims. My officials will meet with the TEC on 19 July to consider the adequacy of the further evidence.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 16 July 1993

EDUCATION

Centre for Young Musicians

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will take steps to ensure that musically gifted children from all parts of inner London can continue to receive tuition at the Centre for Young Musicians.

Mr. Forth: The activities of the Centre for Young Musicians are funded from a number of sources—including the Department for Education. We are supporting the central costs of the centre with £100,000 funding for each of the three years 1993-96. I welcome the support given by private sponsors and hope that London children will continue to benefit from the opportunities offered by the centre.

Non-vocational Adult Education

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the standard spending assessment allowances for non-vocational adult education for 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 listed by education authority.

Mr. Robin Squire: Provision for the further education for adults for which education authorities are responsible is included within the education component of standard spending assessments, but is not separately identified.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Crown Court Cases

Mr. Michael: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many persons were found guilty following a not guilty plea in Crown courts in England and Wales during 1991; and how many of those were subsequently given a non-custodial sentence.

Mr. John M. Taylor: During 1991, a total of 15,379 defendants were convicted in the Crown court following a plea of not guilty to all or to some counts. Of these, 7,161 received a non-custodial sentence.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeals to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal have been allowed and dismissed in 1992 and the first quarter of 1993.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is as follows:

Appeals to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal

	Allowed	*Dismissed*
1992[1]	249	493
January to March 1993	62	123

[1]Complete figures are not available for 1992. The figures given are estimates based on average returns for the eight months of that year for which figures are available.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the average delay listed by each immigration appeals hearing centre (i) between receiving the explanatory statement and papers about a case *(a)* from a British post overseas and *(b)* from the Home Office and sending those papers to an appellant or his or her authorised representative and (ii) between the hearing of an immigration appeal by an adjudicator and the despatch of the determination to the appellant or authorised representative.

Mr. John M. Taylor: All appeals to the immigration appellate authorities—IAA—are at present registered at their centre at Thanet House in London. On receipt of an appeal, whether from a British post overseas or from the Home Office, the IAA on average dispatches copies of the case papers to the appellant or his of her authorised representative within five days. The IAA's individual hearing centres do not record the average time between the hearing of an appeal by an adjudicator and the dispatch of the determination to the appellant or authorised representative. It is estimated, however, that the current average time for the IAA as a whole is six to eight weeks.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeals to immigration adjudicators have been allowed and dismissed in 1992 and the first quarter of 1993, broken down according to the nationality of the appellant and the type of decision appealed against.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested, broken down according to the country where the application was made, is set out in the tables.

Month ending January 1992 to December 1992
Appeal categories—EEC

	Number allowed	*Number dismissed*
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	—	3
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	—	9
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	—	1
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	—	1
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	—	—
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	—	1
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	—	—
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	—	—
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	—	1
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	—	1
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	—	12
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	—	1

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	—	1
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	—
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	—	31

Appeal categories—Bangladesh

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	4	16
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	—	34
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	23	203
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	115	749
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	4	23
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	152	937
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	2	5
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	50	117
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	1	7
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	1	14
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	5	127
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	1	7
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	1	1
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	—
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	359	2,240

Appeal categories—Ghana

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	2	46
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	4	21
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	14	51
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	74	288
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	—	12
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	6	9
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	1	1
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	—	11
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	3	2
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	—	14
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	8	367
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	5	108
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	—	1
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	1
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	117	932

Appeal categories—India

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	—	13
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	1	39
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	6	22
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	687	2,198
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	10	27
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	72	217
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	15	34
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	67	215
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	47	100
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	1	36
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	24	532
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	2	38
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	2	2
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	1
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	934	3,474

Appeal categories—Jamaica

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	—	13
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	5	57
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	4	49
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	88	397
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	—	15

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	18	36
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	1	2
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	5	18
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	—	2
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	—	4
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	6	224
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	2	25
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	—	4
14. Giving of Removal Directions	1	4
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	130	849

Appeal categories—Nigeria

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	1	63
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	2	37
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	3	37
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	272	1,989
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	5	27
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	15	33
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	2	2
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	4	15
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	2	1
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	5	36
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	55	1,259
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	11	362
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	—	23
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	7
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	377	3,891

Month ending January 1992 to December 1992
Appeal categories—Pakistan

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	1	18
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	2	33
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	—	20
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	611	2,525
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	4	46
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	166	400
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	10	24
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	370	842
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	79	179
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	1	35
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	26	515
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	2	45
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	—	8
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	4
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	1,272	4,694

Appeal categories—All Other Countries

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	10	109
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	55	879
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	15	73
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	672	4,218
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	29	259
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	82	374
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	16	41
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	21	80
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	7	20
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	39	238
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	118	2,735
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	9	224
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	2	17
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	19
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	1,079	9,186

Month ending January 1993 to March 1993
Appeal categories—EEC

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	—	1
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	—	—
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	—	—
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	—	—
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	—	—
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	—	—
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	—	—
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	1	—
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	—	—
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	—	—
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	—	—
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	—	—
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	—	—
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	—
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	1	1

Appeal categories—Bangladesh

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	—	3
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	—	5
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	4	36
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	44	219
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	—	4
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	20	143
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	1	—
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	12	33
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	—	2
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	—	—
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	2	26
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	1	5
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	—	—
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	—
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	84	476

Appeal categories—Ghana

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	—	3
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	—	6
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	—	2
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	32	114
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	—	1
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	2	9
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	—	—
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	—	2
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	—	—
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	—	2
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	2	77
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	—	41
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	—	—
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	—
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	36	257

Appeal categories—India

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	—	2
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	1	5
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	1	7
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	169	393
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	1	6
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	17	66
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	6	11
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	21	55
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	15	26

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	—	8
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	6	93
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	—	16
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	1	1
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	—
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	238	689

Appeal categories—Jamaica

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	—	1
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	2	19
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	—	—
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	15	57
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	—	—
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	2	4
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	1	1
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	1	3
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	—	1
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	—	3
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	6	77
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	—	10
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	—	1
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	—
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	27	177

Appeal categories—Nigeria

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	1	8
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	—	15
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	3	8
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	91	542
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	—	7
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	—	11
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	1	1
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	1	5
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	—	—
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	—	4
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	12	251
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	—	100
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	—	1
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	1
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	109	954

Appeal categories—Pakistan

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	—	7
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	—	3
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	1	3
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	184	437
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	2	3
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	21	70
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	2	3
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	84	155
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	13	21
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	2	7
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	2	105
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	—	22
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	—	1
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	—
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	311	837

Appeal categories—All Other Countries

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
1. Exclusion—Appeal at Port	—	15
2. Exclusion—External Appeals	20	214

	Number allowed	Number dismissed
3. Refusal of Certificate Entitlement	3	21
4. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Temporary purposes (not husbands or wives or fiances or fiancees)	174	1,156
5. Refusal of Entry Clearance for Employment, Business or Independent Means (not husbands, wives, fiances or fiancees)	8	49
6. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by Wives and Children, other dependent relatives and returning residents	41	82
7. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by female fiancees	5	10
8. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by husbands	10	33
9. Refusal of Entry Clearance requested by male fiances	1	9
10. Variation of Landing Conditions (including curtailment of stay or duration or conditions of leave to remain given to persons previously exempted (S. 14(2))	1	50
11. Refusal to Vary Leave to Enter	14	456
12. Decision to make Deportation Order	—	95
13. Refusal to Revoke Deportation Order	—	—
14. Giving of Removal Directions	—	4
15. Destination Only Appeal	—	—
TOTAL	277	2,194

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what arrangements he has made to deal with the effects of the right of appeal for all refused asylum-seekers provided in the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor will designate 16 full-time and 15 part-time adjudicators to act as special adjudicators. These will be appointed from the cadre of experienced immigration adjudicators and will deal with appeals by refused asylum seekers under the Act. In addition, a new regional centre has been opened at Hatton Cross, near Heathrow airport, which will provide 15 hearing rooms; this has replaced the five hearing room centre at Harmondsworth which has been closed.

Benzodiazepine

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many legal aid certificates have been issued in repect of claims arising from the ingestion of benzodiazepine tranquillisers; how many of these have been discharged; and how many are subject to appeal.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A total of 13,168 legal aid certificates have been granted in respect of proceedings relating to benzodiazepine tranquillisers. The position on these is constantly changing, but, at present, more than 7,000 certificates have been discharged and several hundred are awaiting decisions on appeal.

TRANSPORT

Rail Routes (M25)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies have been made of the improvement, reintroduction or new building of passenger rail routes that would provide rapid inter-urban transport between travel generation centres adjacent, or with easy access, to the M25 motorway.

Mr. Freeman: The Heathrow access and London south-west quadrant study has considered options for new rail links within range of the M25. That study is being considered in the wider context of transport and planning issues in London. I understand that some other ideas for rail projects adjacent to the M25 have been proposed outside the Department. In general however, since for most users the M25 is a relatively small part of their overall journey, rail links which simply connected towns close to that motorway would not provide a very attractive alternative.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects services through the channel tunnel to commence.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for Eurotunnel.

Red Star

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many bids to buy Red Star have been received to date.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail is responsible for the sale of Red Star. The number of bids received is a commercial matter for BR.

EMPLOYMENT

Apprenticeships

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to provide more apprenticeships; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: In national vocational qualifications we now have an employer-led framework of qualifications which young people can achieve through work-based training, building on the best of our apprenticeship traditions. These training arrangements and qualifications have much to contribute in improving economic competitiveness and equipping young people for rewarding careers.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he proposes with *(a)* the Trades Union Congress and *(b)* employers to consider ways of stimulating the growth in the number of apprenticeships in British industry.

Miss Widdecombe: Interest in a modern, revitalised apprenticeship system features prominently in discussions I have with representatives of both employers and employees. All concerned need to be clear that work—

based training and vocational qualifications deserve equal esteem alongside other education and training options open to young people.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list for each annual labour force survey since 1984 and for the spring 1992 and winter 1992-93 surveys the number and percentage of 16 and 17-year-olds in full-time employment;

(2) if he will list for each annual labour force survey since 1984 and for the spring 1992 and winter 1992-93 surveys the number of 16 and 17-year-olds International Labour Organisation unemployed and their ILO unemployment rate;

(3) if he will list for each annual labour force survey since 1984 and for spring 1992 and winter 1992-93 surveys the number and percentage of 16 and 17-year-olds *(a)* in total, *(b)* in full-time education and *(c)* not in full-time education.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is given in the following table:

Persons aged 16/17 — *Great Britain*

Year/quarter	*Numbers of 16/17 year olds (000's)*					*Percentage of total 16/17 year olds*			
	Total	*In full time employment*	*ILO Unemployed*[1]	*In full time education*[1]	*Not in full time education*	*In full time employment*	*In full time education*	*Not in full time education*	*ILO unemployment rate (per cent.)*[2]
1984 (spring)	1,749	512	223	973	777	29·3	55·6	44·4	21·5
1985 (spring)	1,717	521	214	920	797	30·3	53·6	46·4	20·3
1986 (spring)	1,667	510	219	897	769	30·6	53·8	46·2	20·8
1987 (spring)	1,663	486	201	943	720	29·2	56·7	43·3	19·4
1988 (spring)	1,626	522	150	916	710	32·1	56·3	43·7	14·1
1989 (spring)	1,523	313	107	867	657	20·6	56·9	43·1	10·8
1990 (spring)	1,449	275	103	889	560	19·0	61·3	38·7	11·5
1991 (spring)	1,369	212	129	874	495	15·5	63·8	36·2	15·2
1992 (spring)	1,339	177	122	925	414	13·2	69·0	31·0	16·1
1992-93 (winter)	1,300	157	125	913	387	12·0	70·2	29·8	17·6

[1] 16/17 year olds included as ILO unemployed may also be in full time education.
[2] ILO unemployed as percentage of total 16/17 year olds economically active (ie in employment + ILO unemployed).

Source: Labour Force Survey (not seasonally adjusted).

Youth Training

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, further to his answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *263*, how many participants in total were on youth training in January *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* 1993.

Miss Widdecombe: Information about the number on youth training in January 1991 is not available, but the March 1991 figure was 314,000. In January 1992 and January 1993, there were 303,000 and 293,000 people respectively on youth training in Great Britain.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 28 June, *Official Report*, column *375*, if he will place in the Library copies of the figures underlying his conclusion as to the level of cost savings possible through the contracting out of public services.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) on 21 May 1993, *Official Report*, columns *324-25*.

Additionally, my officials are currently collating the market-testing figures for the year to March 1992. I shall publish the results in due course.

Civil Service Occupational Health Service

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the annual report of the Civil Service Occupational Health Service will be published.

Mr. David Davis: Part I of the annual report of the Civil Service Occupational Health Service for 1992-93 is published today. This reports on the health of the civil service. Part 2 of the report, which covers the activities of the Civil Service Occupational Health Service during 1992-93 and includes the agency's accounts, is intended to be published by 30 July. Copies of both parts will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses on publication.

Environmental Technologies

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he make a further statement on the benefits that will accrue to the environmental technologies of the implementation of his strategy for science as set out in his White Paper, Cm 2250.

Mr. Waldegrave: The White Paper "Realising Our Potential" will help us build on our strengths in science, engineering and technology. In particular, environmental technologies will benefit from the work of the Natural Environment Research Council, with its new mission statement and the closer relationship it will establish with users of its research.

PRIME MINISTER

Heating Costs

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his estimate of the *(a)* average, *(b)* highest and *(c)* lowest cost of heating a dwelling in (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales and (iv) Northern Ireland for *(a)* the winter months and *(b)* the summer months, and indicate in each case the cost for (i) solid fuel, (ii) electricity, (iii) oil, (iv) natural gas and (v) bottled gas; and if he will list the locations in each of the countries which were used for samples to estimate these costs.

The Prime Minister: This information is not held centrally, but the estimated comparative cost of heating two, three, and four-bedroomed homes using different types of fuel and power can be derived from a publication entitled "Comparative Domestic Heating Costs in the UK" published by Sutherland Associates, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister what reply he has given to the letter on the THORP from the Japanese group which visited him on 15 June.

The Prime Minister: A reply will be sent shortly.

Ministers (Directorships)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister how many Ministers retain directorships of companies; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to paragraph 107 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". No central record is held of such information.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 7 June, *Official Report*, columns *13-14*, when he expects to be able to place in the Library the requested document regarding deaths resulting from the security situation in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: The production of a comprehensive list of people killed since 1968 as a result of the security situation in Northern Ireland, and in related incidents in Great Britain, the Irish Republic and mainland Europe, requires extensive and painstaking research. Information on mainland Europe, which is available only after 1978, and Great Britain is nearly complete and will be placed in the Library in the next fortnight. Work on the remaining information is well advanced, and the completed data will be placed in the Library as soon as they are available.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the actions taken by the Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina which Her Majesty's Government consider to have fulfilled the requirements of the London conference, and the ways in which they have failed to co-operate satisfactorily with the international community's peace efforts.

The Prime Minister: The Bosnian Government have been unable to realise the objectives of the London conference owing to the actions of their other parties, in particular the Serbs. The international community has repeatedly made clear that it will not accept a settlement in Bosnia which is dictated by the Serbs and Croats at the expense of the Muslims. We hope that the Bosnian Government will soon be in a position to enter into negotiations with the other parties under the co-chairmanship of Lord Owen and Mr. Stoltenberg.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the actions taken by the Government of Croatia which Her Majesty's Government consider to have fulfilled the requirements of the London conference, and the ways in which it has failed to co-operate satisfactorily with the international community's peace efforts.

The Prime Minister: While we consider that the Serbs bear the main burden of responsibility for the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, we are also not satisfied that the Croatian Government have so far fully met the requirements of the London conference to achieve a peaceful settlement in Bosnia. European Community Foreign Ministers will be considering on 19 July whether measures should be taken against the Croatians so long as they are engaged in activities contrary to the London conference principles.

HEALTH

Dissatisfied Patients

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will take steps to introduce the necessary changes to second and third stage complaints procedures by dissatisfied patients to ensure that an independent lay assessor is part of the assessment team; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have no plans to make changes to the clinical complaints procedure, in advance of any recommendations which the National Health Service Complaints Review Committee, chaired by Professor Alan Wilson, will be making at the turn of the year.

Neurology Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will indicate the proportion of patients per neurologist within each *(a)* standardised United Kingdom region and *(b)* each district health authority and health trust area.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is shown in the table. Data are not available below regional level. Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Hospital consultant neurologists per 1,000 population by region 30 September 1991

	Consultants	*Population in '000s per consultant*
England	208	231
Northern	11	278
Yorkshire	12	304

	Consultants	Population in '000s per consultant
Trent	14	331
East Anglia	8	251
North West Thames	18	189
North East Thames	27	141
South East Thames	21	176
South West Thames	18	161
Wessex	12	242
Oxford	15	174
South Western	7	459
West Midlands	15	348
Mersey	7	320
North Western	13	318
SHAs	33	n/a

Notes:

1. The sum of regional consultation figures does not equal the England total since some doctors hold contracts in more than one region.
2. n/a means "not applicable".

High Blood Pressure

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate her Department has made of the annual national health service hospital costs incurred in treating patients who suffer heart attacks or strokes caused by raised blood pressure that have not been treated with medication.

(2) what estimate her Department has made of the additional annual cost of the national health service that would be incurred if the 75 per cent. of untreated patients suffering from high blood pressure, as identified in "The Health of the Nation" survey were to be treated with *(a)* calcium antagonist preparations, *(b)* Ace-inhibitors, *(c)* beta-blocking agents and *(d)* beta-blocking agents in combination with diuretics.

Mr. Sackville: No information is held centrally on which to base such estimates.

Community Care Assessment

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will include in the guidance issued to local authorities on assessment procedures under the new community care arrangements a requirement for authorities to pass on to clients the full results of assessment, irrespective of whether the resources are available fully to meet a client's needs.

Mr. Bowis: We have made it clear to authorities that they should share the results of assessments with users so that they know where they stand. There are no plans to issue further guidance in this area.

Paediatric Beds

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average daily number of available paediatric beds in 1991-92 in England, including special health authorities.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Average of daily number of available paediatric beds

Region	1991-92
Northern	731
Yorkshire	809
Trent	879
East Anglian	290
North West Thames	593
North East Thames	639
South East Thames	754
South West Thames	495
Wessex	461
Oxford	399
South Western	559
West Midlands	1,090
Mersey	642
North Western	1,158
Special Health Authorities	447
England[1]: Total Paediatric Beds	9,944

[1] Figures do not add to England total due to rounding.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many special paediatric intensive treatment unit beds there are; how many are temporarily closed; and what estimate has been made of the number required to conform with best practice.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 17 June at columns *704-6*.

Children

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children there were under 16 years in 1991-92.

Mr. Sackville: The latest available information shows that the estimated number of children under 16 years of age, resident in England at mid-1991, was 9·7 million.

Water-borne Diseases

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 5 July, *Official Report*, column *1*, if she will list the five commonest diseases associated with poor water supply and sewage disposal found in the United Kingdom and the incidence of those diseases in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The incidence of diseases are recorded in the Communicable Disease Report published weekly by the Public Health Laboratory Service Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, copies of which are available in the Library.

The source of infection for each case of disease reported cannot always be ascertained. It is therefore not possible to list the five commonest diseases associated with poor water supply or sewage disposal.

Dental Charges

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what help she plans to give to persons currently facing increases in their dental charges.

Dr. Mawhinney: Help with the cost of dental treatment is already available to patients on a low income. Some 21 per cent. of adult courses of treatment are provided with full or partial relief from charges.

Child Migrants Trust

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will now finance the Child Migrants Trust in its work of tracing the families of child migrants.

Mr. Bowis: The Department has awarded the trust a grant of £25,000 for the current financial year.

Respite Breaks

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action her Department is taking to ensure that the new arrangements for community care provide adequate opportunities for disabled people and their unpaid carers to have a respite break; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The first two key objectives of the community care reforms are to promote the development of domiciliary, day and respite services; and to ensure that service providers make practical support for carers a high priority. The reforms require authorities to assess the needs of carers as well as the people for whom they care. They also provide greater incentives for authorities to provide respite care.

NORTHERN IRELAND

International Investments Gibraltar Ltd.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will endeavour to place on the agenda for discussion at the next Anglo-Irish Conference meeting the action taken by the Irish authorities against Mr. William Flynn, in order to persuade him to stop his campaigning for defrauded investors in International Investments Gibraltar Ltd. and its associate companies in the Irish Republic.

Sir John Wheeler: There are no plans to raise this matter, which is not covered by the Anglo-Irish agreement and, thus, does not fall within the field of activity of the intergovernmental conference.

Road Schemes

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his replies of 26 April and 4 May, *Official Report*, columns *220-22*, what is the actual cost benefit rating for each of the 11 major road schemes referred to in those replies.

Mr. Atkins: The information is as follows:-

Scheme	*Rating*
Comber By-pass	9.26
A5 Burndennet	0.85
Antrim-Ballymena: Stage 2	1.91
Omagh Through-pass: Stage 2	5.32
Belfast Urban Area Plan roads—	
Purdysburn Road: Stage 1 (1995-96)	7.10
Balmoral Avenue-Malone Road Junction (1996-97)	23.18
Forster Green Junction (1996-97)	9.13

Comparable figures for the remaining schemes are not available.

Bank of Ireland

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Bank of Ireland's operations in Northern Ireland reflect the fair employment ratios set down by the Fair Employment Commission.

Mr. Atkins: This is a matter for the Bank of Ireland. Every employer covered by the terms of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 is required to determine whether it is affording fair participation in employment to members of both communities and, if necessary, to take affirmative action. In support of these employers, the Fair Employment Commission provides, on request, information and advice on any aspect of fair employment practice, including catchment areas.

The commission is also required to ensure that employers are complying with the legislation, that employers' determinations concerning fair participation are correct and that, where necessary, employers are taking the appropriate affirmative action.

Rural Housing

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he will take to reduce the levels of rural housing unfitness; and what action he plans for areas with particularly high levels of unfitness.

Mr. Atkins: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive—the Executive—whose chief executive has advised me that the most significant way in which it can reduce rural dwelling unfitness is through the home improvement grant scheme.

To tackle the highest levels of rural unfitness, the Executive since 1989 has identified rural priority areas. It is intended to review the basis of these with the intention of extending them and to intensively market and counsel occupants on the opportunities and options offered by the new housing renovation scheme. From the current financial year—1993-94—the Executive expects to approve around 2,000 rural grant applications annually.

To a more limited degree, rural new building will help to further reduce unfitness. Several small settlements and 'crossroads' areas now have a number of new build schemes to rehouse households living in unfit dwellings; around 200 houses are expected to be provided over the next two years. Additionally, the Executive has provided office accommodation and administrative support for the Rural Housing Association as well as identifying several rural locations where new build to meet the local needs of families living in unfit accommodation could be supported.

Railways

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will now place in the Library the conclusions of the consultant's report on private sector involvement in Northern Ireland Railways.

Mr. Atkins: No. The findings of the study are still under consideration.

Fair Employment

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action will be taken by the Fair Employment Commission to ensure that the Agricultural Research Institute, Carrickfergus borough council, Chief Electoral Office and the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company implement affirmative action and outreach programmes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: All public concerns specified at 1 January 1990 under the Fair Employment (Specification of Public Authorities) Order (Northern Ireland) 1989, as amended,

were required to have completed a review of their employment composition and practices by 1 January 1993. Where, as part of this review, an employer determines that members of a particular community are not enjoying or are not likely to continue to enjoy fair participation in employment, the employer is required as part of the review to determine reasonable and appropriate affirmative action.

The Fair Employment Commission is currently studying public sector employers' reviews to establish whether the commission considers that the employers' determinations concerning fair participation are correct and to promote affirmative action where it is necessary.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action will be taken by the Fair Employment Commission to ensure that private sector concerns which employ fewer than 10 employees from one community implement affirmative action and outreach programmes.

Mr. Atkins: Under section 31 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989, all registered concerns are required to complete a review of their employment composition and practices within three years of the date of their registration with the Fair Employment Commission.

The commission is using its statutory powers to ensure that employers have completed their reviews in accordance with the legislation and, where necessary, are taking the appropriate affirmative action and have set goals and timetables for change.

Additionally, the commission is using its powers of investigation under section 11 of the Act to conduct investigations into 47 large private sector concerns, some of which have a very low representation of one community.

Young People

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of *(a)* 18-year-olds, *(b)* 17-year-olds and *(c)* 16-year-olds in January (i) 1991, (ii) 1992 and (iii) 1993; and if he will list for each year the number in full-time education in (1) schools including maintained, independent and special schools and (2) further education, excluding those on youth training schemes in colleges.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The available information is as follows:

Table 1: Mid-year estimates of Northern Ireland population

	1991	*1992*	*1993*
18 year olds	26,702	25,854	25,149
17 year olds	25,652	24,981	24,468
16 year olds	25,009	24,537	24,735

Table 2: Number in full-time education

	Schools	*Further Education*	*Total*
1990-91			
18 year olds	4,553	4,113	8,666
17 year olds	9,417	5,506	14,923
16 year olds	16,923	3,186	20,109
1991-92			
18 year olds	4,464	4,506	8,970
17 year olds	9,431	5,111	14,542
16 year olds	16,544	2,777	19,321

Notes:
1. Schools figures relate to January; Further education figures relate to November.
2. Comparable information is not available for 1992-93.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Probation Service

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implications for the Probation Service of the provision of same-day reports in Crown court cases where a not guilty plea is followed by a finding of guilt.

Mr. Maclean: In asking probation services to provide accelerated pre-sentence reports in the Crown court, we took account of the findings of the review by Her Majesty's inspectorate of probation of the operation of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 which was published last month, and concluded that it would be practicable within current resources to set a same-day target where a custodial remand would otherwise be required.

Runciman Report

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish a response to the report of Lord Runciman on the criminal justice system.

Mr. Maclean: I am considering with my ministerial colleagues the timing and form of the Government's response to the royal commission report.

Security Service

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make available more information about the Security Service following the publication of the White Paper on open government.

Mr. Howard: I am pleased to announce that a booklet about the Security Service, describing its role, responsibilities and organisation is being published today. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

The booklet is a significant step towards greater openness in the Security Service. The information in it will increase understanding of the service's work, while preserving the secrecy necessary to maintain operational effectiveness.

Immitation Fire Arms

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received calling for curbs on the carrying of imitation firearms.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In the past year, the Home Office has received represntations calling for further controls on imitation firearms from the Banking Insurance and Finance Union and the Financial Services Staff Federation.

Bones Analysis

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of his Department's analysis of the bones brought from Ekaterinburg, Russia, in July 1991 for identification.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This is a matter for which the Forensic Science Service is responsible, and the chief executive has provided a reply.

Letter for Dr. Janet Thompson to Mr. David Atkinson, undated:

You recently tabled a Parliamentary Question about the project being undertaken by the Home Office Forensic Science Service (FSS) on the remains found near Ekaterinburg, Russia, in July 1991. As you know, the Chief Executive of an Executive Agency, with the agreement of the Minister, replies to Members of Parliament on operational matters. I am therefore replying on behalf of the FSS.

The project has now been successfully completed and we announced the results on 9 July. As a result of the DNA analysis, scientists believe that five of the nine skeletons found are those of the Tsar, Tsarina and three of their daughters. This conclusion is the same as that reached by anthropologists in Russia.

The statistical analysis was complex. The scientists estimated a 98·5 per cent. probability for the identification, based on a neutral interpretation of the previous anthropological evidence and on the least likely interpretation of the DNA evidence.

The scientists involved in the project will submit their work for publication and peer review in the scientific literature to enable other scientists to examine their work and conclusions. Further work will be needed to refine the statistical analysis. Once validated, we hope soon to be able to put the techniques used into practice in criminal casework to the benefit of the criminal justice system as a whole.

Police Service

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he proposes to set up to ensure Londoners are consulted on *(a)* his statement on the future of the police service, *(b)* the Sheehy report and *(c)* the recommendations of the Royal Commission on criminal justice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The White Paper on police reform —Cm 2281,—invites views on various reform proposals, including the question of the boundaries of the Metropolitan police district. My right hon. and learned Friend has asked for comments from interested persons, including Londoners, on the recommendations of the reports of the inquiry into police responsibilities and rewards—Cm 2280—and the Royal Commission on criminal justice—Cm 2263. Copies of all these documents are available from Her Majesty's Stationery Office and two copies of the digest version of the White Paper have been placed in every public library.

Immigration

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* husbands, *(b)* fiancés, *(c)* wives and *(d)* fiancées refused wholly or partly on (x) primary purpose and (y) support and accommodation grounds in 1991 and 1992 in (i) the countries of the Indian subcontinent and (ii) any other country for which statistics are available appealed against the refusal; and how many of the appeals in each category were (1) allowed, (2) dismissed, (3) withdrawn and (4) are pending.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information is given in the table and relates to the numbers of applications for entry clearance initially refused and the numbers granted following an appeal in the Indian subcontinent. Not all those refused initially go on to appeal.

Information by reason of refusal is not available for countries outside the Indian subcontinent.

Spouses and fiance(e)s in the Indian subcontinent initially refused and subsequently granted entry clearance on appeal by reason for refusal, 1991 and 1992

	Initial refusals				*Granted on appeal*			
	Primary purpose of the marriage was to obtain admission to the United Kingdom:		*Couple could not accommodate and/for maintain themselves without recourse to public funds:*		*Primary purpose of the marriage was to obtain admission to the United Kingdom:*		*Couple could not accommodate and/for maintain themselves without recourse to public funds:*	
	Solely for this reason	*Partly for this reason*[1]	*Solely for this reason*	*Partly for this reason*[1]	*Solely for this reason*	*Partly for this reason*[1]	*Solely for this reason*	*Partly for this reason*[1]
1991								
Bangladesh								
Husbands	90	40	20	30	20	—	[2]—	—
Fiances	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wives	[2]—	[2]—	20	10	—	—	10	[2]—
Fiancees	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pakistan								
Husbands	760	660	40	660	210	280	20	270
Fiances	100	70	[2]—	70	50	50	[2]—	10
Wives	40	30	140	40	[2]—	[2]—	50	[2]—
Fiancees	[2]—	[2]—	20	10	—	—	—	—
India								
Husbands	270	20	[2]—	20	50	—	—	—
Fiances	210	20	—	20	50	—	—	—
Wives	130	20	[2]—	10	20	—	—	—
Fiancees	70	20	—	10	10	—	—	—
Total Indian sub-continent								
Husbands	1,120	710	70	700	280	280	30	270

	Initial refusals				Granted on appeal			
	Primary purpose of the marriage was to obtain admission to the United Kingdom:		Couple could not accommodate and/for maintain themselves without recourse to public funds:		Primary purpose of the marriage was to obtain admission to the United Kingdom:		Couple could not accommodate and/for maintain themselves without recourse to public funds:	
	Solely for this reason	Partly for this reason[1]	Solely for this reason	Partly for this reason[1]	Solely for this reason	Partly for this reason[1]	Solely for this reason	Partly for this reason[1]
Fiances	310	100	[2]—	90	100	50	[2]—	10
Wives	180	50	170	70	30	[2]—	50	10
Fiancees	70	20	20	10	10	—	—	—
1992								
Bangladesh								
Husbands	120	70	40	60	70	20	20	30
Fiances	—	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	[2]—	—
Wives	10	10	20	30	—	[2]—	—	[2]—
Fiancees	[2]—	—	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—
Pakistan								
Husbands	720	570	120	570	160	190	10	190
Fiances	80	40	10	40	20	30	[2]—	20
Wives	40	30	190	40	10	10	20	10
Fiancees	[2]—	10	10	10	[2]—	—	[2]—	—
India								
Husbands	240	20	[2]—	20	90	—	—	[2]—
Fiances	200	20	—	20	50	—	—	—
Wives	180	40	20	40	50	—	—	—
Fiancees	70	20	[2]—	10	10	[2]—	—	[2]—
Total Indian sub-continent								
Husbands	1,090	660	160	630	320	220	30	220
Fiances	280	60	10	60	70	30	[2]—	20
Wives	230	70	260	100	60	10	20	20
Fiancees	70	30	10	20	10	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—

[1] Includes double-counting of those for which refusal was jointly for these reasons. *All figures are rounded to the nearest ten.*
[2] Equals less than 5.

Note: Initial refusals and numbers granted on appeal do not necessarily refer to the same individuals as an appeal may not be decided in the same year. These figures include some revisions.

Winson Green Prison

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will order an inquiry into the release of Mark Jarvis on home leave from Winson Green prison;

(2) if he will make a statement on the circumstances which led to the last release of Mark Jarvis from Winson Green prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given to both these questions.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated July 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about Mark Jarvis being granted home leave from Birmingham prison.

I refer you to my letter in reply to the Question to Mr. Graham Allen MP on 13 July published in the Official Report (columns 429 and 430), a copy of which is enclosed.

As you will see from that reply the decision to grant home leave was reviewed by the governor at Birmingham. The area manager has also reviewed the circumstances in which Mr. Jarvis was granted home leave and he also concluded that the decision was not an unreasonable one.

In the circumstances I am satisfied that there is no need for a further enquiry into this matter.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Market Testing

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answers of 7 June, *Official Report*, column *32* and 25 June, *Official Report*, column *325*, how many projects are covered by the £13.5 million expected cost of the market-testing programme for 1993-94; to what services they relate; how much is to be spent on each project; and how much will be paid to outside consultants for each project.

Mr. Hague: The expected cost of £13.5 million was broadly estimated for the financial year 1993-94. At present there is a total of some 50 individual projects and they relate to the following services:

Accommodation and Office Services
Archival Storage
Audit
Catering
Customer Services
Data Entry
Debt Recovery
Fraud
Legal Services
Medical Services
Personnel
Printing
Publishing
Recruitment

Storage and Distribution
Training
Video Production

The individual projects will be subject to a market test through the tendering of some 93 separate contracts/service level agreements.

It is not possible to state the level of expenditure on individual projects as this largely depends on each project's needs, which are dictated by the scale and complexity revealed by the market testing process.

While there is an anticipated need for some external consultancy, it is not possible to determine the level of expenditure of individual projects.

EC Expenditure

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each country in the European Community *(a)* the total expenditure on social protection, *(b)* the per capita expenditure and *(c)* expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table.

Expenditure on social protection 1991

	(a) Total	*(b) Per capita*	*(c) Per cent. of GDP*
Belgium	42,004·2	4,191·2	26·7
Denmark	23,790·6	4,608·7	29·8
France	274,763·9	4,803	28·7
Germany	316,931·1	4,952	26·6
Greece	[1]13,723·5	[1]1,367·8	[1]20·7
Ireland	7,912·4	2,240·2	21·3
Italy	230,651·9	3,991·3	24·4
Luxembourg	2,259·7	5,797·3	27·5
Netherlands	77,172·2	5,101·1	32·4
Portugal	15,919·4	1,616·9	19·4
Spain	95,019·5	2,432·9	21·4
United Kingdom	210,597	3,653·5	24·7

[1] 1989.

Source: Social Protection Expenditure and Receipts 1980-1991 Eurostat.

(a) Total expenditure in millions of purchasing power standards (Purchasing power standards (PPS) take comparative price levels in the countries into account).
(b) Per capita expenditure in purchasing power standards.
(c) Expenditure as a percentage of GDP.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Inland Revenue (Relocation)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his latest estimate of the public expenditure savings which will arise from the transfer of the Inland Revenue headquarters office from London to Nottingham; and how these savings are to be achieved in terms of accommodation, staffing and other general running costs;

(2) when he expects the transfer of Inland Revenue headquarters office from London to Nottingham to be completed;

(3) what is the current cost of running Inland Revenue headquarters offices in London and Nottingham, indicating accommodation and salaries costs in each place.

Mr. Dorrell: The offices included in the Inland Revenue's relocation from London to Nottingham are a number of headquarter units and a number of operational offices. At present, just under two thirds of the posts or staff involved have already moved to temporary accommodation in Nottingham, and the remainder are still based in London.

The cost in 1992-93 of the staff already in Nottingham ia around £20 million, of which some £14 million is pay and £2·5 million is accommodation. The 1992-93 cost of the staff still based in London is about £21 million of which some £13·5 million is pay and £3·5 million is accommodation.

The currently estimated annual net pay and accommodation savings are around £12 million a year from 1996-97 to which some £4·5 million is pay and £7·5 million is accommodation.

On present plans, the relocation to the new purpose-built centre will be completed by April 1995.

No. 11 Downing Street

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost of replacing the carpeting on the second floor of No. 11 Downing street.

Sir John Cope: The carpet on the second floor of No. 11 Downing street has not been replaced. One room on the second floor was recarpeted in 1991 at a cost of £963.

Tax Allowances and Reliefs

Ms Eagle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the savings from restricting all tax allowances and reliefs to *(a)* a 25 per cent. rate of tax and *(b)* a 20 per cent. rate of tax, showing the amounts for each allowance and relief.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 15 July 1993]:* The estimated full-year yields at 1993-94 income levels are shown in the table.

£ million

	Restriction to	
	25 per cent.	*20 per cent.*
All allowances and reliefs	2,400	8,900
Personal allowance (excluding age related addition)	1,000	5,200
Married couple's allowance (excluding age related addition)	320	1,100
Age allowance[1]	—	100
Mortgage interest relief[2]	—	860
Pension contribution reliefs[3]	470	1,000

[1] The higher levels of the age-related personal and married couple's allowance given to those aged 65 and over, subject to the income limit.
[2] Mortgage interest relief is currently restricted to the basis rate of tax. The yield from restricting the relief to 20 per cent. is based on the conventional assumption that interest rates remain at their current levels.
[3] Employees' contributions to occupational pension schemes and contributions to personal pensions including retirement annuity premia and free standing additional voluntary contributions.

No account has been taken of possible behavioural changes resulting from such restrictions. Figures for the major allowances and reliefs show the yield from restricting each allowance or relief separately. If two or more were restricted, the total yield would be greater than the sum of the figures for individual allowances.

EC Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Economic and Finance Council of the European Community met in Brussels on 12 July. I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council discussed the convergence programme circulated by the United Kingdom in May of this year. The programme reflects the Government's economic strategy for sustained non-inflationary growth set out in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" published on Budget day. In discussion, I underlined the Government's determination to take the action necessary to reduce the budget deficit. I also drew the Council's attention to the emerging signs of broad-based economic recovery, our recent good record on inflation, and highlighted the favourable prospects for growth in the United Kingdom economy by comparison with other member states.

The Council welcomed the United Kingdom programme as ambitious and built on realistic assumptions and there was support for the Government's commitment to a firm anti-inflationary strategy. The adoption of a budgetary consolidation strategy and the measures taken in the Budget were welcomed. Ministers also noted the substantial progress already achieved by the United Kingdom in introducing structural reforms and welcomed the Government's continued commitment to supply-side reform.

The general economic situation in the Community was also discussed in the context of the Council's six-monthly multilateral surveillance discussions. Ministers underlined the importance of the conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council on economic recovery and unemployment. The Council also stressed the need to address fiscal imbalances and to create conditions which would permit further reduction of interest rates in some member states. It was agreed that national convergence programmes were a valuable instrument of economic policy co-ordination. Without prejudice to the national responsibility for programmes, it was agreed that it would be desirable for them to cover a common time horizon and for them to be updated annually.

Ministers had a first discussion of the Commission's ideas for interest rate subsidies for European investment bank lending to small and medium-sized enterprises and bridging finance for structural funds spending in the context of a general discussion of follow-up to the European Council. These proposals are likely to return to the Council later in the year.

Finally, there was a short discussion of tax-free allowances for travellers entering the Community from third countries and travellers within the Community. Germany maintained its objections to the increases proposed.

No formal votes were taken. The Council conclusions on the United Kingdom convergence programme and the communiqué on multilateral surveillance were agreed by consensus.

WALES

Valuation Tribunals

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many *(a)* officers and *(b)* members of staff employed by the joint Gwynedd/Clwyd valuation tribunals office speak Welsh; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action he proposes to take to ensure that appellants in Gwynedd are able to correspond with the officers of the joint Gwynedd/Clwyd valuation tribunal office and to have their cases heard through the medium of the Welsh language; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how many *(a)* officers and *(b)* members of staff employed by the joint Gwynedd/Clwyd valuation tribunal office have a sufficient knowledge of the Welsh language to correspond through the medium of the language; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In appointing staff to the new joint office, the Gwynedd and Clwyd valuation tribunals were required to take account of the Secretary of State's policy that a fully bilingual service should be provided. Questions about the staff appointments are matters for the tribunals themselves as the employers. The tribunals are being provided with the necessary resources to pay for the Welsh language training of staff; and to deal with any specific issues concerning Welsh language correspondence and enquiries. The tribunals hear cases in Welsh as appropriate and will continue to do so.

Neurology

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the specialist centres in Wales in neurology and the treatment of epilepsy, indicating the number of patients treated by each centre in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The hospitals listed in the table treated patients in the speciality of neurology during the financial year 1991-92. It is not known centrally how many patients treated for epilepsy are included with the figures. It should be noted that patients with a diagnosis relating to neurological problems may sometimes be treated by consultants in other specialties.

Hospital	*Number of patients treated*		
	In-patients	*Day cases*	*New out-patients*
Clwyd			
Ysbyty Glan Clwyd	—	—	333
Ysbyty Maelor	—	—	200
East Dyfed			
West Wales General	—	—	233
Bronglais	—	—	18
Gwent			
Nevill Hall	—	—	29
Monmouth	—	—	34
Royal Gwent[1]	—	—	153
Mount Pleasant	—	—	67
Gwynedd			
Ysbyty Gwynedd	—	—	249
Mid Glamorgan			
Prince Charles	—	—	4
Mountain Ash	1	—	—
Bridgend General	—	—	109
East Glamorgan	—	—	38
Powys			
Breconshire War Memorial	—	—	45

Hospital	Number of patients treated: In-patients	Day cases	New out-patients
South Glamorgan			
University Hospital of Wales[1]	772	32	1,575
Rookwood	309	23	61
Llandough	—	1	84
West Glamorgan			
Singleton	100	1	488
Fairwood	8	—	—
Morriston	767	1	752
Clydach War Memorial	26	—	—
Neath General	—	—	228

[1]Includes paediatric neurology.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will indicate the proportion of patients to each neurologist in each district health authority and health trust area in Wales;

(2) how many neurologists are based within each district health authority and health trust in Wales; and how many neurologists specialise in epilepsy.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of neurologists and patients per neurologist is given in the table. It is not known centrally how many of the neurologists specialise in epilepsy.

Health authority	Consultant neurologists[1]	Patients per consultant[2]: In-patient	Day cases	New out-patients
Clwyd	0·46	—	—	1,159
East Dyfed	0·09	—	—	2,789
Gwent	0·09	—	—	3,144
Gwynedd	0·36	—	—	692
Mid Glamorgan	0·52	2	—	290
Pembrokeshire	—	—	—	—
Powys	0·03	—	—	1,500
South Glamorgan	3·67	294	15	469
West Glamorgan	1·55	581	1	947

[1] Whole time equivalent staff in post as at 30 September 1991. Includes consultants in the specialty of paediatric neurology.
[2] Patients treated in the specialties of neurology and paediatric neurology during 1991-92.

Housing Associations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to which of those housing associations operating in Wales are based *(a)* in Wales and *(b)* outside Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is Housing for Wales policy to provide grant aid only to registered housing associations based in Wales. The whole of the development programme is therefore carried out by Welsh associations; but a few English associations continue to own and manage small numbers of homes in Wales.

Burial Grounds

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding differences between the responsibilities of the Church in Wales and the Church of England in relation to the maintenance of closed burial grounds; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The only representations received on this subject have come from the hon. Gentleman: four letters since June 1990. My right hon. Friend does not propose to take any action at this stage.

Health Line Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the monthly amount of inquiries made to Health Line Wales since it was set up; and what independent evaluation he has commissioned of the value for money to be obtained from its operation.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Between 30 November 1992 and 30 June 1993, a total of 1,703 calls were received by Health Line Wales, broken down by month.

	Number
January	208
February	580
March	374
April	252
May	196
June	93

All calls are monitored and this information forms part of the full internal evaluation of the service currently being undertaken. It will include an external consumer satisfaction survey by independent market researchers of a random sample of the users of the service. The evaluation report is expected during early August.

Young People

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of *(a)* 18-year-olds, *(b)* 17-year-olds and *(c)* 16-year-olds in January (i) 1991, (ii) 1992 and (iii) 1993; and if he will list for each year the number in full-time education in (1) schools, including maintained, independent and special schools and (2) further education, excluding those on YTS in colleges.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information required is given in the table.

	16 years	17 years	18 years
1991			
Population[1]	36,100	36,800	39,000
Students in full time education:			
School[2]	13,487	8,957	1,114
Further education[3]	8,047	6,997	3,940
1992			
Population[1]	34,400	36,100	36,600
Students in full time education:			
School[2]	14,276	9,385	1,228
Further education[3]	8,886	8,076	4,580

	16 years	17 years	18 years
1993			
Population[1]	32,800	34,500	36,000
Students in full time educa[illegible]:			
School[2,4]	14,570	9,538	1,213
Further education[3,4]	8,943	8,786	5,095

[1] All population data refer to mid year (June). 1991 data are final mid year estimates for 1991—produced by OPCS. 1992 and 1993 data are 1991 based OPCS projections (based on provisional 1991 mid year estimates)—produced by Government Actuary's Department.
[2] At January each year, ages at 31 August the preceding year. Includes Sixth Form Colleges.
[3] Full time and sandwich courses at November of each academic year, ages at 31 August preceding each academic year.
[4] Data for 1993 are provisional.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial assistance he has granted to the Welsh Grant-maintained Schools Association; what assistance in kind has been granted to the association; what proposals he has for further grant-in-aid; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My Department does not provide assistance, financial or otherwise, to the Welsh Grant-Maintained Schools Association. However, officials have met members of the organisation to discuss a wide range of issues relating to the grant-maintained sector in Wales.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Offshore Oil and Gas Licensing

Mr. Cormack: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to release information regarding the special conditions attached to blocks awarded in the 14th offshore oil and gas licensing round.

Mr. Eggar: The special conditions attached to blocks awarded in the 14th offshore licensing round are the most far reaching to date in terms of environmental protection. It is my intention that those conditions attached to licences in order to protect the environment should be made available. My officials are currently consulting the industry and those bodies which advised on the conditions regarding the separation of their commercially confidential elements from those which can be disclosed. I am anxious to release as much of this information as possible.

Defence Industry (Reduction)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what specific steps are being taken by his Department to assist those areas which have been affected by the recent reductions in the level of defence procurement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* My Department provides advice to defence companies on diversification opportunities, through the "Changing Tack" regional seminar programme and associated help manual. In addition, areas which are adversely affected by reductions in defence spending may be able to benefit from the EC Konver initiative, which will be worth some £15 million to the United Kingdom as a whole.

EC Funding

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those applicants which his Department has submitted or is planning to submit for funding under the Konver programme.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* The Konver scheme has not yet progressed so far. European Community procedures for such schemes require general national programmes to be written and approved before individual applications can be considered.

The European Commission has asked for proposed national programmes for Konver—not individual applications—to be sent to it by 31 August. Individual United Kingdom applications will be considered as soon as possible after the Commission has agreed the United Kingdom's Konver programme; I hope that that will be early in the autumn.

Meanwhile, in order that the scheme may proceed in the United Kingdom as soon as possible after the Brussels procedures have been completed, the Government will invite draft applications in August, following completion of the consultation process now being undertaken by my Department.

ENVIRONMENT

Industrial Pollution

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in his plans to conduct a survey of industrial pollution expenditure.

Mr. Yeo: We shall start work on the survey later this year.

Council Tax

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the calculation used in determining the scheme tax band when assessing levels of council tax transitional relief entitlement; and if he will list both the scheme and actual figures for every band in each London borough.

Mr. Baldry: Scheme taxes used in the calculation of transitional relief are calculated by charging authorities in accordance with part II of schedule 2 to The Council Tax (Transitional Reduction Scheme) (England) Regulations —SI 1993/175. For the other information requested, I refer the hon. Member to the tables that have been placed in the Library following the answers given to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 24 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *369*, and to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Mr. Henderson) on 31 March 1993, *Official Report*, column *295*.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration governed his decision on the timing of the release of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee's report on waste substitution; by what means the release of the report was publicised; what representations have been made to his Department before and after the release in regard to the timing and contents of the report; and what considerations

of commercial sensitivity underlay the decision to remove certain information from the published version of the report.

Mr. Yeo: This report was placed in the Library of the House following agreement on the commercially sensitive material which needed to be withheld, and a RWMAC press release was issued. There remain a number of points that require clarification and RWMAC will be asked to undertake further work on this and to report. This further report will be made available on the same basis.

PSA BM Scotland

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the bids which were received in response to the competitive tender of the PSA BM business; and what was the basis on which the successful tender by SERCO was accepted.

Mr. Baldry: The following bidders were shortlisted as potential purchasers of PSA Building Management Scotland: a joint venture between Amey and Sir Alexander Gibb and partners; Serco; and a management buy-out team. Serco was chosen as the purchaser because it best met the criteria set by the Government. The main criteria were:

the overall financial value of the offers

bidders' financial status

the credibility of bidders' long term future plans

bidders' commitment to developing the business in the private sector

bidders' intentions regarding staff and the prospects for staff

bidders' response to the proposed secondment and pension arrangements

bidders' commitment to ensuring continuity of service to existing customers"

THORP

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, following his recent announcement of a further consultation period on THORP, if he will list *(a)* the relevant officials, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* consultants, who will be involved; and by what processes the consultation will be carried out.

Mr. Yeo: We intend to consult the same statutory consultees and other bodies who were recently consulted by the regulatory authorities, and to make the consultation documents available to the public in the same way.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) of 28 June, *Official Report*, column *392*, whether the documents he intends to release in connection with a further round of consultation will be made available in translation in the language of the principal countries contracted for reprocessing at the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield.

Mr. Yeo: No.

Environmental Ideas

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to improve the communication of environmental ideas, problems and solutions to the public.

Mr. Yeo: My colleagues and I take every opportunity to raise public awareness of environmental matters. The Department runs information campaigns on specific issues and encourages and supports local authorities, industry and the voluntary sector in their public information work in the environmental field. In order to get the environmental debate on a sound factual footing, we published in October last year "The UK Environment", the first comprehensive compilation of statistically based information on our environment. Returns from readers show that it has been welcomed as a positive contribution to improving public understanding.

Environmental Performance Indicators

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he or officials of his Department have had with the Chemical Industries Association on environmental performance indicators.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend is due to meet the Chemical Industries Association on Tuesday 20 July and this is one of the topics proposed for discussion.

Oil and Gas Exploration

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to produce environmental sensitivity maps of the United Kingdom continental shelf area indicating where the Government would not allow exploration for oil and gas.

Mr. Yeo: None: it is more efficient to consider these questions in relation to each area as and when the possibility of licences for exploration is considered.

Warehouse Racking Systems

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to implement the recommendation of the Wood committee that warehouse racking systems should be deleted from class 4 of the Plant and Machinery Order.

Mr. Baldry: We are currently considering all the Wood committee's recommendations as part of the preparation for the 1995 rating revaluation.

DEFENCE

Trident

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what information published by, or received from Nirex his Department based the reply to question 8 contained in his departmental memorandum to the Defence Committee, HC-Paper 549, page 38.

Mr. Aitken: The reply to the question referred to was based on information contained in confidential management documents produced by Nirex. Some of this information is also contained in the publicly available Nirex report No. 327, dated 21 October 1992.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many copies of his Department's brochure, "Trident: Thirty Years of the Polaris Sales Agreement" have been published, at what cost; and to whom it has been disbributed.

Mr. Aitken: A total of 10,000 copies of the brochure "Trident: Thirty Years of the Polaris Sales Agreement" have been printed. Copies have been sent to, among others, the media, members of the public, local councillors and hon. Members. A number have been placed in the Library of the House. The overall cost of producing the brochure was some £26,000.

Depleted Uranium Shells

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his answers to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) of 1 July, *Official Report*, columns *630-31*, when he expects to begin the environmental impact assessment at Eskmeals and Kirkcudbright, respectively, to which he refers; if Her Majesty's Health and Safety Executive produced a report following its 1986 visit to Kirkcudbright; and if Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution produced published reports following the visits to Eskmeals in 1989 and 1993 to which he refers.

Mr. Aitken: My Department is already in the process of commissioning independent consultants to undertake an environmental impact assessment at both Eskmeals and Kirkcudbright. A suitable company will be engaged by late summer or early autumn. The Health and Safety Executive did produce a report following its 1986 visit to Kirkcudbright. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution did not produce published reports following its visits to Eskmeals in 1989 and 1993.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies his Department has conducted on the pyrophoric qualities of depleted uranium when distributed into particulate matter on impact in an armour-piercing shell.

Mr. Aitken: Neither the Ministry of Defence nor the Defence Research Agency has conducted studies or trials specifically addressing this phenomenon. Data available from United States sources indicate that it has no military significance.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *639*, if Her Majesty's Government made any submissions to the European Commission, pursuant to article 34 of chapter III of the Euratom treaty, when United Kingdom depleted uranium shells were tested at La Gramat in France in 1990.

Mr. Aitken: The Euratom treaty does not apply to military activities. There was therefore no requirement to make any submission to the European Commission regarding the testing of depleted uranium shells at Gramat in France.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when British Nuclear Fuels was awarded the contract to monitor for radioactivity at the Dundrennan test range at Kirkcudbright following the testing of depleted uranium shells; and if the monitoring reports have been published.

Mr. Aitken: British Nuclear Fuel's contract to analyse samples from the Kirkcudbright range commenced on 1 May 1992 and was renewed earlier this year. As I indicated in my reply to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 1 July 1993, *Official Report*, column *630*, copies of the monitoring reports on the three ranges where DU rounds have been fired will be placed in the House of Commons Library once they have been checked to confirm that no classified information is included.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the tests for the armour-piercing capability of depleted uranium shells are conducted.

Mr. Aitken: All tests in the United Kingdom of the armour-piercing capability of DU shells are carried out in the enclosed butt facility, known locally as "VJ Battery", at Eskmeals. The tests at Kirkcudbright are to test the range and accuracy of DU rounds and no firings have ever been carried out against armour targets there.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 5 July, *Official Report*, column 51, if he will set out *(a)* how many depleted uranium shells have been recovered following test firing into the Solway firth and *(b)* what monitoring has been undertaken of the Solway firth as to radioactive contamination from the shells.

Mr. Aitken: No DU rounds have been recovered from the Solway firth to date. Environmental monitoring arrangements are set out in the reply of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces' to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) on 14 June, *Official Report*, column *474*.

Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition planned to be held in Aldershot between 5 and 10 September.

Mr. Aitken: We have received numerous written representations concerning the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition both from hon. Members relaying the views of their constituents and direct from members of the public.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what tests and studies the chemical and biological establishment at Porton Down has carried out on the organophosphorous binary reactant QL; when these experiments were carried out; and for what purpose;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 1 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *163*, how many memoranda of understanding have been agreed in the field of chemical and biological defence, as opposed to offensive chemical and biological warfare, involving Britain and the United States of America since 1963; what was the subject and nature of each memorandum of understanding; and in which year each memorandum of understanding was agreed;

(3) pursuant to his answer of 1 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *162*, what information his Department has

with the United States of America relating to technical work on its binary chemical weapon, M-687 155 mm artillery round; and how and when this information was exchanged;

(4) in which years VX nerve gas was stored at the Ministry of Defence's establishment at Nancekuke in Cornwall; and why it was stored there;

(5) pursuant to his answer of 1 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *160*, when Australia and New Zealand joined the tripartite technical co-operation programme; for what reasons Britain agreed to each of these two countries joining the programme; and if information was exchanged under the programme on the subject of chemical and biological defence and warfare before 1967;

(6) when the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down started and completed work on the AR5 aircrew respiratory system; in conjunction with which other countries the research and development of the system was carried out; under which specific defence agreement this collaboration was arranged; and if this system is now in service with any other countries;

(7) pursuant to his answer of 1 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *162*, how many exchange postings in relation to binary chemical weapons the United Kingdom and United States Governments arranged and in which years; and under which specific defence agreement these postings were arranged;

(8) what experiments his Department carried out on Q fever; when these experiments were conducted; for what purpose the results of these studies were passed to either the United States of America, Canada or Australia; and why and when these results were passed to other countries;

(9) if all research carried out by the Ministry of Defence's chemical and biological research establishment at Porton Down into LSD was conducted within the establishment itself;

(10) what factors led to the signing of the 1980 memorandum of understanding between the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada on chemical and biological defence, as referred to in his answer of 21 May 1992, *Official Report*, column *255*;

(11) pursuant to his answer of 1 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *162*, when the two memoranda of understanding referred to in the answer were signed; how many other memoranda of understanding relating to chemical and biological defence Britain has signed with Australia since 1963; and what they were about;

(12) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) on 1 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *164*, if he will list the location, dates and participating countries at each of the subsequent tripartite conferences on toxicological warfare until the present day; and if he will outline the recommendations and conclusions of each of these conferences;

(13) which British scientific research institutions have received stocks of toxins and biological agents from the United States of America Department of Defence since 1979; which toxins and biological agents have been transferred and when; which United States Department of Defence establishments have supplied these toxins and biological agents; under which defence agreements these toxins and biological agents were transferred; and for what purpose on each occasion;

(14) on what dates, and in which publications, scientists on extramural research projects funded by the chemical and biological defence establishment, Porton Down, published their findings in 1991, as referred to on page 15 of the establishment's annual report 1991-92;

(15) for what reasons the Ministry of Defence delayed dismantling its nerve gas agent plant at Nancekuke, Cornwall after the Ministry had decided to decommission the plant; what tasks were carried out at the site in the intervening years between the decommissioning and dismantling; and if these tasks were connected to the United Kingdom's chemical and biological defence programme;

(16) pursuant to his answer of 1 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *164*, if he will publish the official name and details of the informal agreement under which the 15th tripartite conference on toxicological warfare was organised; and if this agreement still exists;

(17) how many members of the 1985 independent advisory group on Gruinard island have since been on scientific advisory committees serving the Ministry of Defence or the the Porton Down chemical and biological warfare establishment;

(18) what experiments his Department has carried out on the chemical agent B staphylococcal enterotoxin; when and where these tests and studies were carried out; for what purpose; when the results of these experiments were first exchanged with the United States of America, Canada or Australia; and if this exchange occurred under the arrangements of the technical co-operation programme.

Mr. Hanley: These are matters for the chief executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document and I have asked him to reply.

Letters from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 July 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what tests and studies the chemical and biological establishment at Porton Down has carried out on the organophosphorus binary reactant QL; when these experiments were carried out; and for what purpose (Question 12, Order Paper, 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. As part of this work, it is necessary to evaluate the potential hazard from nerve agents such as VX. In order to do this, work was carried out at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Nancekuke from early 1960 to about 1968 to study the transesterification process involving QL as part of the study into the nerve gas VX.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him, pursuant to his Answer of 1 December 1992, Official Report, column 163, how many memoranda of understanding have been agreed in the field of chemical and biological defence, as opposed to offensive chemical and biological warfare, involving Britain and the United States of America since 1963; what was the subject and nature of each memorandum of understanding; and in which year each memorandum of understanding was agreed (Question 13, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The United Kingdom abandoned offensive work on chemical and biological weapons in the late 1950s and since then the role of the Chemical and Biological Defence

Establishment has been to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The following agreements in the field of chemical and biological defence involving Britain and the United States of America have been agreed since 1963;

(a) The United Kingdom-United States of America-Canada Memorandum of Understanding on chemical and biological defence was signed in 1980 and addresses research, development, production and procurement of chemical and biological defence equipment.

(b) The NATO Army Armaments Group (NAAG) Panel VII on nuclear, biological and chemical defence involving both Britain and the United States of America was set up in 1967. This addresses the standardisation of NBC equipment and procedures.

(c) The United Kingdom-United States-Canada-Australia American British Canadian Australian (ABCA) Armies agreed The Basic Standardisation Agreement in 1964 with the aims of ensuring the fullest cooperation and collaboration between the Armies, the highest possible degree of interoperability through standardisation and the greatest possible economy through the use of combined resources and effort. This includes a group known as the Quadripartite Working Group (QWG) which has a panel on NBC defence.

(d) The Technical Cooperation Programme which was set up in 1958 activated its Sub Group E on chemical and biological defence in 1967 which has the aim of promoting collaboration in chemical and biological defence research.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him, pursuant to his Answer of 1 December 1992, Official Report, column 162, what information his Department has with the United States of America relating to technical work on its binary chemical weapon, M-687 155 mm artillery round; and how and when this information was exchanged (Question 15, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. The United States of America has provided technical information to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down which has enabled us to evaluate the potential hazard to the United Kingdom Armed Forces should a potential aggressor State utilize biological binary weapons.

4. This information has been provided during the course of the development of the M-687 binary artillery round as part of the regular briefings provided by the United States on their chemical and biological programme. Much of this information has been in the public domain and has been provided to the United Kingdom for background information.

5. As the United Kingdom abandoned all offensive work on chemical weapons in the late 1950s, there has been no collaboration with the United States of America on the M-687 binary chemical artillery round.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him in which years VX nerve gas was stored at the Ministry of Defence's establishment at Nancekuke in Cornwall; and why it was stored there (Question 16, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. Samples of VX nerve agent were stored at Nancekuke between 1957 and 1976 for studies into the storage stability of this agent so as to assist in our evaluation of the potential hazard to the United Kingdom Armed Forces should an aggressor produce such materials.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him pursuant to his Answer of 1 December 1992, Official Report, column 160, when Australia and New Zealand joined the Tripartite Technical Co-operation Programme; for what reasons Britain agreed to each of these two countries joining the programme; and if information was exchanged under the programme on the subject of chemical and biological defence and warfare before 1967 (Question 19, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. Australia joined the Tripartite Cooperation Programme in 1965 and, since it was no longer a tripartite organisation, the name of TTCP was changed to The Technical Cooperation Programme thus retaining the same initials. In 1969 New Zealand also joined The Technical Cooperation Programme. Our records do not indicate the reasons why the United Kingdom, US and Canada agreed to each of the two countries joining the programme.

3. Information on chemical and biological defence was exchanged prior to 1967 under the American, British, Canadian and Australian (ABCA) agreement and before that under the close cooperation which existed between the Allies during World War II.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him when the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down started and completed work on the AR5 Aircrew Respiratory System; in conjunction with what other countries the research and development of the system was carried out; under which specific defence agreement this collaboration was arranged; and if this system is now in service with any other countries (Question 21, Order, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down started work on the AR5 Aircrew Respiratory System project in 1976 whan the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment provided advice to the lead Establishments of the Defence Research Agency Farnborough (then the Royal Aircraft Establishment Farnborough) and the RAF Institute of Aviation Medicine on overall NBC philosophy, materials and testing. CBDE has continued to provide advice in support of the in-service deployment of the AR5 Aircrew Respiratory System.

3. No other countries were involved in the development of the AR5 which is currently in-service with the UK Armed Forces and is also used by the US Navy and Canadian forces.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him pursuant to his Answer of 1 December 1992, Official Report, column 162, how many exchange postings in relation to binary chemical weapons the United Kingdom and United States governments arranged and in which years; and under which specific defence agreement these postings were arranged (Question 23, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. As the United Kingdom abandoned work on offensive chemical and biological weapons in the late 1950s, there have been no exchange postings in relation to binary chemical weapons between the United Kingdom and the United States Governments as the US binary programme began in the 1970s.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what experiments his Department carried out on Q fever, when these experiments were conducted; for what purpose the results of these studies were passed to either the United States of America, Canada or Australia; and why and when these results were passed to other countries (Question 27, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has carried out research on Coxiella Burnettii, the causative agent of Q-Fever. This work was carried out in the late 1980s and has been directed at the development of identification techniques for the organism based on gene probe and antibody technologies. The results of this work have formed part of the programme of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment which is the subject of collaboration with the United States, Canada and Australia under The Technical Cooperation Programme and with the United States and Canada under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him if all research carried out by the Ministry of Defence's Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down into LSD was conducted within the establishment itself (Question 30, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. The majority of the work at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment into the evaluation of the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is carried out within the Establishment. Extramural research contracts are placed with universities and other higher education institutes and industry when these outside bodies have an appropriate expertise that is not available within the Establishment and which compliments the expertise of the Establishment.

4. Insofar as the research into LSD is concerned, most of this work was carried out within the Establishment. Some complementary research was carried out in a university under extramural research contract to the Establishment.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what factors led to the signing of the 1980 memorandum of understanding between the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada on chemical and biological defence, as referred to in his Answer of 21 May 1992, Official Report, column 255 (Question 31, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention was signed in 1972 and entered into force in 1975. As it was then perceived that the threat from biological weapons had reduced, steps were taken in both the United Kingdom and the United States to reduce their biological defence programmes. There was also a reduction in chemical defence work in the 1970s.

4. As a consequence, it was recognised in both the United Kingdom and the United States that there would be mutual benefits from close collaboration in the fields of chemical and biological defence. Consequently, the Memorandum of Understanding was drawn up between the United Kingdom and the United States together with Canada and signed in 1980 with the objective of integrating the chemical and biological defence programmes of the three countries to the maximum possible extent.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him, pursuant to his Answer of 1 December 1992, Official Report, column 162, when the two memoranda of understanding referred to in the answer were signed; how many other memoranda of understanding relating to chemical and biological defence Britain has signed with Australia since 1963; and what they were about (Question 32, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The Memorandum of Agreement between the UK and Australia relating to a joint programme of research, investigation and material testing at the Joint Tropical Trials Research Establishment (JTTRE) was signed in October 1977 and this superseded the Joint Tropical Research Unit Memorandum of Understanding signed in December 1970 which in turn replaced an earlier Memorandum of Understanding in 1962 setting up the Joint Tropical Research Unit.

3. There have been three other agreements with Australia relating to chemical and biological defence since 1963:

(a) The Technical Cooperation Programme set up in 1958 under which chemical and biological defence was addresed in Sub Group E which was created in 1967. Australia joined The Technical Cooperation Programme in 1965 and information on research into chemical and biological defence has been exchanged with Australia under this agreement since Sub Group E was created in 1967.

(b) The United Kingdom-United States-Canada-Australia American British Canadian Australian (ABCA) Armies agreed The Basic Standardisation Agreement in 1964 with the aims of ensuring the fullest cooperation and collaboration between the Armies, the highest possible degree of interoperability through standardisation and the greatest possible economy through the use of combined resources and effort. This includes a group known as the Quadripartite Working panel on NBC defence.

(c) The United Kingdom United States and Canada Air Standization Coordinating Committee (ASCC) was extended to include Australia in 1964; the ASCC has a working party addressing CB defence.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him pursuant to his Answer to the honourable Member for Brent East on 1 December 1992, Official Report, column 164, if he will list the location, dates and participating countries at each of the subsequent tripartite conferences on toxicological warfare until the present day; and if he will outline the recommendations and conclusions of each of these conferences (Question 34, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The locations, dates and participating countries at each of the subsequent tripartite conference on toxicological warfare until the present day are as follows:

(a) Fifteenth Conference held in the United Kingdom in 1960 and attended by representatives of Canada, United Kingdom and United States.

(b) Sixteenth Conference held in Canada in 1962 and attended by representatives of Canada, United Kingdom and United States.

(c) Seventeenth Conference held in the USA in 1964 and attended by representatives of Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and United States.

3. In 1965 the America, British, Canadian and Australian (ABCA) Armies Group reviewed the effectiveness of these toxicological conferences. This led to their being subsumed into the Technical Cooperation Programme under which Sub Group E on Chemical and Biological Defence was created in 1967.

4. It is not practicable to outline the recommendations and conclusions of each of these conferences as these were the subject of trinational and, in the 17th meeting quadrinational

agreement. It would be necessary to seek the agreement of all the countries concerned to the release of the recommendations and conclusions of these conferences.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him which British scientific research institutions have received stocks of toxins and biological agents from the United States of America Department of Defense since 1979; which toxins and biological agents have been transferred and when; which United States Department of Defense establishments have supplied these toxins and biological agents; under which defence agreements these toxins and biological agents were transferred; and for what purpose on each occasion (Question 36, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to have available small quantities of the materials which may be used as chemical or biological warfare agents by a potential aggressor.

3. It is not possible for us to comment on what toxins and biological agents may have been received by other British scientific research institutions from the United States of America Department of Defense since 1979. This reply is necessarily limited to the Ministry of Defence scientific research institutions.

4. The quantities involved are very small and in no way could be regarded as stocks of agent. Small quantities of the following toxins and micro-organisms which might be used by a potential aggressor as biological agents have been provided:

(a) Shellfish toxin (saxitoxin) from the then US Army Chemical Research and Development Center in 1982

(b) Clostridium perfringens betatoxin from the US Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases in 1992.

(c) Bacillus anthracis strains from the US Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases in 1985. The strains received did not contain the toxin plasmid and are regarded as attenuated strains.

5. In addition other materials including some vaccines and simulants have been transferred which are neither toxins or biological agents. All the materials transferred have been to support collaboration into the provision of effective protective measures.

6. These materials have been supplied under The Technical Cooperation Programme and under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him on what dates, and in which publications, scientists on extramural research projects funded by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, published their findings in 1991, as referred to on page 15 of the Establishment's annual report 1991-92 (Question 39, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. It is not the practice of the Ministry of Defence on both national and personal security grounds to identify links between the Ministry of Defence and the contractors engaged on extramural research. It is left to the individual contractors to decide whether or not to disclose their contracts with the Ministry of Defence. I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful on this occasion.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him for what reasons the Ministry of Defence delayed dismantling its nerve gas agent plant at Nancekuke, Cornwall after the Ministry had decided to decommission the plant; what tasks were carried out at the site in the intervening years between the decommissioning and dismantling; and if these tasks were connected to the United Kingdom's chemical and biological defence programme (Question 41, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. Work on the pilot scale nerve agent plant at Nancekuke was completed and the plant decontaminated in January 1956 before the decision was taken to decommission the plant later in that year. The plant was partially dissembled to allow other work to be carried out on the site. This other work included tasks related to the chemical and biological defence programme such as the manufacture of a dye for detector paper, a chemical needed to produce P2S, which is an ingredient in medical countermeasures against nerve agents, as well as research work aimed at determining whether other nerve agents presented a hazard to British Armed Forces.

3. The plant was not finally dismantled until the closure of Nancekuke in the late 1970s because of the absence until then of the necessary resources as great care was taken to avoid any hazard to the staff involved in the dismantling work and to ensure that any toxic chemicals were safely disposed of.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him, pursuant to his Answer of 1 December 1992, Official Report, column 164, if he will publish the official name and details of the informal agreement under which the 15th Tripartite Conference on Toxicological Warfare was organised; and if this agreement still exists (Question 44, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Exeuctive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The 15th Tripartite Conference on Toxicological Warfare had its origins in informal agreements of 1946 which in turn had their roots in World War II allied cooperation between the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. Whilst the agreement which led to the Toxicological Warfare conferences no longer exists, its spirit continues in respect of the cooperation between United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand under the Technical Cooperation Programme in the activities under Sub Group E on Chemical and Biological Defence. This transition from the Tripartite and eventually Quadripartite Conferences occurred in the mid 1960s.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him how many members of the 1985 Independent Advisory Group on Gruinard Island have since been on scientific advisory committees serving the Ministry of Defence or the Porton Down chemical and biological warfare establishment. (Question 47, Order Paper 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The Independent Advisory Group on Gruinard Island was established by the then Chief Scientific Adviser of the Ministry of Defence writing to the President of the Royal Society to invite him to nominate a Chairman for the Independent Advisory Group. The Chairman of the Advisory Group then decided who he wished to have on his Advisory Group and he chose its membership which included a representative from the Scottish Home and Health Department. At the time of their appointment, none of the members of the Independent Advisory Group on Gruinard Island were on or had been on scientific advisory committees to the Ministry of Defence or to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down.

3. The Independent Advisory Group on Gruinard Island carried out its work during the period 1985 to 1989 which resulted in Gruinard Island being returned to its original owners in May 1990. Since becoming members of the Independent Advisory Group on Gruinard Island, one member of the Group has served as a member of the Chemical and Biological Defence Board of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council and subsequently as a member of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what experiments his Department has carried out on the chemical agent B staphylococcal enterotoxin; when and where these tests and studies were carried out; for what purpose; when the results of these experiments were first exchanged with the United States of America, Canada and Australia; and if this exchange occurred under the arrangements of the Technical

Co-operation Programme (Question 48, Order Paper, 8 July 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Staphylococcal enterotoxin B is a potent toxin produced by the bacterium staphylococcus aureus. The toxin causes vomiting and diarrhoea and is known to be highly active when delivered by the aerosol route and for these reasons, the toxin is considered to be a potential biological agent which might be used against the United Kingdom Armed Forces.

4. The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has carried out studies on staphylococcal enterotoxin B to assess the potential hazard to the United Kingdom Armed Forces and to devise effective protective measures such as detection and medical countermeasures against this toxin. The results of this work have been exchanged with the United States, Canada and Australia under the Technical Co-operation Programme since 1979 and also with the United States and Canada under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence since 1980.

Defence Scientific Advisory Council

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will name all the chairmen and chairwomen of the Defence Scientific Advisory Board since 1984.

Mr. Aitken: I assume that the hon. Member refers to the Defence Scientic Advisory Council. Its chairmen since 1984 have been:

1981 – 1984	Mr. P. E. Trier
1985 – 1991	Professor Sir J. I. G. Cadogan
1991 – present	Professor D. E. N. Davies

Army Recruitment

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department expects to implement plans for gender-free physical testing for recruitment to the Army.

Mr. Hanley: It is currently planned to introduce gender-free testing of Army recruits in April 1995.

Royal Family

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to his Department of expenditure in support of the royal family in respect of *(a)* the Royal Yacht, *(b)* the Queen's Flight, *(c)* royal flights in civil aircraft and *(d)* equerries for the 1992-93 financial year.

Mr. Hanley: Expenditure in 1993-93 was as follows:

	£ thousands
(a) Royal Yacht	8,361
(b) Queen's Flight	7,590
(c) Royal flights in civil aircraft	9
(d) Equerries	170

Note: The figure for The Queen's Flight is a total operating cost. The flight is not exclusively used by the Royal Family, but it is not possible to allocate expenditure to users without disproportionate cost.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 July *Official Report*, column *629*, what is the proposed United Kingdom contribution to the 1994 budget for the preparatory commission for the organisation for the prohibition of chemical weapons; and how much will be charged to the estimates for 1993-94.

Mr. Hanley: The executive secretary intends to present his 1994 budget at the September plenary session of the preparatory commission of the chemical weapons convention. Until then it is not possible to give accurate assessments of the United Kingdom contribution and of how much will be charged to the estimates for 1993-94.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make a full disclosure of the details of Britain's past chemical warfare activities, under the terms of the chemical weapons convention.

Mr. Hanley: After United Kingdom ratification and the convention has entered into force.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has of the existence of *(a)* Serbian and *(b)* Croatian regular forces in the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Hanley: We are aware of media reports claiming the presence of Serbian and Croatian regular forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Any information gathered by UNPROFOR troops about force composition would be passed through the United Nations chain of command, ultimately to the Security Council. As a member of the Security Council, the United Kingdom receives information reported by UNPROFOR.

Military Tasks

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to provide more detailed information on the estimated costs of the individual force elements allocated to military tasks, as described in Cm. 2270, page 23.

Mr. Hanley: There are no plans to publish detailed information on the estimated costs of force elements.

Tornado

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role Tornado F3 aircraft and regular infantry batallions have in the provision of a strategic and substrategic nuclear capability.

Mr. Hanley: Tornado F3 aircraft are required as part of the forces necessary to safeguard the deployment of the deterrent. Regular infantry battalions are required as part of the forces necessary to safeguard the physical security of nuclear assets and the command and control infrastructure. In both cases, the units involved are normally available to carry out other tasks in peacetime.

Surface-to-Air Missiles

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sea-launched medium-range surface-to-air missile capability is currently operational.

Mr. Hanley: RN carriers and anti-air warfare destroyers are currently armed with the Seadart medium-range surface-to-air missile system.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what ground-launched medium-range surface-to-air missile capability is currently operational.

Mr. Hanley: There is no ground-launched medium-range surface-to-air missile currently in operational service with United Kingdom Forces. RAF Tornado F3 aircraft provide the United Kingdom with a medium-range air defence capability, and these are supplemented by Royal Navy destroyers and Sea Harriers. A shorter range ground-launched surface-to-air missile capability is provided by the Rapier and Javelin air defence systems.

Queen's Flight

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent consideration he has given to the procurement of new aircraft for the Queen's flight.

Mr. Hanley: There are no current plans to procure new aircraft for the Queen's flight.

Diego Garcia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current size of the naval party based at Diego Garcia.

Mr. Hanley: The party consists of three officers and 38 ratings and marines.

Service Units

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether information on the average annual running costs of service units has contributed to the information given in Cm. 2270, page 23.

Mr. Hanley: The estimated force element costs referred to in "Defending Our Future"—Cm. 2270—were derived from a wide range of data sources, including, where available and appropriate, running cost information.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current average annual running costs of all those units listed in Cm. 2270, page 22, table 3.

Mr. Hanley: Running cost information could be provided for those units listed at page 22 of "Defending Our Future" only at disproportionate cost. Information on running costs for each top-level Budget is set out in the supply estimates—Cm. 495-1.

Rapid Reaction Corps

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his NATO counterparts concerning the future use of the Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps in United Nations military operations.

Mr. Hanley: NATO Defence Ministers agreed at the December 1992 defence planning committee meeting that support for United Nations and CSCE peacekeeping should be included among the missions of NATO forces and headquarters. In principle, therefore, the Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps would in future be available for such support to the United Nations in common with other NATO formations.

Defence Staff

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish the compendium of staff targets and staff requirements, referred to in Cm. 2270, page 73.

Mr. Aitken: We plan to publish the compendium as a special issue of the "Defence Contracts Bulletin", on 21 July. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether compendium of staff targets and staff requirements that he is due to publish will include in-service dates.

Mr. Aitken: Yes.

Departmental Land

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much land his Department proposes to *(a)* purchase and *(b)* dispose of in the coming year.

Mr. Hanley: Purchase of land is carried out on an opportunity basis once a landowner has indicated a willingness to sell a particular area of land. Similarly, we do not maintain a record of the area of land we expect to dispose of as changes in site boundaries often occur before a property or piece of land is finally sold.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was his Department's total land holding in the United Kingdom for each of the past five years.

Mr. Hanley: My Department's total land holding in the United Kingdom for each of the past five years was:

1 April 1993 242,542 hectares
1 April 1992 243,333 hectares
1 April 1991 242,865 hectares
1 April 1990 240,613 hectares
1 April 1989 241,300 hectares

Service Accommodation

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards discount sales of Ministry of Defence flats to service personnel leaving the forces.

Mr. Hanley: Surplus flats in Scotland are wherever possible offered for sale to service personnel through the services' discount scheme. This scheme is open to all eligible service personnel, not just those leaving the forces. Surplus flats in England and Wales are not offered for sale through the discount scheme because of different property laws, and are instead offered for sale to housing associations in exchange for nomination rights on a percentage of the properties to house those leaving the services over the next few years. If sales cannot be agreed on this basis, the properties are offered for sale by tender on the open market.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards residence by separated wives of service personnel with children in Ministry of Defence married quarters not required for use.

Mr. Hanley: If the separation arises because the requirements of the service prevent a wife and family accompanying her husband on a posting, she will be allowed to remain in her married quarter for up to 12 months. If a service man is posted away for a longer period, his wife will normally be given the opportunity to join him. If she chooses not to, she must vacate her quarter within three months. If there are special or compassionate circumstances, which prevent her from joining her husband, she may be offered a surplus married quarter, subject to availability, in the area of her choice.

If the separation arises because of the breakdown of the marriage, an estranged wife will be allowed to remain in her married quarter for a period of 93 days, to allow her time to find alternative accommodation. If the marital breakdown occurs overseas, the wife will be moved at service expense to an address of her choice in the United Kingdom. If a wife has no home to go to, she will be offered a surplus married quarter in the United Kingdom, where she may stay for up to 93 days.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of providing caretaking for empty Ministry of Defence married quarters over the past year.

Mr. Hanley: The cost of providing caretaking for some 2,000 surplus married quarters in the process of being sold amounted to £270,000 in financial year 1992-93. Caretaking costs of empty properties which are not surplus to requirements are not separately identifiable.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel left the forces in 1992.

Mr. Hanley: 34,254 personnel left the services in 1992 and 19,292 joined.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Depleted Uranium Shells

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Ministry has made of the environmental effects of the test firing of depleted uranium shells *(a)* on land-based test ranges and *(b)* on the sea in regard to implications for flora and fauna of the test localities.

Mr. Aitken: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces' reply to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) on 14 June, *Official Report*, column 474.

SCOTLAND

Forest Charter

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action has been taken by Her Majesty's Government in the light of the initiatives produced by the United Kingdom forest charter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The issues raised in the forest charter, a statement produced last November by the United Kingdom Forests Network, are being considered in the preparation of the United Kingdom's national plan for the implemtation of the forest principles agreed in Rio. The views of non-governmental organisations will be sought later this year before the plan is completed.

Glasgow Royal Infirmary

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends putting out to tender the contract to construct the new maternity unit at Glasgow royal infirmary which will serve eastern Glasgow; what construction timescale is involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 13 July 1993]:* Plans for the development of a new maternity unit at Glasgow royal infirmary are currently the subject of detailed consideration and at this time no formal submission for approval to build has been submitted.

It is primarily a matter for individual health bodies to progress building projects from approval to build through to the tender stage and the timing of construction work is dependent on this process.

Scotland in the Union Initiative

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what public bodies he envisages relocating functions and staff within Scotland as part of the Scotland in the Union initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 July 1993]:* The White Paper "Scotland in the Union" (Cm 2225) indicates that the Government intend to seek opportunities for further dispersal both of parts of the Scottish Office and of non-departmental public bodies for which I am responsible. I announced on 29 June our decision to relocate part of the Scottish tourist board to Inverness and we shall continue to seek to identify other units or bodies which it would be operationally feasible and financially attractive to relocate when practical opportunities occur.

Prisoners

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average daily prison population at the latest date for which figures are available and in the previous five years.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 12 July 1993]:* I have asked Mr. E. W. Frizzell, the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, to arrange for a reply to be given to the hon. Member.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 16 July 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Scottish Prison Service, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Question asking what was the average daily prison population at the latest date for which figures are available and in the previous 5 years.

On 25 June 1993 the actual population was 5772. The average population for the current financial year so far, ie 1 April 1993 to 25 June 1993 is 5827. The average population for the five previous financial years is as follows:

	Number
1991-92	4,897
1990-91	4,738
1989-90	4,886

	Number
1988-89	5,168
1987-88	5,421

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy of this letter will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Theatres

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the overall amount, and proportions of theatre groups' incomes derived from ticket sales, grant aid, and private sector sponsorship in 1992 and 1982, including any ventures which are wholly commercial in character.

Mr. Brooke: I have been asked to reply.

I understand that the hon. Member's question relates to theatres in Scotland. The information requested is not held centrally. The following figures, provided by the Scottish Arts Council, relate to those drama companies that receive revenue funding from the council. No information is held on wholly commercial productions.

All figures are in £ at actual prices

Company	*Earned Income*		*Local Authority*		*SAC*		*Sponsorship*	
	£	*Per cent.*	£	*Per cent.*	£	*Per cent.*	£	*Per cent.*
Borderline								
1981-82	46,005	28	31,930	20	83,500	52	—	—
1991-92	142,112	43	36,840	11	149,025	45	—	—
Brunton theatre								
1981-82[1]	2,144	6	19,038	54	14,000	40	—	—
1991-92	88,344	35	117,270	47	41,468	16	2,650	1
Byre theatre								
1981-82	47,818	49	15,000	15	35,000	36	—	—
1991-92	105,025	44	465,120	20	84,114	35	1,900	1
Citizens theatre								
1981-82	119,679	25	112,475	24	240,000	51	—	—
1991-92	428,549	32	408,666	31	490,272	37	—	—
Communicado								
1981-82[4]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1991-92	70,738	29	26,500	11	126,260	51	21,000	9
Dundee Rep								
1981-82[2]	—	—	30,696	—	78,000	—	—	—
1991-92	345,749	46	189,855	25	215,684	28	4,060	0·5
Perth theatre								
1981-82	114,730	37	78,918	25	118,000	38	—	—
1991-92	691,000	59	231,000	20	214,988	18	41,000	3
Pitlochry festival theatre								
1981-82	214,376	56	47,807	13	120,000	31	—	—
1991-92	640,524	70	70,300	8	197,327	21	8,000	1
Royal Lyceum								
1981-82	173,936	28	126,000	21	310,000	51	—	—
1991-92[3]	554,780	36	467,000	31	471,051	31	37,960	2

[1] The Brunton theatre project was first funded in 1981-82.
[2] No performances, as the theatre was being built.
[3] Theatre closed for renovation, April-September.
[4] Not in existence.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Israel

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the admission of Israel to one of the regional groups at the United Nations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We believe Israel should be allowed into the Asian group of the United Nations. But until they are, we would not object to Israeli membership of the Western European and others group of the United Nations if there were a consensus among other member states.

Diplomatic Service

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what shrinkage has taken place of posts in Her Majesty's diplomatic service in Latin America in the last 12 months; and if he will pubish a table of numbers of United Kingdom-based diplomatic, aid and trade staff in each Latin American country for the most recent available date.

Mr. Goodlad: There has been no reduction in the number of British missions in Latin America in the last 12 months. The number of United Kingdom-based staff was reduced from 162 to 150 in the 12 months up to June 1993.

The table shows the number of diplomatic service staff in each post in June 1993, together with the man years dedicated to aid and trade.

Country	Post	United Kingdom-based staff 1993	Trade 1993	Aid 1993
Argentina	Buenos Aires	16	2·00	0·05
Belize	Belmopan	6	0·40	1·15
Bolivia	La Paz	4	0·20	0·00
Brazil	Brasilia	17	0·70	0·05
	Rio de Janeiro	5	1·25	0·00
	Sao Paulo	4	2·00	0·00
Chile	Santiago	14	2·00	0·15
Colombia	Bogota	10	1·45	0·20
Costa Rica	San Jose	4	1·10	0·80
Cuba	Havana	10	0·35	0·05
Ecuador	Quito	5	0·65	0·50
El Salvador	San Salvador	2	0·05	0·05
Guatemala	Guatemala City	6	0·20	0·25
Honduras	Tegucigalpa	2	0·15	0·35
Mexico	Mexico City	17	2·30	0·40
Nicaragua	Managua	2	0·25	0·55
Panama	Panama City	2	0·35	0·00
Paraguay	Asuncion	2	0·45	0·05
Peru	Lima	6	0·45	0·30
Uruguay	Montevideo	4	0·30	0·25
Venezuela	Caracas	12	2·00	0·00
Overall Totals		150	18·60	5·15

Entry Clearance Staff

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many entry clearance application staff in each high commission or application point in the Indian sub-continent are *(a)* men and *(b)* women; and what facilities exist for female applications to be interviewed by women staff.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women entry clearance application staff in each of the posts in the Indian sub-continent are;

	Men	Women
Islamabad	30	17
Karachi	5	7
New Delhi	10	17
Bombay	11	24
Madras	2	4
Calcutta	2	3
Colombo	4	6
Kathmandu	2	2
Dhaka	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Figures not available.

Facilities exist at all these posts for female applicants to be interviewed by female staff or to have a female officer present at the interview if they so wish.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with the Secretary-General of the United Nations as to the next action to be taken by the United Nations following the breakdown of the United Nations-sponsored talks on Cyprus; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what discussions he has had with the Turkish Government following the recent breakdown on the United Nations-sponsored talks on the future of Cyprus; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what discussions he has had with the Greek Government following the breakdown of the United Nations-sponsored talks on Cyprus; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what discussions he has had with President Clerides following the breakdown of the United Nations-sponsored talks on Cyprus; and if he will make a statement;

(5) if he will raise the issue of Cyprus during the forthcoming Commonwealth conference of Heads of Government in Cyprus in October; and if he will make a statement;

(6) what actions he proposes to take with the Secretary-General of the United Nations to encourage sucessful continuation of the talks on the future of Famagusta; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The intercommunal dispute in Cyprus is the subject of intensive negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General. This process has our full support and it is important not to start new initiatives that may confuse or cut across the United Nations effort.

On 30 June the United Nations Secretary-General issued a report detailing the progress of the latest round of talks and proposed confidence-building measures which would bring both Varosha and Nicosia airport under United Nations control. Our permanent representative to the United Nations, in his capacity as President of the Security Council, replied by letter on 7 July asking the Secretary-General to continue his efforts and report again in September. The latter's special representative is at present visiting the area.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed the way forward with Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Inonu on 14 July and will take further opportunities to promote the Secretary-General's mission between now and September.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions during the course of 1993 the British high commissioner to Cyprus has visited northern Cyprus; whom he has met during his visits; and what was the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: One of the duties of Her Majesty's high commissioner in Cyprus is to maintain contact with the leaders of the Turkish Cypriot community in order to promote and protect British consular or other interests. In this context he and members of his staff are frequently in northern Cyprus.

Kosovo

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Nations monitors are allocated for duties in Kosovo; how many United Nations monitors are currently on duty in Kosovo; from which countries they originate; what plans there are to increase United Nations monitors in Kosovo; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are no United Nations monitors allocated for duties or currently on duty in Kosovo. However, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) on 14 July, column *556*, on the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe missions in Serbia.

Mr. Sodagar Hussain

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the British post in Islamabad received a copy of a letter from the hon. Member for Bradford, West to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, concerning the case of Mr. Sodagar Hussain—IMP H 312018/2 (S); Po 13775/93; what reconsideration the entry clearance officer has given to this case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The high commission in Islamabad has not yet received the letter from the hon. Member concerning Mr. Sodagar Hussain which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office undertook to send in his letter to the hon. Member of 5 July.

I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit as soon as the entry clearance officer in Islamabad has reviewed the case in the light of the hon. Member's letter.

Mrs. Assia Andrabi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the detention of Mrs. Assia Andrabi, her husband, and baby daughter, at Srinagar airport in Kashmir by Indian security forces on 5 February; if he will ask the Indian authorities for information about where Mrs. Andrabi, the leader of Dukhtaran-e-Millat, a voluntary women's organisation in Kashmir, is detained; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have received no previous representations concerning Mrs. Andrabi and her family. From our initial inquiries we understand that they are being held in Srinagar. The high commission in New Delhi has requested details of the whereabouts of Mrs. Andrabi, her husband and daughter, from the Indian authorities. I will write to the hon. Member once the response of the Indian authorities has been received.

Bosnia

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries which have designated troops to protect protected areas in Bosnia; how many troops each country has committed; when those forces are expected to arrive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Offers received, and under consideration, by the United Nations of forces to deter attacks against safe areas include:

	Numbers
Turkey	[1]—
Malaysia	1,500
Pakistan	3,000
Bangladesh	1,220
Tunisia	1,000
Nordic Contingent	900
Jordan	900
Holland	200
Norway	[2]—

[1] Up to a Brigade (about 4,000)
[2] Construction Unit (strength unknown)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the United Nations is expected to finalise detailed rules of engagement for military personnel engaged in the protection of protected areas in Bosnia; to whom those detailed rules of engagement will be communicated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Ground forces deployed with UNPROFOR to deter attacks against safe areas will operate under existing UNPROFOR rules of engagement. Rules of engagement for air support of safe areas have been developed by NATO in conjunction with UNPROFOR and are being forwarded to the United Nations and troop contributors for agreement. All personnel are fully briefed on the UNPROFOR rules of engagement in force.

Mr. Graham Noble

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 30 June, *Official Report*, column *501*, what further information he has obtained about Mr. Graham Noble, of Brighton, who is detained by Serbs in the Krajina; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Mr. Noble has been charged by the Krajina Serbs with espionage. It is unclear at this stage exactly how long it will take to investigate his case. Her Majesty's embassy in Belgrade is pressing the Krajina Serb authorities to grant consular access to Mr. Noble for an official from the embassy in Zagreb which has consular responsibility throughout Croatia. Mr. Noble continues to receive visits from the local representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross who reports that he is well. UNPROFOR in Croatia have offered their good offices to try to arrange a visit by Mr. Noble's brother.

Vukovar (Hospital Abductions)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 30 June, *Official Report*, column *501*, concerning patients and staff abducted from hospitals in Vukovar in 1991, why the UN commission of experts decided not to attempt identification, exhumation and return of all the bodies; whether the Croatian authorities have sought the assistance of Her Majesty's Government in this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The UN Commission of Experts plans to carry out a more detailed examination of the mass grave site at Ovcara in the near future. This will include exhumation of all of the bodies. But the Commission will attempt to identify only 20, sufficient to link the gravesite with the disappearances from Vukovar hospital. The remainder of the bodies will be handed over to the Croatian authorities for identification. The Croatian authorities have not requested Her Majesty's Government's assistance in this task.

Mr. Sheikh Riaz Ahmed

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 30 June, *Official Report*, column *500*, when the British embassy at Paris expects to receive a reply to the formal note sent to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the refusal to allow Mr. Sheikh Riaz Ahmed to enter France; when the British embassy is going to send another note; if he will raise this matter with his French ministerial counterpart; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The British embassy in Paris has kept in close touch with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Despite several reminders, interim replies to the embassy's note were not received from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs until 6 and 8 July. There are still some points which need clarification and the embassy is pursuing this.

I have no plans to take this matter up with my French counterpart at this time. I will write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as I have a further report.

War Crimes Tribunal

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in the establishment of a war crimes tribunal; when it is expected to sit; and what rules for admissible evidence will be used.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Since the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 827 establishing an international tribunal for former Yugoslavia, the United Nations Secretary-General has been making arrangements for its functioning. The first task is to appoint the prosecutor and judges of the tribunal. The prosecutor should be appointed within the next two months. The judges will be elected by the United Nations General Assembly this autumn. The rules of evidence and procedure will be drawn up by the judges once appointed.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on evidence which has been gathered by international organisations for future consideration by a war crimes tribunal; how such evidence is likely to be presented; and how it will be categorised.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Most information submitted so far to the United Nations Commission of Experts, who are charged with the collation, analysis and investigation of such evidence, has been collected by states. We understand that Amnesty International has submitted three reports on war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia and that Helsinki Watch has submitted one. It will be for the prosecutor and judges of the international tribunal, once appointed, to decide how this evidence might be categorised or presented.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on supporting a war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia; what the cost of the United Kingdom's commitment is likely to be; who will bear the cost of locating and transporting witnesses before the tribunal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We fully support the creation of an ad hoc tribunal for former Yugoslavia. The tribunal is to be funded from the United Nations regular budget. The financial annex to the United Nations Secretary-General's report on the means of establishing the tribunal includes an estimate of $30·5 million for all the tribunal's costs for one year once it is operational. The estimate will be scrutinised by the United Nations Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions at this year's United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what investigations into alleged war crimes in the former Yugoslavia have been undertaken; how many of the alleged perpetrators are *(a)* Croat, *(b)* Muslim and *(c)* Serb; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations Commission of Experts was established in September 1992 by United Nations Security Council resolution 780 to collate, analyse and investigate evidence of war crimes committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia since 1991 submitted to the United Nations under the terms of United Nations Security Council Resolution 771. The commission is building a data base of incidents, victims and alleged perpetrators. At this stage it is not possible to say how many alleged perpetrators come from each party to the Bosnian conflict.

Iraq

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government will take in respect of possible threats by the Government of Iran Mujaheddin bases in Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The possible contravention of Security Council resolution 598 is a matter for the Security Council which is permanently seized of the issue. We have expressed our serious concern at these air raids to the Iranian authorities. In a letter of 25 May to the United Nations Secretary-General, the Iranian permanent representative to the United Nations said that the air raids had been carried out in self-defence on the basis of article

51 of the United Nations charter and without prejudice to Iran's policy of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq or its commitment to SCR 598.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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